ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND SPORT IN CANADA

Historical Foundations and Contemporary Issues

Edited by Janice Forsyth and Audrey R. Giles



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To all of the people who work so hard to make Aboriginal sport a space to experience all of the good things life has to offer.

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ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND SPORT IN CANADA

JANICE FORSYTH AND AUDREY R. GILES

Aboriginal people's involvement in Canadian sport – whether as athletes, coaches, or organizers – has been extensive and their record often marked by notable achievements. One of the first Aboriginal athletes to gain wide recognition was Tom Longboat, the Onondaga runner from Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve in southern Ontario, who catapulted to fame in the early twentieth century thanks to his accomplishments in long-distance running. Fred Sasakamoose, from Ahtahkakoop First Nation in central Saskatchewan, was taken away at a young age and sent to St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Duck Lake, where he learned how to play hockey. Then, in 1954, after several years in the junior league in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, he was called up to play with the Chicago Blackhawks, becoming the first known status Indian to play in the NHL. More recently, twin sisters Sharon and Shirley Firth, members of the Gwich'in First Nation in Northwest Territories, garnered attention by competing at four Winter Olympic Games in cross-country skiing (1972 Sapporo, Japan; 1976 Innsbruck, Austria; 1980 Lake Placid, United States; 1984 Sarajevo, Yugoslavia).

Ted Nolan, of the Garden River First Nation in northwestern Ontario, played for the Pittsburgh Penguins and Detroit Red Wings and was later hired as head coach for the New York Islanders and, later, the Buffalo Sabres. After Nolan won the Jack Adams Award for coach of the year in 1997, his contract negotiations with company management broke down, and he spent

the next ten years working elsewhere in hockey, mostly helping Native youth to reach their potential in the sport. He returned to the New York Islanders for the 2006-07 year, leading them to the playoffs, only to be fired the following season. Although questions about racism and his checkered career in the NHL still surface in media, the NHL has yet to attempt to address them in a serious way.

Alwyn Morris, from Kahnawake Mohawk Territory in southern Quebec, won a gold and a bronze medal in pairs kayaking in the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympic Games. On the podium during the gold-medal presentation, he held up an eagle feather – a symbol of Aboriginality in North American culture – in recognition of the support he received from his grandparents, especially his grandfather, who had passed away a few years earlier, and to use the political platform that the Games provided to broadcast his Aboriginality to the world. Morris went on to co-found the Aboriginal Sport Circle, a national multi-sport organization for Aboriginal sport and recreation development in Canada.

Waneek Horn-Miller, also from Kahnawake, was co-captain of the Canadian water polo team that won a gold medal at the 1999 Pan American Games and that then went on to compete as a team at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia. She was cut from the national squad in 2003 under the pretext of team cohesion issues but challenged the claim by saying it was racially motivated – that she had been let go because of the steely determination she drew from her Mohawk culture. A case in point is the 1990 battle at Oka, where, at age fourteen, while standing alongside her people trying to defend their land from government encroachment, she was stabbed by a soldier with a bayonet that narrowly missed her heart. In the water polo dispute, all parties, including national team coaches, athletes, and Horn-Miller, agreed to arbitration using the alternate dispute resolution system for sport. In 2004, concessions were made on both sides: Horn-Miller did not return to the team, but her coaches and teammates were required to undergo cultural sensitivity training and Aboriginal sensitivity training. The two training sessions have yet to be carried out.

These are but some of the more prominent Aboriginal figures in sport whose accomplishments and challenges have been captured and circulated widely through print, television, radio, and new media. There are many more athletes whose names rarely surface in the public realm in spite of their outstanding performances. Take, for instance, Fred Simpson, an Anishinaabe athlete from Alderville First Nation in southern Ontario, who, along with

Tom Longboat, competed for Canada in the marathon at the 1908 Olympic Games in London, England. Longboat collapsed in the latter part of the race, but Simpson finished sixth overall. He subsequently turned professional, competed in many high-profile races in Canada and the United States, and then retired from competition in 1912 (Forsyth 2010). Yet, his name is largely absent from the historical record. There are also the recipients of the Tom Longboat Award, one of the most prestigious and longest-standing sports awards for Aboriginal people in Canada. Since its establishment in 1951, the Tom Longboat Award has been given to over 550 athletes, coaches, and organizers; for the vast majority of these, their sporting experiences have yet to be documented and analyzed (Forsyth 2005). A similar statement can be made about Aboriginal contestants in traditional indigenous sports and games, Aboriginal sport participants in Atlantic Canada, and the innumerable Aboriginal people who are involved in sporting activities for fun, fitness, and a sense of community: their experiences have yet to be recorded and incorporated into our broader understanding of Canadian sport.

What scholarship does exist on Aboriginal sport in Canada? Currently, information is scarce and limited mostly to a few fields of inquiry in the social sciences and humanities, mainly history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and health. Scholars have increasingly attempted to pull the different strands of knowledge together by producing special issues of academic journals. Recent titles that have supported this trend include the Journal of Sport History (2008), Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health (2007), International Journal of the History of Sport (2006), and Journal of Sport and Social Issues (2005). These publications have helped to enhance the profile and legitimacy of Aboriginal sport and recreation as an area worth studying in Canada. Indeed, several graduate dissertations on Aboriginal sport in Canada have been produced since 2005 (e.g., Forsyth 2005; Giles 2005; O'Bonsawin 2006; Lavallée 2007). Once relegated to the margins of disciplinary traditions, Aboriginal sport is emerging as an important lens through which to examine issues of individual and community health, gender and race relations, culture and colonialism, and self-determination and agency, to name but a few contemporary avenues of exploration.

Apart from this edited collection, no books on Aboriginal sport in Canada have been published to date, so students, established scholars, and the general public must wade through an array of sources in a variety of fields just to formulate a basic outline of the materials available on this topic. Not surprisingly, such conditions limit the expansion of the field, as well as constrain our knowledge of pressing issues tied to Aboriginal people and sport.

That is not to say that Canadian scholarship is completely bereft of useful information. There is small handful of outstanding texts that touch on various aspects of Aboriginal sport in Canada; however, they do not take sportrelated matters as their central theme. One example is Katherine Pettipas's examination (1994) of Aboriginal cultural repression on the Prairies. Her research is significant for the way it shows how Aboriginal people in the late 1800s to the mid-nineteenth century used Euro-Canadian sports to keep their language and traditions alive in the face of overt attempts to wipe away all aspects of Aboriginal ways of life. Two of the authors in this collection expand our understanding of Pettipas's work by analyzing the challenges that occur at the interface between tradition and modernity. In "Women's and Girls' Participation in Dene Games in the Northwest Territories," Audrey Giles examines the ways in which culturally based understandings of tradition and menstrual practices shape beliefs about how Dene games should be played and who should play them. After outlining the history of Dene games, Giles shows the complexity, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, policy makers, and organizers, of attempting to maintain "traditional" practices in contemporary settings. In "Performance Indicators: Aboriginal Games at the Arctic Winter Games," Michael Heine explores the underlying tensions that exist when Inuit and Dene games are played in the context of a major international competition, the Arctic Winter Games. He outlines the underlying principles and values that render participation in Inuit and Dene games meaningful and teases out the intricate considerations that are involved when these principles and values are removed from their traditional cultural contexts and acted out in a formalized competitive framework. Both chapters add valuable theoretical insight to the practical problem that many Aboriginal people face: how to keep their traditions alive in the context of modern sport.

Another example of a detailed history that includes sport as part of its subject matter is Jim Miller's meticulous account (1996) of the residential school system in Canada, in which he describes the different types of physical activities that were common at schools throughout the country. Similar to Pettipas, Miller's work provides researchers with a solid jumping-off point for more detailed investigations of Aboriginal physical activity practices in educational settings. Two chapters in this volume are particularly instructive here. In "Bodies of Meaning: Sports and Games at Canadian Residential

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Schools," Janice Forsyth outlines the disciplinary functions of sports and games at these institutions. Her chapter calls attention to sport's paradoxical impact on students' lives: it gave them a brief reprieve from the physically gruelling and highly regulated way of life that characterized most schools, yet this reprieve was part of an assimilative strategy that was used to discipline their "savage" ways and, in turn, transform them into "normal" Canadian citizens. In "The Quality and Cultural Relevance of Physical Education for Aboriginal Youth: Challenges and Opportunities," Joannie Halas, Heather McRae, and Amy Carpenter discuss the problems that pervade on-reserve schooling. These authors illustrate how the systemic underfunding of Aboriginal education influences the provision of infrastructure, equipment, and quality of instruction for on-reserve schools in Manitoba. They also argue that a lack of culturally appropriate curricula pervades offreserve schools and serves to circumscribe Aboriginal students' participation in physical education in those schools. The underfunding of Aboriginal education and the lack of culturally relevant curricula result in Aboriginal students withdrawing from physical education and sport, which serves to limit their athletic development and thus also the number of Aboriginal high-performance athletes in Canada.

The existing body of Aboriginal sport scholarship in Canada can be contrasted with research produced on the American context – several notable publications have significantly advanced our understanding of Native American life and culture through analyses of sport. A dominant thread of this research is on sports and games at Native American boarding schools (Lomawaima 1994; Trennert 1998; Bloom 2000; Brayboy and Barton 2003); the issue of Native mascots in American professional and college sports leagues (King and Springwood 2001; King 2004c; Spindel 2002) also regularly generates significant scholarly attention. Several edited collections (King 2004a, 2004b, 2005) speak to the growing interest in a wide range of issues and approaches to understanding Native sport in America, and a few scholars have narrowed their attention to the issue of Native American integration in sport. For instance, Jeffery Powers-Beck (2004) examines American Indian integration into professional baseball – a trajectory that is more often associated with African American athletes. By broadening the scope to include Native Americans, Powers-Beck enhances our understanding of the practical workings of race by exposing where African American and Native American experiences in baseball intersected and diverged. In a similar vein, Donald Fisher (2002) explores the history of lacrosse in America and Canada, and shows how the game was appropriated from the Native

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inhabitants and then reintroduced to them as a codified sport in which their involvement was occasionally altogether restricted. Each of these contributions to American scholarship reveal a great deal about Native and non-Native relations in American life and culture through their examination of sports and games at boarding schools, the tensions surrounding the use of Indian mascots, and Indian integration into broader American society. Given the attention that Aboriginal people's involvement in sport has garnered in the United States, the dearth of research in the Canadian context seems particularly stark.

The scholarship on Native American involvement in sport is helpful – to a point. The Canadian context differs greatly from the American context because of differences in legislation, particularly the Indian Act in Canada; multiple Aboriginal identity positions constructed from complex ideas about nationhood, as expressed by the three dominant political groups in Canada, the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; and the way in which sport is delivered to the people – in Canada, it is largely through a centralized, state-operated and -funded program, whereas there is no such form of organization in the United States. In light of this, we argue that a collection such as this one is needed to compare and contrast American issues with Canadian discourses, legislation, and organizations.

Developing a text that focuses on Aboriginal people's involvement in sport in Canada is thus an important undertaking. Within Canada, there is certainly a substantial body of research and writing on Aboriginal people and Aboriginal issues more generally. The vivacity of Native studies as a standalone field is a testament to the abundance of literature on the topic. Perhaps the dearth of academic production concerning Aboriginal people's involvement in sport is tied to a pervasive outlook that positions this area of study more as a hobby than as a field worth serious academic attention. The chapters in this collection challenge such a sentiment and reveal the extent to which sport plays an integral role in understandings of Aboriginal history, culture, identity, politics, and health, and should be studied alongside issues of land claims, cultural regeneration and survival, individual and community well-being, identity formation, gender relations, and educational outcomes and suicide among youth, to name a few key themes that resonate with current Aboriginal politics in Canada.

Issues of gender and Aboriginal involvement in major international games are two areas where this collection fills an obvious void in the literature. M. Ann Hall's chapter, "Toward a History of Aboriginal Women in

Canadian Sport," illustrates the importance of focusing our scholarly attention on Aboriginal women's sport history – an area that seems to have been overlooked in the upsurge in research on Aboriginal sport. She shows how Aboriginal women have always played an important role in the development of sport and recreation in Canada – as athletes, coaches, organizers, and administrators in both mainstream and Aboriginal systems. Her chapter highlights Aboriginal women's many sporting accomplishments while also providing an overview of the challenges they face because of raceand gender-based discrimination. In a similar vein, the issues surrounding Aboriginal involvement in major games are worth considering, especially in light of the high-stakes cultural politics that are often associated with their involvement. In "Indigenous Peoples and Canadian-Hosted Olympic Games," Christine O'Bonsawin examines the ways in which images of Aboriginal people and Aboriginality have been used in ceremonies for Olympic Games held in Canada (Montreal, Calgary, and Vancouver). In addition, she traces Aboriginal people's levels of involvement in past Olympic Games in Canada, paying close attention to the ways in which broader societal issues, including those of Aboriginal rights, have informed this involvement.

In order to engage with this text on the deepest possible level, readers must keep in mind a few things. First, it is important to understand the structure of Canadian sport, particularly as it relates to Aboriginal people, so that readers can more firmly grasp the place and importance of Aboriginal sport within the broader Canadian system. To frame the matter concisely, Sport Canada, a branch within the federal Department of Canadian Heritage, is responsible for sport development throughout the country. It strives to achieve its goals by partnering with various organizations to coordinate and deliver sport to Canadians, from the grassroots to the highest levels of competition. In other words, Sport Canada does not deliver sport; rather, it coordinates the entire sport system by creating and implementing sport policies to guide federal interests, and to foster partnerships between other national departments, government, and non-government agencies to expand its overall reach. It strategically allocates human and financial resources to ensure its objectives are met.

Sport Canada is responsible for overseeing the development of Aboriginal sport in Canada. A key partner in this system – the mainstream, governmentrun system – is the Aboriginal Sport Circle, a multi-sport organization that serves as the national voice for Aboriginal sport development in Canada. Established in 1995, the Aboriginal Sport Circle and its regional affiliates

develop and deliver sport to Aboriginal people only. Some view the Canadian and Aboriginal sport systems as working like a double helix: there are places at which the two systems intersect, but there are others where they depart. As such, in this volume we do not refer to a singular sport system in Canada, but rather to two sport systems, specifically the mainstream Canadian sport system and the all-Aboriginal (or all-Native) sport system. As some of the chapters' authors demonstrate, the connection between the two systems is often characterized by tension.

Nowhere is this tension made clearer than in Victoria Paraschak's chapter, "Aboriginal Peoples and the Construction of Canadian Sport Policy." Here, she examines the first-known strategy of its kind in the world: Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport (Canadian Heritage 2005). Using the model of the double helix, Paraschak explains how the mainstream and Aboriginal sport systems provide a racialized, racializing, and at times racist sporting space for Aboriginal people. In so doing, she highlights the policy's significance for both Aboriginal and Canadian sport systems and reveals its problems and possibilities. Robert Schinke, Duke Peltier, and Hope Yungblut's chapter, "Canadian Elite Aboriginal Athletes, Their Challenges, and the Adaptation Process," builds on Paraschak's chapter by detailing Aboriginal athletes' experiences in the Canadian and Aboriginal sport systems. Schinke, Peltier, and Yungblut argue that sport psychology is not culture-free and that the culturally bound ideas found in elite sport may serve to dissuade many Aboriginal athletes from continued participation. As such, they posit, Aboriginal elite athletes have unique needs that must be acknowledged and met within both the Aboriginal and mainstream Canadian sport systems. Further building on Paraschak's chapter, in "Two-Eyed Seeing: Physical Activity, Sport, and Recreation Promotion in Indigenous Communities," Lynn Lavallée and Lucie Lévesque offer an innovative approach to understanding physical practices, one that can inform future research that focuses on Aboriginal people's involvement in sport. Drawing on social ecological theory and the medicine wheel, Lavallée and Lévesque suggest that "two-eyed seeing," which refers to incorporating the strengths of indigenous and Western perspectives to create a hybridized understanding of how to address a particular issue, can be used effectively in health promotion efforts. Importantly, such an approach emphasizes the often overlooked contributions that indigenous understandings of the world can make to the promotion of sport, physical activity, and recreation for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike.

A second issue that readers should consider is terminology. The term "Aboriginal" is a contemporary designation and here refers to individuals residing within Canada who are First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. Aboriginal people within Canada are the only individuals who have their ethno-cultural identity defined by legislation, in this case, the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982. Some sport events (e.g., the North American Indigenous Games) are Aboriginal-only events: participants must be First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. In other events (e.g., Arctic Sports at the Arctic Winter Games), most participants are from a particular Aboriginal group (e.g., in the case of Arctic Sports, the Inuit). Thus, when reading this volume, it is important to remember that although there are some commonalities among Aboriginal groups, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit also have their own unique cultural practices. It is worth mentioning too that the authors in this book often use the term "Aboriginal" interchangeably with "Native" and "Indian," depending on the era that is being discussed or the language that is predominantly used in their sources. In addition, whereas the terms "First Nations" and "Inuit" are used to refer to the broader cultural grouping, some authors use the specific ethno-cultural names, such as Cree, Mohawk, and Dene, to highlight the experiences of specific groups of people.

Aboriginal Peoples and Sport in Canada addresses several main questions: How have Aboriginal people shaped the Canadian sport system? In what ways has the Canadian sport system changed throughout the years to incorporate Aboriginal people and Aboriginal sport practices? What broader social, political, and economic contexts need to be taken into account to develop a better understanding of Aboriginal sport in Canada today? Aboriginal Peoples and Sport in Canada is thus the first text that provides a detailed, multidisciplinary approach to the study of Aboriginal sport in Canada. The authors in this edited collection, many of them leaders in their respective fields, draw on a wide array of materials from anthropology, history, psychology, women's studies, physical education, and sociology to examine some of the key issues that enable and constrain Aboriginal participation in sport today, as well as in the future. What emerges is a stronger understanding of the tensions that stem from cultural ideas that differ between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and among Aboriginal people, about what sport is and how it should be organized, how unequal power relations influence the ability of different groups of Aboriginal people to implement their own visions for sport, and how Aboriginal people are attempting to make sport one venue through which to assert their cultural identities and find a positive space for themselves and upcoming generations in contemporary Canadian society. *Aboriginal Peoples and Sport in Canada* is an invaluable resource for researchers and students in kinesiology, recreation, leisure, physical education, and health, and will also appeal to readers interested in gaining a deeper understanding of Aboriginal—non-Aboriginal relations in Canada.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 uses historical research as the basis for addressing contemporary issues. Part 2, on the other hand, uses various theoretical tools to address contemporary issues. Our aim in dividing the text this way is to highlight the importance of using history and theory to address present-day concerns.

In the final chapter, we (Forsyth and Giles) summarize the trends and issues identified in the preceding chapters, discuss the future of Aboriginal sport in Canada, and make recommendations as to how the field should proceed in an era when researchers have been urged to make their scholarly findings both accessible and practical. Nowhere has this movement been more pronounced than in the field of Aboriginal research, where Aboriginal people and their allies have challenged and changed in important ways the nature of conducting research. It is our hope that this text will challenge students and established scholars alike to shift their grasp of Aboriginal sport in Canada from static understandings of a simplified past to a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which Aboriginal people's participation in sport informs and is informed by contemporary issues in Canada.

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