

The Roles of Sport

Introduction

Through the ages, sport has been known to affect various cultures, traditions, and values in our society. The stories that come from the world of sport help us to gain a better understanding of our views on issues of equality, human rights, child development, standards for health and fitness, and character development, as well as many other issues. Sport has the capacity to create much debate over topics such as steroid use, fighting in hockey, and salaries of professional athletes. There is no shortage of public opinion on these and other related sport topics.

Many people have favourite physical activities, sports, teams, stars, or events, such as the Olympic Games or world championships. Many fans dedicate much time to learning more about their favourite sport and attending sporting events in support of their favourite athletes and teams. Many children have aspirations of becoming like their favourite players, yet very few actually get the opportunity to play against or alongside their childhood idols.

Sport plays a vital role in Canadian society. Sport receives an inordinate amount of media attention, and has attracted the interest of most Canadians, especially when it comes to Olympic ice hockey, curling, and speed skating.

Background Information

History of Sport

Sport has been recorded for centuries. In fact, the sport of wrestling is depicted on ancient Egyptian urns known to be older than 4000 years. Formal sport was a natural follow-up to the games children played in many cultures and in different countries.

The ancient Greeks are considered to be the originators of competitive sport. Their inter-city competitions evolved into the original Olympic Games, which carried over to the Roman gladiator sports. Throughout medieval times, productive work was considered of utmost importance, and games and sport were considered to be trivial, unless they were used in preparation for war and combat. Eventually, with the reincarnation of the Olympic Games in 1896 by Baron Pierre de Coubertin of France, a venue was made available for international competition at the amateur level. By the 1970s, professional sport had begun to permeate many sports, and the concept of amateur was removed from the Olympics in the 1980s.

The modern Olympic Games have the greatest economic impact of any world-wide event and have the greatest media coverage of any event up to and including the two weeks of competition. Unfortunately, drug use and abuse have taken away some of the glitter from sport and even from the Olympics, but modern technology and people's innate love of sport are working towards overcoming this problem.

Background Information

The Continuum of Physical Activity and Sport*

As we examine physical activity and sport we quickly realize that sport is only one of numerous stages along a continuum of human physical activity:

1. **Free play** is the first stage of the continuum, as this is the activity in which we engage as children and in which we continue to participate throughout life. As children, we explore, express ourselves, pretend, and role play using various forms of physical activity. This form of play has no firm rules and can usually take place anywhere. We engage in this form of play simply for the pleasure it provides.
2. **Game play** is the next stage of the continuum. This form of play requires greater structure and involves some kind of competition. Game play has a clear set of objectives that enhance our physical and mental capacities and are governed by a set of rules and/or regulations. The final outcome of a game can be based on luck, skill, or strategy, or on any combination of the three. Game play can be inactive or active:
 - Inactive games are very popular and include board games, card games, and video games.
 - Active games include tag games, dodging games, relays, and pick-up games such as touch football or street hockey.

In game play there are no leagues, standings, or schedules, and the players are usually the officials.

3. **Sport** is the next stage along the continuum. As a specialized form of game play, sport generally involves the following characteristics:
 - Sport **contains a physical component** such as strength, speed, endurance, flexibility, coordination, balance, and/or agility.
 - Sport competition **involves winning and losing**; therefore, winning and losing serve as motivating influences to practise, train, and give the best effort.
 - Sport **is governed by an organization or institution** that sets and enforces the rules and regulations and establishes the way in which results are kept and used.
 - Sport almost always **requires specialized facilities and equipment** that conform to a set standard. Courts, fields, and pools, for example, require set boundaries and markings. Equipment must meet standards for size, shape, material, and weight to ensure fair and equitable competition.

Sport in any given society reflects its values, beliefs, attitudes, and culture. In a society that places great emphasis on cooperation and fair play one would expect to find sports, games, and activities that are different from those found in a society that focused on competition and winning. One might argue that the youth of today are involved in a movement that may redefine sport within the North American culture through greater involvement in alternative sports such as in-line skating, mountain biking, and wakeboarding.

Most people play a sport as a hobby or for the love of the game. They are immensely satisfied to achieve the intrinsic rewards of the sport, such as improved health and fitness, improved skills, friendships, and enjoyment. Sporting activities and equipment can be modified to include people with disabilities, thereby giving everyone an opportunity to achieve the personal benefits of sport involvement.

4. **Work** is the final stage of the continuum of physical activity and sport. Some sport participants have developed skills to such a high degree that they are able to earn a living from their craft in organized sport. Professional players and coaches who are at the highest level of organized sport can earn millions of dollars through salaries, endorsements, and prize money. It is the financial payments they receive to perform in sport that classifies them as professionals.

The level of training and commitment needed from a very early age to pursue a dream of becoming a professional athlete is characteristic of work. Pushing the young body to its physical, mental, and emotional limits at a very young age is similar to the work that seasoned and well-conditioned professional athletes must endure. It is small wonder that only a few amateur athletes can ever hope to attain the professional level.

- * Source: Adapted, with permission, from R. B. Woods, 2007, *Social Issues in Sport*, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics), pages 5-9.

Why Do People Become Involved in Sport?

- enjoyment and fun
- filling free time
- parental influence and/or expectations
- risk and excitement
- meeting and playing with others (social relationships)
- fitness and health (e.g., cardiovascular fitness, body shape, stress management)
- skill development
- character development (e.g., leadership, teamwork, communication, self-confidence, self-esteem)
- personal rewards (e.g., awards, scholarships, recognition)
- financial gain

Sport as an Agent for Social Change

According to *Strengthening Canada*, a report published by the Conference Board of Canada, participation in sport is vital to our society:

Canadians love sport. It gives them pleasure, helps them to define themselves and their communities, and contributes to a sense of what it means to be Canadian. In any one year, more Canadians are involved as active participants in sport – more than 8 million people in 2004 – than take part in public education at all levels combined. Millions more take part as volunteers and attendees. In all, about half the entire population of Canada is involved annually with sport, including 55 per cent of all adults.

It is because sport engages so many – as families, friends, communities and individuals – that Canadians experience its effects so strongly. (Bloom, Grant, and Watt 1)

The report further argues that while sport touches so many aspects of people's lives, many Canadians are unaware of how powerfully sport affects them directly or indirectly. Sport changes us as individuals and communities (e.g., allowing us to enhance our skills, improve our health and well-being, develop social connections and cohesion), affects our economy (e.g., creating jobs in manufacturing, retail, and service industries), and contributes to shaping our national and cultural identities (Bloom, Grant, and Watt 1).

The assertion that sport and physical activity are important to our culture and society naturally leads to the question of whether people's attitudes, values, and beliefs about sport can influence social change. The challenge in this lesson is to examine critically the role that sport and physical activity have played in shaping lives. What impact does sport have on family and friends? How do the media influence thinking?

Background Information

The Media and Sport Partnerships*

The world seems to shrink every day due to the high level of connectedness achieved by the many forms of media. Essentially, there are two forms of media:

- **Print media** include newspapers, magazines, and books.
- **Electronic media** include television, radio, and the Internet.

Sport, sport media, large corporations, and business in general are all linked, making this unique partnership a significant economic contributor to society. But sport media also fulfill many other functions, such as the following:

- The media **educate consumers** about a game or sport, its history, the players, and the strategies involved in the contest, making all of us "armchair experts" on the game so that we can discuss and debate the events with others.

- The media **create excitement** about upcoming events, motivating people to become avid consumers, not only of the contest itself but also of all the festivities surrounding it. Many people will watch a significant game (e.g., Stanley Cup final) even if they do not usually watch the sport.
- The media **create emotional attachments** to athletes, coaches, and teams through the many features leading up to the start of a new season of play. The media often focus attention on athletes who have been injured, or who have had to overcome adversity in their lives to get them to a certain point.
- The media **provide a form of recreation and entertainment** for many people, which is of great value in stressful lives. Cheering for a local or favourite team or player is the type of excitement and drama that can make a difference in a person's life.
- The media **relate stories on social concerns** that attract attention, stimulate thinking, and often create lively debate. Significant topics addressed in the media include issues related to:
 - racial discrimination and inequities (e.g., coaching assignments, player positions, team names, logos, mascots)
 - sport economics (e.g., profits, salaries, endorsements, public financing, careers)
 - gender inequities (e.g., salaries, attire, opportunity)
 - sport ethics (e.g., cheating, fighting, gambling, athlete and fan behaviour, alcohol and tobacco sponsorships, role modelling, sexual harassment)
 - technological advancements (e.g., playing surfaces, equipment, clothing)
 - substance use and abuse (e.g., steroids, alcohol, drug testing, blood doping, penalties)



Background Information

Social Issues Highlighted through Sport

Sport engages the physical and mental abilities of groups and individuals world-wide, whether as fans or participants, as professionals or amateurs. Sport experiences generate a range of complex meanings that are shaped by many factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. To understand the significance of sport more fully, it is necessary to examine the connections between sport and issues such as social mobility, individual achievement, ethnic conflict, nationalism, and the drive for equity.



Background Information

Social Issues and Values

The following are examples of social issues that affect sport participation and development, including access to sport participation for populations with specific or exceptional needs:

- Special Olympics
- Paralympic Games
- Aboriginal sport participation
- gender equity in sport
- physical activity and sport for older adults
- politics and sport
- technology in sport
- sport as business

Special Olympics

In the early 1960s the Kennedy Foundation in Washington, DC, began to promote international games for individuals who were intellectually challenged. The Kennedy Foundation hired Dr. Frank Hayden, a well-known Canadian researcher in the area of fitness and people with disabilities, and thus the Special Olympic Games were initiated in 1968, primarily with athletes from the United States and Canada. Events were later added for athletes who were physically challenged. Hayden and other more recent investigators have shown that the low fitness levels demonstrated by athletes with intellectual disabilities in the 1960s and 1970s were the result of physical inactivity. Testing has shown that these athletes are among the fitness elite, not only in physical skills for their peer groups, but also, in many cases, when compared with other athletes. Today the Special Olympic Games are the second largest international events, next to the Olympic Games.

Paralympic Games

Athletes with disabilities were included in the Olympic Games for the first time in Rome in 1960. By the 1976 Olympic Games in Toronto, more groups with disabilities were added. That same year the Winter Paralympics took place in Sweden.

Since that time, groups with disabilities have increasingly been included in international sports competitions. Today, six different groups with disabilities are involved in the Paralympics, with athletic achievement being highlighted over disability. The number of athletes participating in the Summer Paralympics, for example, has increased from 400 athletes from 23 countries in Rome in 1960 to 3806 athletes from 136 countries in Athens in 2004 (International Paralympics Committee).

Currently, the Paralympics and the Olympics are held in the same year and at the same location. The decision to ensure this practice for the future came about with a 2001 agreement between the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), establishing that any host city will be presenting not only the Olympic Games but also the Paralympics

Aboriginal Sport Participation

In Canada the Aboriginal Sport Circle is the national voice for Aboriginal sport, bringing together the interests of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Established in 1995, the Aboriginal Sport Circle was created in response to the need for more accessible and equitable sport and recreation opportunities for Aboriginal peoples. Canada is viewed throughout the world as a leader in promoting and protecting the rights of all its citizens, including the access and participation in sport and physical activity programs. Today, many Native bands and individuals located near cities participate in athletic leagues. As well, every four years competitive games are held between Aboriginals from places such as Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Yukon Territory, and Alaska. The competitions include indigenous games and demonstrations such as the arm pull and high kicking.

Gender Equity in Sport

One of the most consistent injustices of the past and present is the lack of equal access to, for example, job opportunities for women in our society. The quest for equitable and fair access in all aspects of society including sport is still a struggle today, although great strides have been made in recent history.

According to the [Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity](#), "no women took part in the first modern Olympic Games in 1896" (CAAWS, "Introduction"). At the 26th Olympic Games (1996) in Atlanta, for example, 97 of the 271 events were open to women, with both women and men contesting in 11 events; 3626 of the 10 629 athletes were women. Canada has fared better than other major countries when it comes to representation: "Of the 307 Canadian athletes who competed in Atlanta, 154 were women and 153 were men, making it the first Canadian Olympic team ever to consist of more women than men, an impressive shift in a short time" (CAAWS, "Introduction").

Significant events that have ultimately changed the social view of women in sport include

- the women's movements of the 1950s and 1960s
- the creation of organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Canadian Association for Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS)
- the passing of U.S. legislation called *Title IX* in 1972 prohibiting gender discrimination in federally assisted education programs

Title IX states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving financial assistance" (U.S. Department of Labor).

The impact of events such as these has changed the level of female participation in sport throughout the world.

Physical Activity and Sport for Older Adults

As humans age, the body begins to deteriorate, from the cellular level to the total body. Aging is inevitable, and the process cannot be stopped. Research has shown, however, that it is possible to slow the loss of physiological and physical functions through exercise and sport. The Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging is a world leader in aging research and provides practical advice and materials on the benefits of physical activity for older adults. Recently, the Canadian government was instrumental in the formation of the Canada Senior Games, a national competition for seniors over the age of 55, which includes sports such as snooker, swimming, five-pin bowling, golf, and track.

Politics and Sport

The Canadian Sport Policy, available on the Sport Canada website, “presents a powerful vision for sport in Canada” and emphasizes the “goals of enhanced participation, excellence, capacity, and interaction in sport” (“Introduction”):*

The Policy is unique in comparison to the many previous studies and policies on sport in Canada because it

- represents the shared vision and goals of 14 governmental jurisdictions for sport for the period 2002 to 2012 and challenges the sport community to share in their achievement
- reflects the involvement in the policy development process of stakeholders not previously included
- emphasizes increased communication and collaboration amongst all the stakeholders
- commits all governments to setting targets for enhanced participation and enhanced high performance sport in collaboration with their respective sport communities
- commits governments to strengthening their regular and formal communication with their respective sport communities on issues affecting sport
- will be implemented by complementary Action Plans developed by the governments collectively and individually, bi-laterally and multi-laterally, and by the sport community

THE GOALS OF THE CANADIAN SPORT POLICY ARE

- **Enhanced Participation**

A significantly higher proportion of Canadians from all segments of society are involved in quality sport activities at all levels and in all forms of participation.

- **Enhanced Excellence**

The pool of talented athletes has expanded and Canadian athletes and teams are systematically achieving world-class results at the highest levels of international competition through fair and ethical means.

- **Enhanced Capacity**

The essential components of an ethically based, athlete/participant-centred development system are in place and are continually modernized and strengthened as required.

- **Enhanced Interaction**

The components of the sport system are more connected and coordinated as a result of the committed collaboration and communication amongst the stakeholders.

Sport is often seen as a venue for the promotion of social values, thereby making sport a political venue. For example, sport and physical activity enable participants to

- enhance personal growth and development
- develop life skills (e.g., skills in time management, priority and goal setting)
- strive for excellence and success through hard work, discipline, and perseverance
- experience change in socioeconomic status
- contribute to and benefit from teamwork and team cohesion

Champion athletes can use their celebrity and success to bring attention to inequities, injustices, and other social and personal causes (e.g., racism, gender bias, homophobia, substance use, eating disorders, cancer, AIDS, disaster relief). Sport can also inspire national pride and unite a nation.

Technology and Sport

New sport products are continually being developed, including sportswear, court and field surfaces, equipment, fabrics, and materials. The primary reasons for the development of new products are safety, increased speed of movement (e.g., better trained athletes and the design of playing tools such as the shape and size of balls and the configuration of skis), and improved performance. Innovations in sport products (e.g., larger racquet heads, new waxing techniques for cross-country skiers) have made sport easier for beginners, assisted top-level athletes to reach superior performances, and eased the transition from individual to team play and from recreational sport to highly competitive sport.

Scientifically proven, sport-specific training regimes have significantly added to improved performance, as well as helping to combat the deleterious effects of physical inactivity. Advances in understanding how the body reacts to physiological and psychological stress, as well as improved rehabilitation methodology and technology, have enhanced knowledge of how to live a healthier life.

Sport as Business

Sport is big business. More individuals participate in sport as spectators, athletes, and/or administrators than are involved in any other singular human endeavour. In many nations, including Canada, more money is spent on physical activity and sportswear, admission fees, salaries, equipment, and facilities than on the armed services or on any other area of concern, with the exception of health care. Sport involvement contributes to the fitness level of the nation, serves as a major form of entertainment, contributes to personal and national pride, provides employment for thousands of individuals, results in the construction of superior facilities, and thus contributes significantly to the gross national product of the country.