

# History of hockey essay



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For more than a century, hockey historians have found that precisely tracing the sports origin is not only a difficult task but, a virtual impossibility.

Therefore I can only try to deduce for myself, from the records, claims, and accounts, which are available to me, when, where, and by whom the first ice hockey was played. I'll also discuss the early problems and obstacles that the NHL encountered. Plus I will also tell a little bit about early equipment, along with early game play and ice conditions that players encountered. Lastly, the Stanley Cup, which is the most prized and oldest sports award of the NHL. It has been won many times, by many different teams. Ice hockey is traceable to games played on fields as far back as nearly 2500 years ago. In 478 BC, a Greek soldier, Themistocles, built a wall in Athens which contained a sculpture scene portraying two athletes in a faceoff-like stance holding sticks similar to those later used in field hockey. (Hubbard & Fischler, page17)

Perhaps native Americans were the first to play hockey like games. The Indians of Canada invented the field game lacrosse, which is known by the legislative act as Canada's and national sport. The Algonquians who inhabited the shores the St. Lawrence River played an ice game that was similar to lacrosse called "baggataway," played without skates and with an unlimited number of participants. French explorers who visited the St. Lawrence River area and northern areas of United States in the 1700s witnessed these matches. (Hubbard & Fischler, page17) According to the dictionary of language of Micmacs Indians, published in 1888, the Micmacs of eastern Canada played an ice game called "oochamkunutk," which was played with a bat or stick. Another ice game played by the Micmacs was "alchamadijik," which was referred to in legends of the Micmacs, issued in 1894. (Hubbard & Fischler, page18-19) Early hockey-like games that came from across the

Atlantic include the Field game Hurley from Ireland, field hockey from England, and the ice games English bandy and Kolven from Holland. Hurley is a ground game that is still popular in Ireland. It was originally played by an unlimited number of players representing one parish against another. A flat field hockey-like stick and a large ball were used. Irish immigrants, who came to work on the Shubenacadie Canal near Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, in 1831, brought Hurley to Canada. Some believe that oochamkunutk is Hurley on ice. (Dolan page 21-26) Field hockey was played in 1870 in England, as well as Egypt and India. Although the rules for field hockey play a major role in the early evolution of ice hockey in Canada. But most students of the game doubt that field hockey was the forerunner of ice hockey, for the reason that both sports started around the same time. Despite its overwhelming popularity as primarily a woman's sport in North America, field hockey didn't arrive in America until 1901, (when Miss Constance Applebee of England arrived at Harvard summer school and organized a game with the group of students and teachers. (Dolan page 29-31) The English played a game called Bandy, which is a hockey-like game, who have been playing it as far back as the late 18th century and it is still played today in Russia, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and the United States (Minnesota). Many of the stars of the early Soviet hockey teams had been Bandy players. It is played on a large sheet of ice with short sticks, a ball and large goals. The Dutch, long known for their ice skating ability, have played the game Kolven since the 1600's. It is played with a golf-like stick, a ball, and posts stuck in the ice for goals. Evidence of this game can be seen in 17th century Dutch paintings. Emigrants from Holland who settled in New York City played the game in their new locale. Another hockey-like game played on both sides of

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the Atlantic was shinny. It was played on the frozen pans of North American and northern Europe (Scotland in particular). A block of wood or of ball served as a puck and a couple of a large rocks board chunks of wood were used to mark-off the goals. For the faceoff players had to “ shinny on their own side,” which meant they had to take it right handed. Ever since the advent of organized ice hockey, the name shinny has been used to describe on organized will or sandlot (if you will) hockey. There is an ongoing debate among hockey historians as to whether or not some of the “ first hockey ever played” claims where actually ice hockey or instead, one of hockey-like games like shinny. The committee appointed of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association Concluded that the first hockey was played in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1855, by the royal Canadian rifles, an imperial army unit stationed at Kingston. Some believe the game they were playing was probably shinny. An English historian once claimed that the royal family created the game in the early 1850’s, on the lake behind Windsor Castle. But most likely the British royalty was playing either shinny or a bandy-like game instead. Apart from shinny, the precursor to ice hockey in the United States was ice polo, a purely American creation that was derived from the indoor sport of roller polo. . (Hubbard & Fischler, page 22-37) Ice polo was played on outdoor ice by the early to mid-1880s in New England, Minnesota and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. It was most likely played at first at St. Paul’s school in Concord, New Hampshire, in the early 1880’s. In 1883, a four-team ice polo league was formed in St. Paul, Minnesota. The formation of this league lead to the organization of ice polo tournament held annually in conjunction with the famous of St. Paul winter carnival. By the turn of the century, ice hockey had replaced ice polo in the U. S. (Fischler page 47) The

first organized indoor ice hockey game supposedly took place in Canada on March 30, 1875. Montreal's Victoria Skating Rink was the site of the game, which was organized by James Creighton, an ice Hurley player from Halifax. After a local exhibition of ice lacrosse drew little, if any public interest. Creighton of or post ice hockey to instead and ordered sticks to be shipped from Halifax to Montreal for the event. The game was played with nine-man sides on a surface that measured 80 ft by 204 ft. the contest ended in at 2-1 in victory for Creightons team and, believe it or not - the game included a fight! " Shins and heads were battered, benches smashed, and the lady spectators fled in confusion," reported the wire dispatch Kingstons Daily British Whig from Montreal. A terrible scene indeed, but there is a silver lining: we may not know when outdoor ice hockey began but we do know that fighting in hockey is at least as old as its first indoor game. What I can determine, despite my inability to pinpoint where and by whom the first outdoor game was played, is that ice hockey is primarily on Canadian creation. What I can also assume is that since humans have inhabited the Earth, they have invented, along with other recreational forms of entertainment and amusement, games, which have required, or better yet served, to fulfill man's need for exercise. Whether there have been meadows, fields, parks and of back yards, games have been played. The same is true for ice, whether it be frozen ponds, lakes, rivers, or even puddles. In the years following that first indoor game, Canadians began to shape and hone the new sports to their liking. In 1876, the object being struck with sticks was referred to as the " puck" for the first time, and 1877 saw the first publicized set of ice hockey rules, all seven of which were taken directly from field hockey. Further ideas and rule decisions were adapted and

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made respectively by McGill University of students W. F. Robertson and R. F. Smith. Ice hockey's popularity grew in Canada where it soon became the sport of choice - a preference that has stuck to this day. NHL forward Brendan Shanahan summed up his country's partiality for hockey in 1996 when he stated: "lacrosse is our national sport, the hockey is our beloved national sport." (Gretzky page 9 34) By 1883 there were three teams in Montreal and one in Quebec City. Ice hockey's first ever championship series was featured at the 1883 Montreal winter carnival with the McGill University team taking top honors. Tournament rules called for seven men to a side and two 30-minute periods with a 10-minute intermission. The annual carnival continues to feature the novel sport and served as a showcase for innovations as well as a testing ground for rule revisions. By 1886, stick width was limited to 3 in. and pucks achieved their standard specs: 1 inch thick by 3 in. in diameter and made of vulcanized rubber. Charles E. Courtney, a master at the St. Pauls School, later brought these new standards for the tools of the game to the states. One of the first amateur leagues in Canada was the Ontario Hockey Association founded in Toronto in 1890. It was divided into three groups: junior, intermediate, and senior and. The OHA was responsible for producing some of the game's greatest players in those early days. In 1892 Lord Stanley of Preston, the sixth Governor General of Canada and an avid fan of the game, sent his aide Captain Charles Colvill to England to purchase a trophy to be awarded annually to the amateur champions of Canada. For a mere 50 pounds, Colvill bought what has become the oldest and most prestigious trophy in North American sports. Governor's Stanley's initiative was symbolic of the level of popularity the game had already achieved throughout the dominion of Canada. The

coveted trophy soon became known as - appropriately enough - The Stanley Cup the area to this day is considered the ultimate gold in professional hockey. It wasn't only men who chose to partake of this thrilling ice game; the year 1890 also marked the time when the first organized and recorded all-female ice hockey game took place in Ottawa, Ontario. Later, women would compete regularly in "Baker's leagues" which were organized in most of Canada's major cities. Ice hockey continued to spread across Canada during the early to mid- 1890's, when it was just beginning to filter into the United States. Scholars of the game have struggled to locate hockey's American roots and, which have become of prime subject for debate. The transition from ice polo to ice hockey has clouded hockey's beginnings below the 49th parallel, leaving Uncle Sam without a definite hockey birth certificate. In the summer of 1894, the group of Americana and Canadian tennis players competed in a tournament held at Niagara Falls, New York. While attending an off-court social occasion, some Americans and Canadians got around to comparing notes about winter sports. Both were surprised to find they were playing similar but different games on ice. Upon learning that the Americans were playing ice polo instead of ice hockey, the Canadians invented their North American counterparts to visit Canada the next winter to play exhibition games of both sports against their border buddies. George Wright, founder of Wright & Ditson, a manufacturer and distributor of athletic equipment, organized a series of double headers featuring both sports to be played in Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston and Toronto. Each night the teams played two periods each of polo and hockey, the former being played with five men to a side, the latter with seven. The Maple Leafs swept all four of the hockey games with the Yanks winning two and tying two of the polo

matches. Capacity crowds witnessed Americas discovery of the better ice game. Soon after, this great new sport spread like cancer. Hockey was becoming more and more popular in Canada and northern U. S. by the years. The sports growth in popularity brought new ideas for the formation of a professional league, which would be later referred to as the NHL. The actual establishment of the NHL took a very short time, the whole thing boiled down to just one meeting on November 22, 1917 at Montreal Windsor Hotel. (the league is born). This meeting consisted of NHA owners representing the Canadians, the Wanderers, the Quebec Bulldogs, and the Ottawa Senators. (The NHA was an amateur league established before the NHL, in which Lord Stanleys Cup was awarded to the champion of the league). These teams and team owners came up with a radical plan in mind: the creation of new league. They were tired of the NHAs problems. In time, it would become and the worlds premier professional hockey league, with its teams playing both Canada and the U. S. Between the moment of its founding and our time, it would divide its history into three eras-a struggling infancy, the golden and, simultaneously, dark years of youth and the growth two todays adulthood. We turned now to the first of those eras. Even though launched with five teams, the NHL played its first season with just four. The reason: the Quebec Bulldogs had been losing money in the recent difficult years and the owners, deciding that enough was enough, elected to suspend operations for the time being. They then had to distribute their players among the other teams. (Official Guide & Record Book page 136 137) The NHLs infant seasons land from 1917-18 to 1924-25. They were to be years marked by financial pains, instances of superb play, and the establishment of one as-yet to on broken record and moment of terrible sadness in the Stanley cup play. 1917-18 -



after deciding to play a 22-game season, the NHL went into action for the first time on December 19, 1917, sending Montreal against Toronto, which was played on Toronto's Home facility, the only artificial-ice rink in the circuit at the time, (Montreal took a 10-9 win). Unfortunately the game only attracted 700 fans, despite the fact that men in uniform were admitted with no charge. The meager crowd left no doubt that pro hockey, even under a new banner, was still suffering from the army scandal, most of the greatest players were off fighting at war. Again on the disaster side, the Westmount Arena burned to the ground in early 1918. Montreal had not drawn good crowds during the season and with arena lost, the owners decided to call it quits. What has long been one of Canada's finest amateurs than professional teams came to an end. 1918-19, The NHL continues to suffer bad times in the second season. Crowds remained sparse, even though the league tried to elicit interest by adopting new rules to make the game faster and more interesting. During this season an very unusual thing had happened, for a first time ever the Stanley cup was not awarded, the reason why it was not awarded is because Canada was in the midst of a lethal flu epidemic in the which touched the a Stanley cup teams. The flu sent many players to the hospital, tragically some of them died 6-8 weeks later. Therefore the competition was held off and a cup of was not awarded. Never again has the Stanley cup not been awarded after post season. (Hubbard & Fishler, page 55-68) Over the years the NHL suffered similar obstacles, financial problems, wars, and the lack of fans, to about the 1924-25 season. After that season times started to become easier. More profit was being made by the owners, and more fans were attending the games. Hockey was becoming one of the most popular sports in all of Canada, which quickly spread to the U. S.

Nowadays hockey is one of the most profitable and enjoyable sports throughout North America and Europe.

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