

# Relationship between politics and sport



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Throughout history, sporting events have always reflected the political and social events that have surrounded them. Canada is not an exception to this fact. Political events such as the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, and various sporting events such as the Olympics have had a large influence on the world of sports. During the civil rights movement, many African athletes began to participate in sports to help transcend racial barriers. Willie O'Ree, the first black player to ever play in the NHL, was one of the figures that could be compared to Martin Luther King Jr. Willie O'Ree played for the Boston Bruins and his career was reflective of the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, "...one night in Chicago, O'Ree was butt-ended in the mouth by a Blackhawks player, who, as O'Ree was picking up his teeth from the ice, stood over him uttering a racist remark" (Burnett, 2007). O'Ree took this kind of abuse for his whole career, and even though he was the first black player to play in the NHL, it took 30 years for the league to invite him to a single All-Star game (Burnett, 2007). The hate he received was immense, and his calm and quiet demeanor allowed him to ignore the derogatory terms he was being called and continued to help contribute to the movement.

As the movement began to prove successful in the 1960s, black athletes began to flourish as well. Fergus Arthur Jenkins, an African Canadian athlete who played in the MLB throughout the duration of the movement, was the epitome of the effects the movement had on the world. He is one of the greatest pitchers of all time, and one of the less known figures during the time period (Fergie Jenkins Foundation). The main reason why I say he is a representative figure of the movement is because his career began right

after the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Because of the dates of each event are so close, it can be assumed that Jenkins' career and the bill symbolized a turning point in history in which people of African descent would begin to be treated as human beings. In addition to Ferguson Jenkins, Harry Jerome was another African Canadian athlete that stood out in his field and was also a symbol of the struggle black people had to go through before receiving proper treatment from others. Harry Jerome was born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan in 1940 (Barris, 2008).

He participated in numerous races throughout his career and set records in the 100m dash and a variety of other events (Barris, 2008). In 1964, he “ participated in the Tokyo Olympics and won a bronze medal in the 100m – dash” (Barris, 2008). This event was very significant as it represented the recent successes of the civil rights movement and his scar symbolized all the hardship that black people had faced as they pursued their dreams to be seen and treated fairly. The civil rights movement produced many athletes of African descent and they in turn represented the world – wide movement. Some of these athletes – Ferguson Jenkins, Willie O’Ree, and Harry Jerome – symbolized the movement and were leaders in their own way. During the women’s rights movement, many of the participants challenged the views of society and changed the world for the better through politics and sports. The Edmonton Grads were a dominant women’s basketball team and served as a symbol of the progress women have made throughout the movement. “ Beginning as a high-school team, the Grads ruled women’s basketball from 1915 to 1940, winning 93% of their games and 49 out of a possible 51 domestic titles” (Macdonald, 2006). The dominance the team had over the

sport was relatable to the expansion of women into other fields. For example, as the Grads began to win, women began working and factories and drifting away from the stay-at-home wife stereotype that had held them down for so long. The Grads were also quite relatable to the Famous Five. Since they were playing a sport that was considered to be masculine and trying to challenge that view, the Famous Five were challenging the law that prohibited women from working. After the Dominions Election Act was passed in 1920, women gained the right to vote in federal elections (Massicotte).

After this event many women athletes began to truly shine and stand out in their sport. One of the many woman athletes that produced incredible results was Lela Brooks. Brooks won multiple championships in speed skating (Ferguson, 2008). Although she had such a long career, she began to find success in 1923, which was just three years after the passing of the Dominions Election Act. Another successful athlete that flourished after the bill was Ethel Catherwood. She was a member of the 1928 Olympic team and won a gold medal (Barris, 2008). Although, if there was an individual that embodied the women's rights movement, Fanny Rosenfeld would be that person. Rosenfeld is the most accomplished woman athlete in Canadian history. She was the "top-ranked female sprinter in Canada, she was also ranked number one in the long jump, shot put, and discus in 1925, and won Canada's first Olympic track and field medal (a silver) in 1928" (Marshall, 2013). Throughout the 20s, she challenged the idea that some sports should only be played by men. Many commentators would often say that "women should stick to sports such as swimming" (Marshall, 2013). To combat this

stigma, Rosenfeld played other sports such as hockey and basketball (Rosenberg). To reach the point where women had equal standing with men in terms of sports, many contributions were needed. Some of those major contributions were the Edmonton Grads, the Dominions Election Act, and Fanny Rosenfeld. Without these individuals and events, life would be different for women all over the world.

Many sporting events such as the 72 summit series, the 1980 boycott of the Olympics, and the 2014 winter Olympics held in Sochi were all affected by politics. In 1972, Canadian players from the NHL would face off against Russia in an eight game series office hockey (Wilson, 2004). This series mirrored political events occurring at the time as it was not just ice hockey, but a way to decide which political views were more dominant. Russia wanted to prove that communism was superior to democracy, and this opinion was shared by all players on team Russia. On the other hand, Canada believed that they would prevail and prove to Russia that a democratic government was superior. As the games unfolded, Canada won by a single game but realized the threat presented by Russia. In addition, this series was also representative of the war occurring at the time as it took place during the Cold War. These games of hockey would not only decide which country was better at developing talent, but also which government was far more effective. In addition, The 1980 Olympics also brought the issues created by Russia out into the forefront. In 1979, Russia invaded Afghanistan, and this did not sit well with President Carter of the United States (Bigelow, 2014). Carter issued a warning to Russia declaring that if they did not leave Afghanistan and return home, the United States would

boycott the 1980 Olympics (Bigelow, 2014). Instead of returning, Russia decided to stay and defy the wishes of the US. Because of this, not only did the United States proceed to boycott the event, but so did Canada and a multitude of other countries (Hill, 1999). Later in 1984, Russia decided to boycott the Olympics in Los Angeles (Hill, 1999). The actions taken by both countries were heavily influenced by the Cold War that was occurring at the time. In recent years, the Sochi Winter Olympics were reflective of the views of society and Russia's out-of-date thinking. In the last decade, society has become more accepting of individuals who do not follow the norm. For example, there have been states in America that have been allowing homosexuals to get married. In Russia, a law recently passed that "prohibits individuals from promoting homosexuality to minors" (Domi, 2013). This law caused a major uproar in America, and many people wanted a boycott. This desire led to various protests across the United States (Domi, 2013). This outrage also affected athletes as they all insulted the service provided by Russia while they were competing to help support the cause. Many of them took pictures of the dirty conditions they were living in and posted them on the internet, such as dysfunctional toilets. Over the last century, there have been many national sporting events that have influenced and reflected their political surroundings. History and sports go hand-in-hand. Political events such as the Women's Rights and Civil Rights Movement have all had an effect on Canadian competition. Even during events such as the Olympics, politics still manage to affect competition. This will continue to be true for the next few years, and the next century.

## Works Cited

Barris, T. (2008, February 18). *Ethel catherwood- the canadian encyclopedia* . Retrieved from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/ethel-catherwood/>

Barris, T. (2008, March 24). *Harry jerome – the canadian encyclopedia* . Retrieved from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/harry-jerome/>

Bigelow, W. (2014, February 17). *The failed u. s. boycott of the 1980 moscow summer olympics* . Retrieved from <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-failed-u-s-boycott-of-the-1980-moscow-summer-olympics/5369121>

Burnett, T. (2007, December 14). *Willie O'Ree: The first black NHL player* . Retrieved from <http://slam.canoe.ca/Slam/Hockey/News/2007/12/07/4713520-sun.html>

Domi, T. (2013, December 18). *Obama rightly joins political boycott of winter olympics* . Retrieved from <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2013/12/russia-gay-rights-lgbtsochiwinterolympics.html>

Fergie Jenkins Foundation. (n. d.). *Fergie jenkins – biography* . Retrieved from <http://www.fergiejenkins.ca/site/biography>

Hill, C. R. (1999). The Cold War and the Olympic movement. *History Today* , 49(1), 19.

Macdonald, C. (2006, February 07). *Edmonton grads – the canadian encyclopedia* . Retrieved from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/edmonton-grads/>

Marshall, T. (2013, October 16). *The history of canadian women in sport* . Retrieved from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-history-of-canadian-women-in-sport/>

Massicotte, L. (n. d.). *The evolution of the duties to be fulfilled by poll staff with regards to registration and voting on polling day and advance polling days, 1920 to 2012* . Retrieved from <http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=cons/comp/evol&document=intro&e>

Rosenberg, D. (n. d.). *Fanny “bobbie” rosenfeld* . Retrieved from <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rosenfeld-fanny>

Wilson, J. J. (2004). 27 remarkable days: the 1972 summit series of ice hockey between Canada and the Soviet Union. *Totalitarian Movements & Political Regions*, 5(2), 271 – 280