

The first game of ice hockey was played in Canada shortly before the turn of the century. Since that historic game, the popularity of the sport has grown steadily. Today, more than 260,000 Canadians play hockey in organized leagues, where adults and children as young as six years of age find skilled coaching and well-matched competition.

The game is played by two teams wearing skates. The players move a cylindrical piece of hard rubber (*puck*), about one inch thick and three inches in diameter, along the surface of an ice-covered playing arena (*rink*) by means of a bladed stick.

Description

The object of the game is to score goals by driving or shooting the puck with the hockey-stick into the opposing team's goal area, which is defended by a *goaltender*. If the puck is not stopped by the goaltender, one goal is counted for the attacking team. The team generally consists of from 15 to 20 players, six of whom may be on the ice at any time as the *playing* team. The members of the playing team alternate throughout the game, though the goaltender usually plays the entire game without substitution. The game, which is one hour in length, is divided into three playing periods of 20 minutes, with intervening rest-periods.

Besides providing many Canadians with recreation and exercise, hockey is Canada's most popular spectator sport. Thousands of people attend games every week in cities and towns, and millions regularly watch professional hockey on television.

Professional leagues

The foremost professional hockey association is the National Hockey League, which, despite its name, is international in scope. At present there are 17 teams in the NHL, three in Canada and 14 in the United States. The Canadian teams are the Montreal *Canadiens*, the Toronto *Maple Leafs* and the Vancouver *Canucks*. The U.S. teams are the Boston *Bruins*, the New York *Rangers*, the New York *Islanders*, the Chicago *Black Hawks*, the Detroit *Red Wings*, the Los Angeles *Kings*, the Philadelphia *Flyers*, the Pittsburgh *Penguins*, the St Louis *Blues*, the Minnesota *North Stars*, the Buffalo *Sabres*, the Washington *Capitals*, the Atlanta *Flames* and the Colorado *Rockies*.

National Hockey League teams play an 80-game schedule that lasts from early October to early April and culminates in an eight-team play-off. The symbol of professional hockey supremacy is the Stanley Cup, donated in 1893 by Lord Stanley of Preston during his term as Governor General of Canada.