

Sports

There is no record of the first sporting match between Cubans and Canadians but there are extensive newspaper accounts of the first sports league that brought together teams from both countries.

The International League of Baseball, which lasted

from 1954 to 1960, consisted of eight Triple-A teams, including the Cuban Sugar Kings, the Montreal Royals and the Toronto Maple Leafs. The Cuban and Canadian teams gave the League its international flavour, despite the preponderance of American players and owners. Its games were major public events for the era, with Monsignor Alfredo Mueller blessing the first ever match between the Maple Leafs and the Sugar Kings in 1954. Canadian Ambassador Hector Allard was on hand to receive the ball at the opening of a Royals/Sugar Kings match in Havana in the late 1950s.



Jack Kent Cooke (owner of Toronto Maple Leafs), Monsignor Alfredo Mueller, Roberto Maduro (owner of Cuban Sugar Kings), and player Luke Sewell, 1954



Cuban Sugar Kings player presenting autographed ball to Canadian Ambassador Hector Allard before game against Montreal Royals, late 1950s

After the Cuban Revolution, the focus of sporting contacts between Canada and Cuba switched to the amateur level, as illustrated by this photograph from 1965 showing young baseball players from the two countries who met for a series of friendly matches at the Estadio del Cerro in Havana. The commitment to excellence in amateur sports and to the development of young athletes has been a hallmark of sports in Cuba since the early 1960s. It has also been a strong point of attraction for Canadian athletes, looking for a congenial environment in which to train and compete, especially during the Canadian winter. A series of official sports co-operation agreements have promoted these friendly exchanges between our two countries since 1977.

International competitions have generated most of the notable encounters between Canadians and Cubans in sports. The first international competition that brought athletes from one country to the