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ICE HOCKEY -- CANADA'S MOST POPULAR SPORT

The first game of ice hockey was played in Canada shortly before the start of this century. Although there is some controversy as to where this historic game was played, and who participated in it, there is no question of the sport's impact upon Canadians. Today, more than 260,000 Canadians play hockey in organized leagues, where adults and boys as young as six years of age find skilled coaching and well-matched competition.

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

Description of Game

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 goal-tender. If the puck is not stopped by the goal-tender, one goal is counted for the attacking team. A team generally consists of some 15 to 20 players, six of whom may be on the ice at any given time as the playing team. The members of the playing team are alternated throughout the game, though the goal-tender usually plays the entire game without substitution. The game is one hour in length and is divided into three playing periods of 20 minutes, with intervening rest periods.

Besides giving many Canadians hours of recreation and exercise, hockey provides entertainment as a spectator sport. Each week thousands of people attend games in their home cities and towns, and millions regularly watch professional hockey on television.

Professional Leagues

The foremost professional hockey league is the National Hockey League, which in spite of its name is international in scope. At present there are six teams in the league, two from Canada and four from the United States. The Canadian teams are the Montreal Canadiens and the Toronto Maple Leafs, whose home arenas have spectator capacities of 15,700 and 15,000 respectively. The U.S. teams are the Boston Bruins, the Chicago Black Hawks, the Detroit Red Wings and the New York Rangers.

National Hockey League teams play a 70-game schedule extending from early October to late March, and culminating in a four-team playoff. 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.

Professional hockey is also played in three other North American Leagues - the American League, the Western Hockey League and the Central Professional Hockey League. Canada has only two teams in these leagues, the Quebec Aces of Quebec City in the American League and the Vancouver Canucks in the Western League. With few exceptions, however, professional hockey players are Canadian-born. Canadians generally take an intense interest in the fortunes of all professional teams, no matter where "home ice" may be situated.