

# Sports

Think of sports in Canada and you'll likely think of hockey. Some of the world's best-known hockey players are Canadian. And hockey is by far Canada's favourite spectator sport and one of its most widely played recreational sports.

But ask young Canadians to list their favourite sports activities and a much broader picture emerges. Those aged 13 to 24 cite swimming, downhill and cross-country skiing, baseball, tennis, basketball. . . Canadians view sports as an integral part of a well-rounded, healthy life.

## Sports on Ice and Snow

More than 450 000 youngsters participate in organized hockey leagues. . . and many more play on streets, lakes and outdoor rinks. Many dream of joining the National Hockey League (NHL), a professional league comprising 23 North American teams, including 8 Canadian-based teams in Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec City, Toronto, Vancouver and Winnipeg.

Although many teams are located in the United States, the majority of the NHL players are Canadian. The NHL hockey season runs from October to June and is concluded by a playoff among the top teams for the Stanley Cup, a trophy symbolic of hockey supremacy in North America. The 1992-93 season marked the 100th awarding of the Stanley Cup.

Canadians have fared extremely well in international hockey competition: from 1990 to 1994, the Men's Junior National Team won the World Junior Championships four out of five times; the Men's National Team captured silver medals in the 1992 and 1994 Winter Olympic Games; and the Women's National Team won world

championships in 1990, 1992 and 1994.

Skiing — downhill or cross-country — is a sport that has captured the hearts of Canadians. The country boasts hundreds of ski areas, including world-renowned resorts in Banff, Alberta, and Whistler, British Columbia, as well as an abundance of cross-country ski trails. In international competition, Canadian skiers have excelled in recent years on the World Cup circuit and at the Winter Olympic Games. In 1992, Kerrin Lee-Gartner had the performance of her career as she captured a gold medal at the Albertville Olympics. Kate Pace continued the streak of success by winning a gold medal at the 1993 World Championships and coming second in the overall World Cup downhill standings in 1994.

Canada also excels in figure skating. A vast network of figure-skating clubs throughout the country has produced a long line of world and Olympic medalists, from Barbara Ann Scott and Elizabeth Manley to Toller Cranston and Kurt Browning. Among the latest group of Canadians to excel in international figure skating are Elvis Stojko, who won a silver medal at the Lillehammer Games and a gold medal at the World Championships in 1994; and the pairs team of Isabelle Brasseur and Lloyd Eisler, who won a gold medal in 1993 and a silver in 1994 at the World Championships along with bronze medals at the Albertville and Lillehammer Winter Olympics. As a spectator sport, figure skating has steadily increased in popularity over the last several years.

Although not practised as widely as figure skating, speed skating has produced Canada's greatest Winter

Olympian, Gaétan Boucher, the winner of two gold medals and a bronze at the 1984 Olympics. Canadian speed skaters showed their prowess at the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics where they captured one bronze and three silver medals.

A relatively new sport that has attracted a large following in Canada is ringette: more than 50 000 ringette competitors play on about 2500 teams. Played mostly by women, ringette is similar to hockey, taking place on ice with skates, sticks and a rubber ring.

Biathlon is a demanding sport that integrates the disciplines of cross-country skiing and shooting. Canadian Myriam Bédard dominated the women's 7.5-km and 15-km events at the Lillehammer Olympics, where she won two gold medals.

## Sports Variety

The myth of Canadians being ice- and snow-bound for most of the year is quickly shattered when one looks at the variety of warm-weather sports played in Canada. These include swimming, sailing, windsurfing, rowing, track and field, tennis, football (called "soccer"), rugby, field hockey, golf. . . the list goes on.

Swimming is not only one of the most popular recreational sports in Canada, it is also a powerhouse event for Canadian athletes in international competition. Canadians have won more than 50 Olympic medals since the 1912 Summer Games in Stockholm and have held numerous world records. At the 1992 Barcelona Summer Olympic Games, swimmer Mark Tewksbury won a gold medal in the 100-metre backstroke event while setting an Olympic record.