

History of Sports in Newfoundland

One of the oldest references to sport in Newfoundland was found in Aaron Thomas' journal entry of 1794 (Anderson, 1). His entry depicts races between horse drawn sleighs on the icy surface of Quidi Vidi Lake. This sport, referred to as "tilting" was enjoyed by both men and women and later developed into what was called ice-racing (Anderson, 1). Sports like cockfights and games of billiards were referred to as elegant events for the noble upperclassmen (Anderson, 1). Indeed, with regard to team sports, Anderson states that;

The earliest reference to a "team sport" is in 1812 which was a very severe winter in which sentinels on duty were frequently found frozen to death..To keep alive the spirit of the troops, men were encouraged to play the game of "hurley" either on Quidi Vidi or the frozen harbor (Anderson, 2).

Yet, sports were not for everyone when they first started. The high class, well paid and well off members of Newfoundland society were those who played sports; "sport was regarded as a pleasant diversion for the upper class... [sporting events included many like the following;] in 1851 a cricket match was played between the 'gentlemen of St. John's versus the officers of the Garrison and H.M.S Alarm" (Anderson, 2). All sporting events, once undergone, were followed by large social gatherings by the upperclassmen who participated in the sports. The fishermen and townsmen of Newfoundland were banned from playing sports or even viewing these events. Anderson states that one of the very few events that the general public was allowed to attend and participate in was the Regatta- an event almost no upperclassmen attended or participated in (Anderson, 3).

Hockey started in Newfoundland thanks to the Reid Newfoundland Company and bank employees. The first game was played on Quidi Vidi Lake, and the games were eventually moved to the Prince of Wales' Arena built by the Reid Newfoundland Company (Anderson, 5). Again, sports remained for the educated upperclassmen. However, as we know from the tremendous sports participation in the present day, this ruling changed and we owe it all to the formation of the Brigades. The Brigades were "semi-military organizations whose main objectives were to foster the physical, mental and moral development of young men and boys and to train them to become good, useful citizens and thereby keep them off the streets" (Anderson, 7). Indeed, Anderson states that the Brigades "were the catalyst for sport change in Newfoundland. Through them, sport was opened up to all who were interested in playing. No longer a socially elite pastime, sport was changed by the Brigades in two major areas; involvement of youth, and introduction to the club system" (Anderson, 8).

Today Mount Pearl, and Newfoundland as a whole hosts tremendous amounts of sport participation. We have come a long way from "tilting" races and cockfights. Sports are now open to all of those who wish to participate and are the pastime of many.

Source:

Anderson, Sheila. *Sports Administration in Newfoundland Prior to the National Fitness and Amateur*

Sports Act-1961. Memorial University of Newfoundland, March 1982. Print.