



# Facts on Canada

## Sports in Canada

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

Ice hockey is the national winter sport of Canada, and lacrosse is the national summer sport of Canada. However, while Canada has two national sports, if one were to ask young Canadians to list their favourite sports activities, a much broader picture emerges. Those aged 13 to 24 cite swimming, downhill and cross-country skiing, soccer, baseball, tennis and basketball. Canadians view sports as an integral part of a well-rounded, healthy life.

The Department of Canadian Heritage, through Sport Canada, provides funding and support to high-performance sporting excellence and fairness in sport. It contributes to the hosting of amateur competitions – international, national and interprovincial. It works with partners to support Canadian athletes and to link sport organizations at the community, provincial and national levels.

### Sports on Ice and Snow

More than 505 000 players are registered with the Canadian Hockey Association, including over 45 000 females, the fastest growing segment of the game. Many more play on streets, lakes and outdoor rinks and even dream of joining the National Hockey League (NHL).

The majority of the NHL players are Canadian and Canadians have fared extremely well in international amateur hockey competition: the Men's Junior National Team has won 10 World Junior Championships, including five in a row from 1993 to 1997; the Men's National Team captured silver medals in the 1992 and 1994 Winter Olympic Games; and the Women's National Team won all five world championships in the 1990s, as well as the silver medal at the 1998 Winter Olympic Games. Canada's Paralympic sledge hockey team won the silver medal at the 1998 Paralympic Games in Nagano.

Skiing 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 ski racing legends such as Nancy Greene, Kerrin Lee Gartner and the Crazy Canucks have excelled on the World Cup circuit and at the Winter Olympic Games. Canada's Paralympians are also champions on the slopes.

At the 1998 Paralympics in Nagano, Dan Wesley put together a top-flight performance, winning gold in the men's super G for sit skiers, and taking a bronze in downhill.

Speed skating (both long-track and short-track) is where Canada truly shines. Between 1932 and 1998 Canada won 27 Olympic medals in speed skating. Speed skating has produced Canada's great Winter Olympian, Gaétan Boucher, the winner of two gold medals and a bronze medal at the 1984 Olympics. Canadian speed skaters showed their prowess at the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics, where they captured three silver medals and one bronze. They more than doubled that at the 1998 Winter Olympic Games in Nagano with five medals in the long-track and four in short-track.

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, Brian Orser and Kurt Browning. Among the latest group of Canadians to excel in international figure skating is Elvis Stojko, who won silver medals at the Lillehammer and Nagano Games and gold medals at the World Championships in 1994, 1995 and 1997, as well as silver at the 2000 World Championships. The dance team of Shae-Lynn Bourne and Victor Kraatz won bronze medals at the World Championships in 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999. In pairs, David Pelletier and Jamie Salé won the gold medal at the 2001 World Championships and placed first at the ISU Grand Prix Final in 2001.

A relatively new sport that has attracted a large following in Canada is ringette. More than 50 000 Canadian ringette competitors play on about 2 500 teams. In 1998, Team Canada and Team Finland, the world's two ringette powerhouses, toured Europe in a promotional Summit Series, playing in Finland, Sweden, Germany and France.

In addition, Canada won gold medals at Nagano in two new Olympic sports: snowboarding and curling (women's). Both are enjoyed by thousands of Canadians; snowboarding is one of the fastest-growing sports in the nation, and Canada's curlers number almost 400 000.

The Paralympic Games were first held in Sweden in 1976, with twelve countries competing in alpine and cross-country events. At the 1998 Winter Paralympic games in Nagano, 32 countries competed in three additional sports: sledge hockey, sledge ice racing and biathlon. Canada has been an early and committed supporter of the Paralympics, participating since 1976. It sent 32 athletes to Nagano in 1998 and they returned with 15 medals (one gold, nine silver and five bronze). At the Sydney Summer Games in 2000, Canada enjoyed its best Paralympics finish ever, capturing 96 medals (38 gold, 33 silver and 25 bronze).

## Sports Variety

A variety of warm-weather sports are played in Canada. These include swimming, sailing, windsurfing, rowing, track and field, tennis, football, soccer, rugby, field hockey and golf.

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 39 Olympic medals in swimming events since the 1912 Summer Games in Stockholm and have held numerous world records. Canada's swim team ended the 1998 World Cup short-course season in spectacular fashion, winning eight medals including a gold for Jessica Deglau of Vancouver in the women's 200 metre butterfly.

Canada has also been a world leader in synchronized swimming since the sport began more than 60 years ago. Synchronized swimming reached full medal status at the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles, where Canada won two silver medals. At the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, Carolyn Waldo won two gold medals for Canada. At the Barcelona games in 1992, Sylvie Fréchette was awarded the gold, while the duo of Penny and Vicky Vilagos captured the silver. The Canadian team won a silver medal at the Atlanta Games in 1996, and a bronze medal at the Sydney Games in 2000.

Rowing has also enjoyed a recent upsurge in popularity in Canada following tremendous success on the international circuit. Canada won four gold medals and one bronze in rowing at the 1992 Barcelona Summer Games, and followed up at the 1996 Atlanta Summer Games by winning six medals.

Soccer, the world's most popular sport, is now entrenched in Canada with a large base of young competitors and a professional league.

The sport of basketball, invented by Canadian James Naismith, is also very popular in Canada, with almost 650 000 participants. In addition, the sport of wheelchair basketball is one of the most popular sports for athletes with a disability. In 1998, the Canadian Women's Team was both World and Paralympic champions and, in 2000, both the men's and the women's teams were Paralympic champions.

In terms of spectator appeal, professional baseball and football rank with hockey at the top of the list. The annual Grey Cup football game is traditionally one of the most watched sports events in Canada.

Major-league baseball teams in Montreal and Toronto attract millions of spectators every season. In 1992, the Toronto Blue Jays became the first team outside the United States to win the World Series. The Blue Jays added to their fame by winning the World Series again in 1993. Baseball and softball are popular recreational sports in Canada, with countless local teams and leagues in operation in the summer and autumn.

## **International Role**

With more than 60 national teams participating in international competition, Canada has a wealth of technical and administrative sport expertise that it shares with other countries through various programs and exchanges.

Canada has hosted almost every major international sports competition: Summer and Winter Olympics, Winter Paralympics, Commonwealth Games, Pan-American Games, World University Games, and Special Olympics.

In 2001, Canada will host its first Jeux de la Francophonie in Ottawa-Hull and, for the first time in North America, the World Championships in Athletics, which will take place in Edmonton. In 2002, Winnipeg will host the North American Indigenous Games, and in 2003 the World Road Cycling Championship will take place in Hamilton.

## **The Future**

Nothing unites Canadians like sport. Over 8.3 million Canadians participate regularly in one or more sports at some level. Millions more coach, officiate or administrate sport activities. More than anything else, sport reflects what Canadians value most: the pursuit of excellence, fairness and ethics, inclusion and participation. Canada also supports international events because during such events the whole world becomes a global village, united in its love of sport and in its appreciation for the excellence of all athletes.

The Government of Canada has increased its support to sport-related areas of activity, including direct support to high-performance athletes, expanding the network of National Sport Centres and increased support for amateur coaches.

For more information on sport in Canada, please visit the following website: [www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/sportcanada](http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/sportcanada)

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