How the French Created

CANAIDA

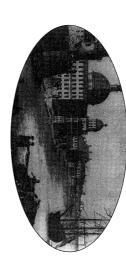
From New France to French Canada

Julie Perrone



HOW THE FRENCH CREATED CANADA

FRENCH CANADIANS AND SPORTS



assume that the French were the first ones to games on the continent. No early documentaans here, they were the first to play their own well—sports. Of course, being the first Europement in which French Canadians do pretty cultures, the game side of it was probably all netted racquets used to pick up a ball and witness a game played by the Natives, with were when it came to understanding other But considering how clueless early explorers the young and also a sort of religious ritual throw it. The game was a method of training tion exists, but we could probably safely The French influence is really everywhere, from theatre to food to drinking alcohol. There is yet another depart-

> chapter). There are now lacrosse federations lacrosse or box lacrosse (indoors). throughout the world, playing either field started in Montréal by Dr. William George game ever. The first lacrosse association was a field. I assume there was more than one ball of people busy chasing a ball up and down Beers (not an intentional link to the previous was just the most challenging ball-chasing used in a game of 100 players, but maybe it flicts between tribes, and it certainly kept a lot was a (relatively) peaceful way to resolve conorigins, hundreds of players played at one time, and games were said to last for days. It is played today more than ever. In its Native (less than original) name stuck, and the sport and called it lacrosse, only because the game involved a stick called a crosse in French. The Jean de Brébeuf wrote about the game in 1636 they could comprehend. Jesuit missionary

Some argue that hockey evolved from lacrosse, an adaptation of the Native game and the European tendency to take something, change it a bit and call it their own. However, there are many theories about how hockey was born, and lacrosse seems to be a far-fetched jump between the two sports. The Irish game of hurling is a more probable origin because it was closer to the game we know, using a curved stick, a ball and no throwing.

some 20 years later, when the sport was introwere the first to play in a recorded game a group of students from McGill University who playing. Once the sport became a paid job instead est on the part of the English to continue ers began to earn money took away any interaround the edges, their game must have been wealthy English Canadians, but when their duced by the priests who taught in schools in 1875. French Canadians started playing responsible for the creation of a hockey dynasty became more numerous on the ice. Although of an exclusive pastime, French Canadians Canadians were poorer and perhaps rougher lost its "fancyness." Assuming that French French counterparts started playing, the sport Hockey was at first a distinguished sport for playing the first game of hockey. Rather, it was in every hockey-playing country in the world. fan in Canada, the United States and perhaps that is either loved or hated by every hockey they didn't play the sport first, the French are less distinguished, indeed. The fact that play-French Canadians cannot be credited for

For the first five years of the team's existence, only Francophone players were recruited to play for the Montréal Canadiens. The team was created specifically to employ French Canadians and to create a rivalry between the English and the French. There was already an English-speaking team in the city, and wealthy

industrialist J. Ambrose O'Brien wanted to spice things up a bit, so in 1909, the Montréal Canadiens were created. There was another French team at the time, the Nationals, though no one knows why that team was not recruited to play against Montréal's English team. The first English-speaking member of the Canadiens, James "Rocket" Power, was hired despite an outcry from French Montréalers. Other teams who wanted Francophone players to play for them had to ask permission from the Montréal Canadiens management.

The team is nicknamed the Habs (for habitants), but is also know as Le Bleu-Blanc-Rouge, Les Glorieux and La sainte flanelle, a mix of religion (which was always very important) and comfort (flanelle is what pyjamas are made of). The Montréal Canadiens celebrate their centenary in 2009, and the team has grown from a small "garage" team to a real institution. French Canadians have always been big fans of hockey, a trait that unifies them throughout Canada.

French Canada has produced many hockey heroes, and since hockey is our national sport, I will dwell on some of them for a bit. (The fact that I have spent three years studying a Canadiens player, or have presented the history of hockey in countless conferences, or married a descendant of Toe Blake has nothing to do with it, I swear.) The first star of the Montréal

considered the first French player, because of a player from Cornwall, Ontario. Although he player, and he is credited for having scored the did not speak a word of French, he is usually Canadiens was undoubtedly Newsy Lalonde. Joliat, who played 16 seasons with the Habs. was a player who spent his whole career on the offered him the most money. A "real" Canadien that French Canadians mean it. He changed the first game after the league's creation) his name. Lalonde was also a star lacrosse death of his teammate, Howie Morenz, broke but retired relatively early in 1938 after the phone legend to play with the team was Aurèle uratively speaking, of course. The first Francoteam and had "C-H" tattooed on his heart, figteams several times, playing for the team that Lalonde wasn't a "true" Canadien in the sense first goal in the NHL (because he played in

Perhaps the biggest star of the Montréal Canadiens, and a symbol for French Canadians throughout the province and perhaps the country, was Maurice "Rocket" Richard. Richard started playing for the Montréal Canadiens during World War II, at a time when the team was really not doing well. He broke every scoring record there was and became the first player ever to score 50 goals in 50 games. He came to be seen as a true French Canadian hero after the riots of 1955—he was the lone Frenchman

a humiliating loss to the Leafs, some disapcrowd that they were a bunch of separatists pointed fans screamed at the red-white-and-blue My husband went to one of these games in always take on an "English vs. French" rivalry. of superstars it is now. The Montréal Cana-Montréal, and after the Canadiens suffered play against the Toronto Maple Leafs, the games Canadians on the team, but whenever they diens now have only a small number of French to break records and make hockey the hotbed the game of hockey, they were certainly the first although the French were not the first to play having received it recently. All this to say that both received the Order of Québec, Bouchard for their work both on and off the ice. They have being honoured by the provincial government have followed in Rocket Richard's footsteps, Jean Béliveau and Émile "Butch" Bouchard, "keeping it in the family." Two other players, players were also French Canadians, thus since broken his records, but some of these example Mario Lemieux and Guy Lafleur, have reserved for political figures. Other players, for allowed state funeral, a privilege usually and of Québec, and was named to the Queen's but he received honours that went beyond his Privy Council. When he died, the Rocket was hockey fame. He received the Order of Canada life telling people he was only a hockey player in a sea of corporate Englishmen. He spent his

Never mind that the proportion of Anglophone and Francophone fans of the Habs must be about the same, the team is still considered a symbol of the French Canadian population.

standard answer—goaltenders. Apparently, other Canadian, and if you asked real hockey world was built in Québec City in 1842. French in 1952, and the first covered ice rink in the a hockey game was in French, in Montréal scored some other firsts. The first telecast of the most legendary team, the French have just a tew. people. Joking aside, some of the best goalgenetically modify its population in order French Canada has grown powerful enough to Canadians are as crazy about hockey as any Martin Brodeur and Jacques Plante, to name tory have been French Canadians: Patrick Roy tenders in the NHL today and throughout histo make amazing goaltenders out of ordinary French on hockey was, you would get a pretty fans what the most important influence of the Besides having the coolest hockey hero and

The French influence in sports goes beyond Canada's national sport, of course. One of the fields in which French Canadians have made their mark is linked directly to their origins as coureurs des bois and then as lumberjacks. Indeed, French Canada has produced some of the best-known strongmen, wrestlers and boxers. The most notable strongman was

strongmen. enced Canada's reputation as a producer of but many other French Canadians have influstation without a word. Louis Cyr was the first, did not argue and followed him to the police officer. I can guess that whomever he arrested he retired as a strongman, he became a police a platform with 18 men on it on another. When pull of four horses on one occasion and lifting the world with his sheer strength, resisting the records have been exaggerated. Cyr did impress graphic evidence of his feats, some of his when there were no cameras to provide photoperformed his feats in the late 1800s, at a time talent has made him a legend. But because he among the first to make a living out of his odd tachioed Québec native. The fact that he was perhaps Louis Cyr, a world-renowned, mous-

France can historically be credited as being the first place where people wrestled. Ever. Indeed, cave drawings dating back some 15,000 years were found in a French cave, and apparently what is depicted in these drawings, among other things, is two men wrestling. So in a strangely historic way, the French influence in wrestling is important. As good descendants, French Canadians have been quite present on the wrestling scene: Yvon Robert, the Rougeau brothers and Maurice "Mad Dog" Vachon are only a few of the men who have made careers out of hurting other people in

strategy that is now part of pro wrestling. He a way to guarantee that tempers would be runabout how bad his opponents were and how a weird but entertaining way. Vachon was also known for having a similar unsportsmanketer before people like Vince MacMahon, ning high on fight night. Vachon was a margood he was. This was great publicity and would give interviews before a fight and talk probably the first one to start the "trash talk" see? What an awful crime. Canadians sure in Tennessee. French Canadians in Tennesto be Americans and would threaten to go live didn't like the fact that the Rougeaus pretended they finally showed up to fight. American fans pretty well because they were often booed when to make sure fans disliked them, and they did pose. The brothers did things outside the ring like attitude, becoming a hated duo on purtainment, Inc.). The Rougeau brothers were president of the WWE (World Wrestling Enterknow how to push Americans' buttons

From hockey, a winter sport, to wrestling, an arguably summery confrontation, now to a sports gathering for both seasons—the Olympics. The French were certainly not the first to think about holding a worldwide contest for national showboating, but it is to a Frenchman that we owe our modern Olympic games. Pierre de Coubertin, a French aristocrat, believed

that sharing national talents in a friendly competition was the true essence of free trade:

Let us export our oarsmen, our runners, our fencers into other lands. That is the true Free Trade of the future; and the day it is introduced into Europe the cause of Peace will have received a new and strong ally. It inspires me to touch upon another step I now propose [...] the splendid and beneficent task of reviving the Olympic Games.

So de Coubertin ended up convincing the right people to revive the legendary Olympics, and the first Games took place in April 1896, appropriately in Athens, Greece. His Canadian cousins have made him proud by participating, and winning, numerous Olympic medals. A list of the French Canadians who have won medals for Canada would be too long to include here, but let's look at some of the most notable performances. In the end, this book is about how the French have influenced the nation as a whole, and what better way to show patriotism than by winning a medal in the name of Canada.

Etienne Desmarteau was probably the first Canadian ever to win an Olympic gold medal, a feat he accomplished in the 1904 Summer Olympics held in St. Louis, Missouri. It has

out of the Olympics shortly after Desmarteau beyond me. Apparently, the event was taken weight and not one with a round number is a record 34 feet (10.3 metres). Why a 56-pound throwing a 56-pound (25.4-kilogram) weight jacks, Desmarteau won a strength contest first one. True to the tradition of strong lumbercan safely say that Desmarteau was really the he competed for the United States, I think we medallist in the Olympics in 1900, but because been argued that there was a Canadian gold restrictions as to the throwing method. Today, the weight, but we do know that there were no won the medal. We don't know how he threw momentum to throw the weight. In Desmartathletes spin around a few times and use very delicate (insert sly, sarcastic smile here) run for a while and then throw it. Either way, eau's time, he could do the same, or throw it the Olympics were department realized belatedly how important returned with a gold medal. The Montréal police his employer rehired him right away when he absence. Although he did get fired for leaving, did not want to pay him during his leave of because his employer, the Montréal police force, tory. He almost didn't go to the Olympics he broke a record and has gone down in hislike a rookie bowler (between the legs) or even

Jump forward to 2002, when a French Canadian, paired up with his partner from Ontario,

the face of international figure skating. Pelletier and Salé were instrumental in changing changed to make it less subjective, meaning that The judging in figure skating has since been two gold medals were awarded for the same event was given a gold medal as well, the first time that vote for the French team in another competition. and in exchange, that same judge promised to vote for the Russians instead of Pelletier and Salé A French judge (no link to French Canadians a huge scandal erupted in the Olympic world Because of the controversy, the Canadian pair here) had been "encouraged" by another judge to another story of disappointed Canadians, but have won the gold. This could have been just ceremony because they thought the pair should were a little less than gracious, booing the medal ciously received a silver medal, although the fans Pelletier and wife and partner Jamie Salé grawas responsible for a serious inquiry into Olympairs figure skating event in Salt Lake City, David pic judging. After a perfect performance in the

Another notable French Olympian is Chantal Petitclerc, a wheelchair athlete who has won more than a dozen Paralympic medals and one Olympic medal. She has since become something of a Canadian celebrity, getting calls to host shows, awards ceremonies and conferences. For the longest time, she was also the announcer of lotto numbers on TV. Canada has a knack for finding all kinds of jobs for its Olympians.