

# ICE HOCKEY

## **What is Hockey?**

Hockey has been played for longer than any of us has been alive, but we can't tell you exactly when it was invented, or by whom, because no one really knows for sure. We do have some idea of how it got started, however, and we can describe the ways the game has grown and changed over the years. Once a relatively obscure recreation for people who lived in the north, hockey is now played all over the world and has become one of the most popular winter sports.

## **The Origins of the Game**

Most historians place the roots of hockey in the chilly climates of northern Europe, specifically Great Britain and France, where field hockey was a popular summer sport more than 500 years ago. When the ponds and lakes froze in winter, it was not unusual for the athletes who fancied that sport to play a version of it on ice. Articles in London newspapers around that time mention increasing interest in the sport, which many observers believe got its name from the French word "hoquet", which means a "bent stick." A number of writers thought this game should be forbidden because it was so disruptive to people out for a leisurely winter skate.

## **Hockey Comes to North America**

Not surprisingly, the earliest North American games were played in Canada. British soldiers organized contests on frozen ponds in Halifax in the 1870s, and about that same time in Montreal students from McGill University began facing off against each other in a downtown ice rink. Hockey became so popular that games were soon being played on a regular basis between clubs from Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. The English Governor, Lord Stanley of Preston, was so impressed that in 1892 he bought a silver bowl with an interior gold finish and ordered that it would be given each year to the best amateur team in Canada. That trophy, of course, is known as the Stanley Cup and is awarded today to the winners of the National Hockey League playoffs.

## **Ice Hockey and Politics**

International hockey has often been played in an atmosphere of tension and conflict. From the 1960s through the 1980s, games between North American and Soviet Bloc teams reflected Cold War tensions. But perhaps the most memorable "political" games in hockey history took place at the 1969 world championship, a few months after the democracy movement in Czechoslovakia was crushed by a Soviet invasion. The Czechs defeated the Soviets twice during the tournament (which was played in Sweden), causing thousands to pour into the streets of Prague in celebration. A sign in the crowd told the Soviets, "This time you can't count on your tanks."

## **What They Wore - and Didn't Wear - In Years Past**

It's remarkable how little equipment the hockey players of the past wore and how basic the gear really was. The quality of the gear progressed over the years, with true hockey skates being made and players wearing protective gloves. Shin guards eventually came into being, but many times they didn't do much to soften the blow of a puck or stick, and players were known to stuff newspapers or magazines behind them for extra protection.

Amazingly, goalies played without masks until 1959. It's also surprising to think that players didn't begin wearing helmets until the early 1970s; prior to that the only people who wore them did so mostly because they were recovering from a head injury, or, as was the case of one former Chicago Blackhawk forward, because they were embarrassed about being bald. The League passed a rule saying that anyone who came into the NHL from the start of the 1979-80 season had to wear a helmet.

**A** Match the expressions from the text with the expressions with similar meaning:

Obscure	To want to do something
Chilly	Unusual, impressive
To fancy	To fill
Disruptive	Not clear, not easy to understand
Remarkable	Something you wear for protection
Guard	To become fit and healthy again
To stuff	Cold enough to be unpleasant
To recover	Causing trouble that interrupt something

**B** Study the text and find sentences with similar meaning in the passive:

1. People have played hockey for ages.
2. Somebody invented the game long ago but we don't know exactly when.
3. Nowadays people play ice hockey all over the world.
4. Many writers thought that somebody should forbid the game.
5. They award the Stanley Cup to the winners of the National Hockey League playoffs.
6. A Soviet invasion crushed the democracy movement in Czechoslovakia.
7. They played the tournament in Sweden.

**C** Answer the questions:

1. How did the game originate?
2. Why did some people want ice hockey to be forbidden?
3. How did the Stanley Cup become a famous trophy?
4. What were the political aspects of the game?
5. How has the equipment changed since the early times of the game?