Hannah Green from La Ronge, competing in the 2014 Saskatchewan Winter Games in Prince Albert. Courtesy Sask Games Council.
Amateur sport has a long and proud history in Saskatchewan, beginning even before Europeans settled this province with games played by First Nations people, such as lacrosse. Lacrosse became popular with non-Aboriginal people too, in the mid-1800s, and was one of the first team sports played on the prairies and across the country. The National Lacrosse Association of Canada became the country’s first national sport governing body in 1867.\(^1\) Canadian sports are also indebted to Aboriginal culture for the toboggan, snowshoe and canoe. It was through their close contact with the first peoples that European settlers adopted the activities that utilized these pieces of equipment.\(^2\)

In addition to lacrosse, sports such as cricket, horse racing, rugby, football (soccer) and baseball (all introduced by British settlers) quickly became popular during the 1880s. Dozens of towns boasted their own men’s and, in some cases, women’s baseball teams already by the turn of the century. More often than not, however, sport remained in the realm of recreation through activities such as hide-and-seek, horseshoes, marbles, tag, dodgeball, catch and skipping rope. There were few formal leagues or teams for which one could try out. During the winter months, skating, sleighing, skiing and many snow games were popular. But it was curling that quickly became one of the most popular activities on the prairies. From the 1880s to 1904, the Royal Caledonian Curling Club of Scotland’s North-West Territories branch controlled Saskatchewan curling, helping to organize the first bonspiel in Regina in 1892. Regina featured its first curling club in 1889 and, soon after, Qu’Appelle and Indian Head built their own clubs. They eventually teamed up with Regina to form the Royal
Caledonian Curling Association, which changed its name to the Saskatchewan Curling Association in 1904. By the First World War, many communities had their own curling rinks.3

Hockey also has a long and proud history in Saskatchewan. The first reported hockey competition took place in 1894 between teams from Regina and Moose Jaw, with Regina winning two of the three games. By the end of the nineteenth century, Prince Albert, Moosomin, Saskatoon, Rosthern, Indian Head, Qu’Appelle and many other towns located along railway lines boasted competitive men’s hockey teams, and in 1906 the Saskatchewan Amateur Hockey Association was formed. Football too had early roots, evolving from the game of rugby. It was first played in Saskatchewan by members of the North-West Mounted Police as early as 1886 but was played only sporadically for the next two decades.4

One of the first attempts to organize sport at a national level came in 1909 with formation of the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (AAU). The AAU was created as an umbrella organization to govern sports, including track and field, swimming, boxing, wrestling and other Olympic sports. Saskatchewan was one of the first provinces to form an AAU affiliate. In the early days, there were not many events to govern, but the AAU played a role in the selection of athletes and teams to advance to the Canadian Olympic trials. Each sport set its own membership rates and club affiliation fees, collected sanction fees for meets, kept records of performances and issued certificates of performances.5

The onset of the First World War put a damper on sport activities as communities focused their energies on the war effort. However, one sport organization which actually stemmed from the war was the Junior Provincial Hockey League, formed by the Saskatchewan Amateur Hockey Association in 1917 to fill the gap left by senior players who had enlisted as soldiers. For a short time in the 1920s, Saskatchewan even had a professional hockey team, the Regina Capitals, which came within one game of playing in the Stanley Cup final. Unfortunately, the franchise was sold to Portland in 1926. In the 1920s, boxing also became a popular sport in Regina, Saskatoon and Moose Jaw. Moose Jaw’s Jack Reddick went on to become the Canadian light-heavyweight champion, while Regina’s Jackie Lewis was the provincial and western boxing champion. Tennis also started to thrive in several communities along the Canadian National Railway (CNR) thanks to O.J. Rowe, assistant superintendent of the CNR in Biggar and later superintendent for western Canada. Rowe was passionate about tennis and requested that his employer fund tennis courts in numerous communities in the province. Support from the government was limited at this time. One of the few examples of provincial support to Saskatchewan athletes was a $600 grant in 1926 to
allow Saskatchewan wrestling champion James Trifunov to attend the 1928 Olympic Games. Although he was the national bantamweight wrestling champion, he was not originally invited to be a member of the Olympic wrestling team. His bronze medal convinced the Saskatchewan government that this was a good investment.6

Although the hard times of the 1930s meant that there were limited recreation and sporting programs available, Regina's rowing and canoeing athletes still managed to capture several awards at the Canadian Henley and Northwestern United States regattas, thanks to Harry Duckett's instruction, devotion and skill. Saskatchewan's first municipal indoor pool was also constructed in Moose Jaw in 1932. The Moose Jaw Natatorium was a state-of-the-art facility for its time, despite problems with hot minerals corroding the pipes and making the water murky. The reality of the times, however, was that most Saskatchewan residents spent their leisure time on inexpensive forms of recreation such as dances and picnics. Travel between neighbouring communities for sport and recreation decreased. Schools and communities had little money for sport and recreation budgets, so young people were forced to return to games such as kick-the-can, red-light and shinny, in which the puck was improvised from any material available, including the fabled frozen horse manure.7

The beginning of the Second World War in 1939 also slowed the growth of sport and recreation activities. Cadet corps programs were initiated to attract young people to join the war, but all other sports and non-war-related activities were discouraged by school boards. Government officials thought that physical training was important for the war effort and this view led to the National Physical Fitness Act of Canada in 1944. According to Saskatchewan sport volunteers Hank and Fyola Lorenzen, the school exercise program during this era consisted of half an hour a week of marching, boot camp style, on a school playground.8

Also in 1944, Saskatchewan voters elected the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation party led by Dr. Balfour Kirkpatrick, a national leader in the fitness movement and long-serving University of Saskatchewan Kinesiology professor. Courtesy SSHF.
Tommy Douglas. With the offer of assistance from the federal government, the new provincial government created a Physical Fitness Division within its Department of Health. The division was in operation by January 1945, and its first leader was Dr. Balfour Kirkpatrick. He had been a keen member of the Huskies track and field team while he did his undergraduate and master’s degrees at the University of Saskatchewan. This marked a new era of government involvement in sport activities, and was the first formal recognition of the role that the province should take in promoting and encouraging sport-related services.9

This was an exciting era for sport in Saskatchewan. The end of the Second World War sparked more attention nationally, provincially and municipally in increasing leisure and recreation services and facilities. Sport fields, parks, rinks, civic centres and pools sprang up around the province. As military bases closed down, many of their indoor facilities were moved, renovated and put to good use in communities across the province.10 Because most of the work that the province was doing in the area of physical fitness dealt with the school-age population, the division was moved to the Department of Education in 1948 and renamed the Saskatchewan Recreation Movement. This was also the year that Dr. Kirkpatrick left the province and Wally Stinson, who had served as his administrative assistant, became department head.11

The year 1948 also saw the creation of the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association (SHSAA). The SHSAA was the parent provincial organization for all high school sports activities. “Wally Stinson was the driving force and principal leader in the establishment of the SHSAA,” said Dr. Howard Nixon. “This association ensured that all boys and girls, regardless of their locale, would have a chance to excel.”12 Through the SHSAA, provincial government staff helped to organize and operate several district high school athletic associations. Small grants were available to district groups and the provincial body for football, track and field, basketball, tennis and curling. More importantly, however, provincial government staff provided administrative and organizational support to the SHSAA. Staff also started instructing at teacher institutes.
Western Canadian champion barrel jumper, “Dare Devil Downey”. Clarence Downey was instrumental in organizing the Saskatoon Speed Skating Club in 1942. Courtesy SSHF.
through the University of Saskatchewan’s summer school and other organizations to improve coaching and physical education instruction in Saskatchewan schools.\textsuperscript{13}

The province also began to put more effort into supporting the Saskatchewan branch of the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (AAUC) in the postwar years. The Saskatchewan chapter of the AAUC was another organization in which civil servants such as Stinson played an active role. Provincial government employees carried out secretarial work for the AAUC and helped to organize western Canadian championships, dominion championships and national trials associated with the Commonwealth and Olympic Games. Nixon noted that his friend Stinson put his heart and soul into this position, travelling extensively to organize and facilitate meetings: “It was no streetcar trip from Regina to Swift Current, to Saskatoon, or to North Battleford -- it was miles and hours of risky and lonely travel.” Former Saskatchewan premier Allan Blakeney echoed those sentiments, characterizing Stinson as “a towering figure in physical education in Saskatchewan and in Canada.”\textsuperscript{15}

Occasionally, funds were made available to the AAUC to help Saskatchewan athletes attend Canadian Olympic and Commonwealth Games trials held outside Saskatchewan. Some support was also given directly to provincial sport organizations, usually in the form of sponsorship for coaching and refereeing clinics and courses. The sports that usually benefited from provincial support, however, were the “have” sports such as hockey and curling and a small number of other groups, because to apply for grants groups needed existing organizational structures, established programs and even a measure of self-support.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{THE 1950S: THE “GOLDEN YEARS”}

The 1950s provided further growth in sport and recreation. A number of community recreation grant programs were offered through the Division of Physical Fitness and Recreation but, with the repeal of the National Physical Fitness Act, most of these grants were discontinued in 1954. Although no further money was forthcoming from federal resources, the province nevertheless maintained its commitment to sport and recreation, largely through grants from the 1955 Saskatchewan Golden Jubilee Committee. Community halls and recreation facilities were built throughout the province and the committee was successful in attracting a number of major sporting events to the province, including the Macdonald Brier Dominion Curling Championships, the Western Canadian Volleyball Championships and the North American Figure Skating Championships.\textsuperscript{17}

The Saskatchewan AAU was highly visible in 1953 when Saskatoon made a bid to host the Canadian Track and Field Championships at Griffiths Stadium during Saskatchewan’s jubilee celebrations in 1955. The event was
so successful that Saskatchewan was seen as a qualified host community for other national championships. Although the AAU served a useful role in sport management, a number of sport organizations decided in the late 1960s to secede from this national body, believing that they could run their sports better under their own management.\textsuperscript{18}

Support for sport and recreation was given a further boost in 1956 when the province introduced a new health and physical education curriculum. This led to gymnasiums being built in elementary schools and teachers becoming skilled in the new program. Especially in rural areas, gymnasiums were tremendous assets because they provided the opportunity for year-round activities for children. A recreational leadership program, which offered participants the chance to learn more about sport and athletics, program planning and administration and arts and crafts, was also initiated by the province to support the new physical education objectives.\textsuperscript{19}

**THE 1960S AND WINDS OF CHANGE**

Change was in the air in the 1960s and nowhere was this more evident than in the area of amateur sport. Canadians had more disposable income than ever before and more time for leisure activities. By this time, two-thirds of the population owned a television. *Hockey Night in Canada* was the most popular tv sport program in the country. Canadians and others around the world enviously watched Soviet athletes head to the Olympic podium. And, horror of horrors, the Russians continued to beat Canada in international ice hockey competitions. A Saskatchewan native son, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, was the first national leader to see the power of sport to unify Canadians. He came by this passion honestly. He had paid his own way to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. At the time, he noted the favourable international image that the games gave Germany. He believed that similar benefits could occur in other countries and vowed to promote amateur sport as a source of national pride in Canada if given the opportunity.\textsuperscript{20}
The 1960s also represented a change in the social assistance practices of Canadian governments. Canadians now welcomed financial support such as “baby bonuses” and supported government efforts in the areas of fitness and amateur sport. The situation was much different from 1943, when the National Physical Fitness Act — enacted to promote physical activity to ensure that Canadians were prepared for war — was soundly criticized by citizens who did not want the government to become involved with or dictate in any way their participation in fitness programs.

The first real change came in 1961 when Diefenbaker’s government passed the Fitness and Amateur Sport Act (Bill C-131). For the first time, significant public funds would be used to encourage, promote and develop fitness and amateur sport. The government created the Fitness and Amateur Sport Directorate to administer funds to be used, among other things, to create national teams to replace the club teams that had represented Canada at national and international competitions. The new sport bureaucracy also established the Canada Games, providing financial support for athletes’ training and travel.

Since the provinces were called on to administer the federal funds, federal-provincial agreements were signed and plans made to move the sport agenda forward. Athletes, their families and their coaches across the nation anxiously awaited their first opportunity to gather and compete against the best teams and individuals in Canada. More than 1,800 athletes from ten provinces and two territories would gather in Quebec City in February 1967 for the first Canada Games, competing in fifteen sports. From that point forward, the Canada Games would be held every two years, alternating between summer and winter, and be a key event in the development of Canadian athletes.

“The Canada Games were the thing that really projected us into the future by forcing us to form organizations. No provincial association was allowed to participate in the games unless they were registered and affiliated with a national association,” said Bill Clarke, who worked for the provincial government. “So right away the games provided a tremendous stimulus for sport development in Saskatchewan. We’d go out into the country and in the cities and talk to people and there were some organizations, but they didn’t speak to one another. This kind of got them speaking to one another.”

Chapter 2: Sport and Recreation in Saskatchewan: The Early Days
Clarke would go on to become the central liaison between the sport community and the provincial government for almost two decades, arguably becoming one of the strongest advocates for amateur sport in Saskatchewan’s history. He ran unsuccessfully for the federal Liberals in 1966. Many people knowledgeable of his contributions as a civil servant believe it was fortunate that Clarke lost that election and went to work in the new provincial Youth Agency, because he did so much more for the cause of amateur sport by working in the provincial government than he could have being a backbench member of Parliament.

Clarke was a large man with a commanding presence, standing six foot four inches tall and weighing over 235 pounds. He was best known publicly for his career with the Saskatchewan Roughriders. He played offensive and defensive tackle for fourteen years for the Green and White (eight seasons as defensive captain), was twice named to the Canadian Football League’s Western All-Star Team and twice nominated for most valuable player. He also made a name for himself in the curling world, skipping the winning rink from Scott Collegiate in the first officially sanctioned Canadian Junior Men’s Curling Championship, held in Quebec City in 1950. At that time, the event was known as the National Schoolboys Championship.

Amateur sport had another huge champion in Cy MacDonald. He was one of the youngest members elected in the Liberal sweep led by Ross Thatcher in 1964. MacDonald taught English and coached football and hockey at Notre Dame College in Wilcox for fifteen years before being recruited by Thatcher and Father Athol Murray to run for the Liberals. MacDonald was quickly named minister of welfare and youth and given the responsibility for leading a major initiative to expand physical, cultural and social activities for young people throughout the province.

In 1965, legislation known as the Saskatchewan Youth Act was introduced and subsequently passed by the provincial legislature. The act provided for the establishment of a Youth Review Committee to study the needs and aspirations of Saskatchewan young people.
Dr. Howard Nixon of the University of Saskatchewan’s School of Physical Education was seconded to undertake this study and prepare a report that would establish the guidelines for a new government agency to act as an intermediary among other government departments, municipal authorities, school officials and volunteer organizations.30

It was fortunate for amateur sport that someone like Nixon, who had such a strong background in and passion for sport, was a leading force in the provincial government’s push to improve opportunities for youth in the province. He competed in football, swimming, gymnastics and wrestling while doing his university undergraduate studies at the University of British Columbia. When he returned to Saskatchewan to teach at the University of Saskatchewan, after completing his master’s degree and PhD at the University of Indiana, he coached swimming and wrestling. His tireless volunteer efforts and dedication in promoting sport, provincially and nationally, earned him the respect and admiration of people from across the country.31

Nixon and his team used many avenues to gather data. Through questionnaires, seminars and personal interviews, they reviewed the mandates and actions of all government departments and agencies that had roles in, or could be called on to address, the needs of young people. They visited more than 118 communities to get firsthand viewpoints on the gaps. They undertook an extensive study of youth programs in other parts of North America and Europe and visited other provinces that had already initiated steps to develop innovative youth programs. To supplement the work that Nixon was doing, a Youth Review Committee was also appointed, chaired by Dr. Lloyd Barber, dean of commerce at the University of Saskatchewan. The committee held hearings throughout the province and accepted 242 briefs from individuals and organizations that addressed the needs of young people.32

The recommendations of the committee led to establishment of the Provincial Youth Agency in 1966. As an editorial in the Leader-Post reported, the vote on the second reading of the Saskatchewan Youth Act was one of the rare occasions when there was unanimity in the legislature. “Not one dissenting vote was cast against providing the government with the necessary powers to provide grants and take other steps to implement the recommendations contained in the 250-page report of the provincial youth review committee.”33

Nixon and Barber’s report was the blueprint for the present system of recreation delivery in Saskatchewan, recommending that the province be divided into eleven regions, organized on the basis of population density. Regional coordinators (government employees) were placed in each region.34 As Barber stressed in a letter to the minister, the main theme of their report, Youth: A
Chapter 2: Sport and Recreation in Saskatchewan: The Early Days

Study in Our Times, was that the government should act as a facilitating agent rather than a program agency. “In my estimation,” Barber wrote, “the success of the Youth Agency rests on the philosophic proposition that individuals desire an opportunity to assist themselves to develop their own talents and abilities. It is a fundamental error for a state or a collectivity of individuals to suggest that they can do for people what it is the responsibility of people to do for themselves.”

Once Nixon and Barber were done their work and had returned to their jobs at the university, Glenn Tuck was put in charge of the team of civil servants hired to implement their recommendations and carry out the mandate of the Provincial Youth Agency. Tuck was born in Alberta and graduated from the University of Alberta, where he specialized in physical education. After teaching physical education and math at the School of Agriculture in Vermilion, Alberta, he came to Saskatchewan in 1955. He was the recreation director and superintendent of parks and recreation for the City of Prince Albert for five years before joining the provincial government in 1960 as a regional supervisor for Fitness, Recreation and Continuing Education in west-central Saskatchewan. In 1964, he became a provincial recreation and athletic consultant. Tuck would spend most of his life promoting and developing sport, culture and recreation in Saskatchewan.

Roy Ellis, who reported to Tuck, was hired as the director of regional field services — his primary responsibilities being to oversee the regional coordinators in their work with community leaders to establish local and regional recreation boards across the province. Ellis was born and raised in Moose Jaw, where he was aquatic program supervisor and director of the YMCA. He served with the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War. After the war, he moved to Saskatoon, where he taught remedial physical education at the Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital. He held several other positions in the field of recreation in Saskatoon, including assistant recreation director for the City of Saskatoon, recreation director of St. Mary’s Parish and superintendent of recreation classes in the Saskatoon separate school system, before joining the provincial government in 1960 as a regional recreation supervisor in the south-central area. Ellis, Tuck and many of the other people hired by the Youth Agency had long histories of involvement in the recreation movement in Saskatchewan and played roles in establishment of the Saskatchewan Recreation Association in 1961, renamed the Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association in 1967 to acknowledge the important role that parks play in the field of recreation.

Once the Youth Agency was established, Tuck and Ellis and their small team of eager coordinators quickly got to work meeting with hundreds of municipal councils across the province to inform them about a number of new...