The Early History of Physical Activity and Sport
Learning Objective

- Understand how the role of physical activity and sport has evolved historically, focusing on specific societies and their values.
Opening Questions

- Why do you play?
- Why are you physically active?
“The values of a society determine what is emphasized by that society”

- Earle Ziegler

... The reasons you participate in physical activity today were not always the reasons people were physically active!
Earliest Human History

- Being physically fit was necessary for survival!
- There was little time for leisure.
Ancient Greeks

- The Sparta used physical activity for military preparation
- P.A builds character
- The pursuit of p.a. is tied to physical and mental well-being
- Formed early Olympic Games (running first... Then other games)
- Interested in the aesthetics of the human body
Romans (50 BCE to 500 CE)

- Physical fitness was an important part of boy’s education
- Developed spectator sports – boxing evolved into gladiator sport
- Continued Olympic tradition
Middle Ages

- The value of athleticism decreased
- Olympic Games disappeared
- Athletic pursuits were primarily for elite
- Concept of chivalry developed (fairness, honesty, duty, concern for others)
- Peasants worked long hours so had little time for leisure
Renaissance (1400-1650)

- Athleticism regained its social ideal due to renewed interest in Greek and Roman culture
- Leonardo da Vinci – illustrates the interest in pursuit of science, anatomy and physiology
- In Europe, new sports were developed:
  - Golf (Scotland) – 1457
  - Curling – 1541
  - “Folk Football” 1400s
  - Ice/Field Hockey (England and France)
Victorian Era and Industrial Revolution (1760 – 1840)

- An increase in population and increased incomes led to the creation of a middle class
- The middle class was eager to join in upper class activities
- Arenas, fields and clubs were built to allow for spectator sports
Victorian Era and Industrial Revolution (1760 – 1840)

- Working class had little free time, consequently there were set rules and time limits placed on games.
- Victorian ideal = amateurism.
- Amateurism excluded lower classes from participating.
- Victorians believed sport developed manly character and camaraderie.
- Women could only participate in activities appropriate for their “delicate constitution”.
- Physical activity programs were implemented in school systems.
Elsewhere in Europe:
- German and Swedish gymnastic systems
- Goal was to create good, disciplined, hard-working citizens
Canada (end of 19th century)

- European immigrants brought their games to new colonies
- Aboriginal people also valued sport – many athletic games were part of religious ceremonies
- 1880-1885 creation of railroad enabled communities to adopt same playing rules and allowed for competition between communities
- Century is marked by exclusive sport practices – Aboriginals, women & girls, Blacks, non-British immigrants and working classes excluded from playing
Early Lacrosse
Pre WWI (1882-1914)

- Rapid growth of amateur and professional sport
- Return of Olympic Games
- Birth of influential sports heroes