Field Hockey History

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Field hockey has a history that dates to ancient times. Indeed, field hockey history can be split into two dichotomies: history of the ancient game or history of the modern game, and men's hockey or women's hockey. The exact period when the ancient game was established is uncertain, but evidence shows that versions of the game were played in Egypt more than four millenniums ago. The modern game is easily traceable, having evolved in 19th century England.

Playing with a ball and a stick occurred well before the mid-19th century in England, but the first hockey club -- Blackheath, a men's club -- was established in 1849. This precipitated the formation of the Hockey Association in London in 1886. In 1874, the first rules for field hockey were drawn up in England, although this caused some controversy. Eventually, the game spread beyond Britain to its colonies and other European nations.

Hockey was originally deemed a man's sport, because it was thought to be too dangerous for women. However, that perception soon changed and it became acceptable for women to play the sport. In 1887, the first women's hockey club was established. Two years later, the All England Women's Hockey Association was formed.

In 1908, hockey got recognition on an even larger stage when it was included in the 1908 London Olympics. However, its second appearance was at the 1920 Summer Olympics. The sport faced problems with Olympic participation because it did not have an international federation at the time. To address this issue, the International Hockey Federation was created in 1924.

Men's hockey became a permanent Olympic fixture after the formation of a federation. Three years later, in 1927, the International Federation of Women's Hockey Associations was formed. International hockey grew in stature and teams from Europe and Asia dominated its realm. The game spread to America as well, where it became popular -- especially women's hockey.

Men's and women's hockey have distinct histories. Even so, the game was revolutionized by the development of "synthetic grass" fields in the 1970s. The 1976 Montreal Olympics was the first time these fields were used in official competition. Since then, it became mandatory that all international field hockey games (and many national games) be played on synthetic turf.

As with other sports, the game of field hockey has evolved considerably. Changes in rules, equipment, techniques and the playing surface meant that modern field hockey is substantially different from earlier versions. Modern field hockey is now played on all continents. In more ways than one, field hockey has come a long way from its origins.