

# The 100th Anniversary of Winnipeg Falcons' Olympic Win

By Susan Hughes



## KEY CONCEPTS & ISSUES

When the scrappy underdog Winnipeg Falcons hockey team found themselves winning a spot at the Olympic Games in the summer of 1920, they had to fundraise to afford the trip across the ocean to Antwerp, Belgium. Once there, they ended up winning the first ever gold medal in ice hockey, thrilling Canadians country-wide. How might examining sports teams and events of the past be useful to us today? How might sports affect relationships between people (for example, bringing them together)? Students will reflect on whether, and how, sport affects our identities as individuals and as Canadians (such as personal and political values and beliefs).

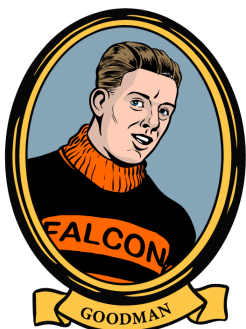
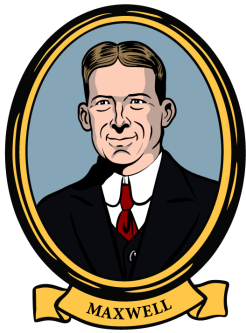
- Political Identity
- Concept of Personal Identity
- Concept of Canadian Identity
- Cause and Consequence
- Historical Significance

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- *Golden Boys: The Winnipeg Falcons of 1920* graphic novel
- Computers or devices with Internet access
- Materials needed for preparing presentations (notebooks, pens)

**SUBJECTS:** Sports, Canadian History

**DURATION:** 4 to 5 classes



## EXPECTATIONS/OUTCOMES

The overall expectations listed below serve as an entry point for teachers. Students will:

- Explain how sports activity may affect social-emotional learning skills and the ability to learn and build resilience;
- Describe how some fundamental values and beliefs, both personal and those associated with democratic citizenship in Canada, may relate to sports activities and organizations;
- Explain how various individuals, groups, and events, including some major international events, contribute(d) to the development of identities and citizenship in Canada;
- Communicate their ideas, arguments, and conclusions using various formats and styles, as appropriate for the audience and purpose.

## CURRICULUM LINKS

- Canadian and World Studies/Canadian History (various)
- Law
- Civics and Citizenship/Politics in Action
- English Language Arts
- Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice

## BACKGROUND

Canada has always been a land of immigrants. Manitoba is no different. By the early 1900s, it was home to its First Peoples, as well as Métis, and many settlers from Europe, such as Ireland, Scotland, England, Russia, Ukraine, and also Iceland. Hockey had become a popular sport in Manitoba by that time; in 1908, there was both an amateur senior men's league and a professional senior men's league. Some parents even flooded their backyards so their children could play hockey! Especially keen was young Frank Frederickson, as were his neighborhood buddies. They attended the same school and church, were fair-haired, fair-skinned, and tall—and none of the leagues, made of players of British ancestry, would allow the Icelandic boys to join. So in 1911, the young men formed their own team, the Winnipeg Falcons, and began competing in the Manitoba Independent League. In 1915, they won the Independent Hockey League title.

Then, in 1917, the members of the Winnipeg Falcons team joined many other Canadians in heading overseas to fight in the First World War. At the war's end, two members of the team had been killed. Nevertheless, in 1919 the Falcons reassembled, recruiting a few new players to replace those who were lost. That first season, 1919-1920, they won the Winnipeg league division and then the provincial championship, qualifying them to compete in Canada's amateur championship and win the Allan Cup. They were successful, defeating the University of Toronto Varsity Blues 11-5 to win not only the championship—but the opportunity to represent Canada in the Olympics!

Days later, the Winnipeg Falcons—eight players and one substitute—boarded a ship for Antwerp, Belgium. Hockey was being included in the Olympics for the first time. Seven teams competed: Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and Canada. Over a period of six days (reduced from the planned ten days) in April 1920, the Falcons played in three games. Heavily favored, with the American team being a concern mainly because many of its players were Canadian, the Falcons ended up coaching their European opponents during practice. The Falcons won their quarterfinal game against Czechoslovakia 15-0 and their semi-final game against the United States 2-0. The final gold medal game was against Sweden: Canada won 12-1.

The year 2020 was the 100th anniversary of the Winnipeg Falcon's gold medal win at the Olympic Games.

## STEP ONE

### TEACHER DIRECTED DISCUSSION

1. Explain to students that the 100th anniversary of the Winnipeg Falcons' win at the Olympic Games took place in 2020. Have them consider questions such as:

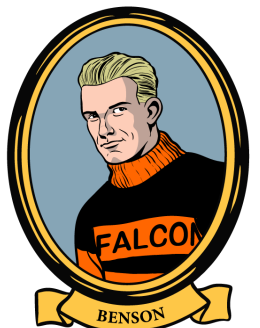
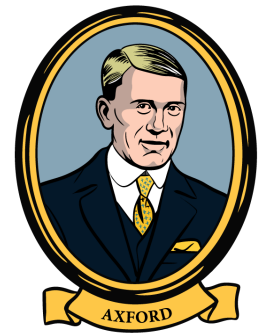
- Who do you think the Winnipeg Falcons are, and why? (What sport do they play? Why might they be called the Falcons? Why would hockey be played in summer?)

Using the Background content and the graphic novel, explain to students who the Falcons were and how they came to play in the Olympics. Ask students to share their responses. Prompt with questions such as:

- Do the players' difficulties joining teams because of their Icelandic heritage reflect your own personal values and beliefs? Your values and beliefs as a Canadian? Would this happen today?
- How did Canadians respond to the Falcons' winning the Olympic Games, and why? How does their win make you feel? How and why can a sports activity elicit this kind of feeling in individuals? In citizens of a nation?

2. With students, discuss connections between sport activity and personal traits and/or concepts reflecting values and beliefs, such as: grit, perseverance, and determination; inclusivity and exclusivity; prejudice, discrimination, and other barriers to success; and what possibilities sports can offer individuals and groups. For example, ask questions such as:

- What challenges do all athletes face? What personal qualities do athletes need to achieve success?
- What specific challenges did the Falcons face, and why?
- How might sport activity cause division or bring people together, and why?



## STEP TWO

### STUDENT LED EXPLORATION

1. In pairs, students research, choose, and read a nonfiction narrative (online, books, or magazines) about a real athlete (preferably Canadian) who has overcome some kind of equity challenge to reach success.

(Examples of narratives include *Fighting for Gold: The Story of Canada's Sledge Hockey Paralympic Gold* by Lorna Schultz Nicholson, or a story from *Everyday Hockey Heroes: Inspiring Stories On and Off the Ice* by Bob McKenzie and Jim Lang.)

Students record answers to questions such as:

- How was this story inspiring?
  - Would you call the subject an “everyday hero”? Explain.
2. In small groups, students do one of the following:
    - Research two or three notable professional athletes (both male and female), and answer the question, “What makes this player appeal to a fan? What makes players appeal to fans in general?”
    - Research names of North American hockey, basketball, and baseball teams—both professional and amateur, and past and present. What is the origin of the names? Are some, or were some, racist? What is the effect of this?
    - Research players of colour or of different genders that overcame barriers to play in a national sports leagues or represent a national team, including hockey (for example, the NHL: Willie O’Ree, Jarome Iginla, P. K. Subban, Dustin Byfuglien, Manon Rhéaume; and the WHL: Blake Bolden), figure skating (Asher Hill), soccer, lacrosse, cricket, baseball, basketball, and so on. Address questions such as:
      - What barriers did they face? How did they overcome them?
      - How does the existence of these barriers reflect on our values and beliefs as individuals? As Canadians?
      - What is our responsibility as individuals to address these issues? As Canadians?



## STEP THREE

### CULMINATING ACTIVITY

#### 1. Preparing for the Activity: Sports and Citizenship

Gillian Smith, former Executive Director and CEO of the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC), says, “A sport is a sport and a fan is a fan, no matter where in this world you were born. Sports are familiar, safe spaces to connect to new people. By playing together, we build connections, community, and ultimately, our country.”

Do you agree? What is the effect of sports on citizens? Do sports bring people together or drive them apart?

Discuss with students:

- Use the experiences of the Winnipeg Falcons to give examples of how sports can drive people apart and how they can bring people together.
- Explain why you believe these experiences are genuine and lasting or not.
- Share a personal experience, if possible.

## 2. Executing the Activity

Tell students that, according to the ICC’s “Playing Together” report, “[Newcomers become] Canadian, in part, by playing and watching sports together. From cheering for Canada’s Olympians, to learning how to play a new sport, to making new friends at their children’s sporting events, ... sports [have] helped [newcomers] feel included in Canadian life. While sporting activities should be more widely recognized for their role in knitting Canadians together, barriers to inclusion in sports still exist: access, cost, lack of information and other factors contribute to new citizens’ inability to participate.”

In groups, students research and give examples of:

- How sporting activities knit Canadians together, in general;
- Three barriers to inclusion and how they can be overcome (sample barriers that contribute to new citizens’ inability to participate in sports include: access, cost, lack of information);
- How newcomers to Canada have enriched sports in Canada.

Students brainstorm and plan a (hypothetical) sporting event that will:

- Bring Canadians together;
- Be inclusive and barrier-free;
- Reflect how newcomers have enriched sports in Canada.

Students consider all details of the event, including where and when it will occur, how long it will last, what sport(s) will take place, who will participate and why, the cost, any services on site, and so on. They need to consider how athletes and observers will transport themselves to the venue, access it, and enjoy the sporting event.

Finally, students create an invitation or poster for the event (considering how to make it accessible to those who they hope will read it/listen to it) and describe how, to whom, and where they would distribute it.

## 3. Final Critique/Reflection

- In what ways do you feel your work is successful?
- In what ways would you change your work to improve it?
- How does your work reflect your understanding of the importance of sports to building citizenship in Canada and the impact of newcomers on sports in Canada?





## OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- The Hockey Diversity Alliance was formed by a group of prominent minority hockey players in Calgary, Alberta, in June 2020 “to eradicate [systemic] racism and intolerance in hockey.” It is committed to “inspir[ing] a new generation of hockey players and fans.” Research to find out more about this alliance. What is your assessment of their goals? How will they measure success? Give your opinion on the alliance overall.
- Craig Doty, three-time National Champion American college men’s basketball coach, wrote on Twitter: “Advice for Young Coaches: #29. Promote diversity within your program. Recruit kids from different backgrounds and cultures (but with the same values). Be intentional with your roster makeup. Sport teams should be a great example of love and togetherness.” Students can reflect on, and discuss and debate, his statement. For example, what does he mean, and do students agree with each of his points?
- Students can research the new Toronto-based BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) youth hockey team set up by former NHL hockey player Akim Aliu. Have them specifically look into why Akim Aliu was interested in setting up this team (for example, his own background and experiences with racial abuse), his objectives for the team, and how he thinks this team can help the sport of hockey. Challenge students to present their research as an informational picture book or graphic novel, using a short narrative text with some dialogue and illustrations. Have them list their sources as well.
- Students can create a non-fiction retelling of the Falcon story for younger children (ages 5 to 9), using only facts, or an informational retelling, using invented dialogue and scenes that are based on reality. Remind them to think about how to turn history into a narrative that instructs and entertains, and consider their audience and purpose. They will research to find out more details about the Winnipeg Falcons and their experience at the Olympic summer games. When students create their narratives, they will consider questions such as:
  - Where will you begin your narrative? What will the middle be about? How will you end? Will you have a “refrain” that repeats? What will be the thread that connects the story throughout? Will there be a theme or “message,” and if so, what will it be?

Students create the story as a written document with or without visuals (photos, illustrations, comics), a video, a podcast, and so on, and plan to share their work with younger students.

- On a January 2021 episode of Meg Linehan’s Full Time podcast, Canadian freelance writer and sports activist Shireen Ahmed says, “We have been failing our women’s soccer players for a long time.” Ahmed makes her views on diversity and representation in sports known on several social media platforms: she’s a host on a feminist sports podcast, Burn It All Down; she has her own



Newspaper clipping of comic illustrations depicting the 223rd Battalion hockey team.

website; her own Twitter account (with over 24K followers); and she is on LinkedIn. With a partner, decide on a sports activism message you'd like to amplify and plan a social media campaign for spreading that message.

- Students watch a movie or video featuring an athlete or athletes facing challenges around equity or discrimination, such as *Bend It Like Beckham* (soccer), *Crooked Arrows* (lacrosse), *Cool Runnings* (bobsled), and so on. Students identify how the characters grow and change, how realistic the story is, the message, alternative endings, and how they might change it to reflect today's realities. Students write a synopsis of for their own movie, taking the opportunity to address issues they feel are most important. What would they want the audience to take away from their film?



Newspaper article showing the Falcons, who were favoured to beat the Winnipeg Winnipeg and earn the right to compete for the Allan Cup.



## RESOURCES

### GENERAL WEBSITES:

- Hockey Diversity Alliance: [hockeydiversityalliance.org](http://hockeydiversityalliance.org)
- Canadian Women & Sport: [womenandsport.ca](http://womenandsport.ca)
- Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport: [cces.ca](http://cces.ca)
- Sport Information Resource Centre—Anti-Racism Resources: [sirc.ca/safe-sport/anti-racism-resources](http://sirc.ca/safe-sport/anti-racism-resources)

### ONLINE ARTICLES AND DOCUMENTS:

- *Playing together—new citizens, sports & belonging* by the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (2014): [inclusion.ca/pdfs/PlayingTogether\\_FullR\\_Online\\_Final.pdf](http://inclusion.ca/pdfs/PlayingTogether_FullR_Online_Final.pdf)
- “Band of Brothers: The Winnipeg Falcons Story” by Kristina Rutherford, November 19, 2014: <https://www.sportsnet.ca/hockey/nhl/band-of-brothers-the-winnipeg-falcons-story/>
- “Figure skater Asher Hill sees hypocrisy in racial equality statements” by Devon Heroux, June 3, 2020: [cbc.ca/sports/floyd-george-sports-organizations-hypocrisy-asher-hill-1.5597217](http://cbc.ca/sports/floyd-george-sports-organizations-hypocrisy-asher-hill-1.5597217)
- “54 athletes deliver a message of hope” by Alexandra Piché, July 8, 2020: <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/sports/podium/936/racism-letter-black-athletes-grasse-brown-duclair-surin;>
- “Former NHL player Akim Aliu establishes BIPOC youth hockey team in Toronto” by Ania Bessonov, Sept 14, 2020: [cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/akim-aliu-bipoc-youth-hockey-team-1.5722477#](http://cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/akim-aliu-bipoc-youth-hockey-team-1.5722477#)

### VIDEOS:

- “Commonwealth Sport Canada, SportWORKS—Sport for Newcomers” Aug 22, 2020: [youtube.com/watch?v=63Oq427XmYU&feature=youtu.be](https://youtube.com/watch?v=63Oq427XmYU&feature=youtu.be) (4.20)
- Feature movie/video, such as *Bend It Like Beckham*, a 2002 movie featuring an Indian girl in London, England, who longs for a career in professional soccer; *Crooked Arrows*, a 2012 movie featuring a Haudenosaunee lacrosse team making its way through a prep school league tournament in New York state; *Cool Runnings*, a 1993 sports comedy movie featuring a Jamaican bobsled team’s debut in 1988 Winter Olympics; and so on.

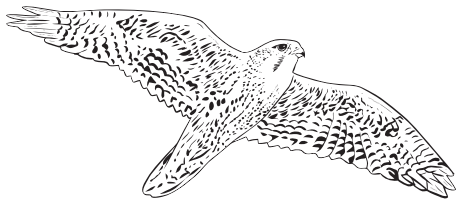
### BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH:

- *Hard Road to Victory: The Chatham All-Stars Story* by Brock Greenhalgh
- *Fighting for Gold: The Story of Canada’s Sledge Hockey Paralympic Gold* by Lorna Schultz Nicholson
- *Everyday Hockey Heroes: Inspiring Stories On and Off the Ice* by Bob McKenzie and Jim Lang

### PODCASTS:

- “Getting Off the Bench” episode from Full Time with Meg Linehan: a show about women’s soccer. The episode features writer and activist Shireen Ahmed speaking about how sports, especially women’s sports, can be drivers of change: [podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/getting-off-the-bench/id1518818543?i=1000504601547](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/getting-off-the-bench/id1518818543?i=1000504601547) or [open.spotify.com/episode/54kYSnJcyxCDaUzNUyvN9W?si=HBox6t\\_sQGqUBHUNm49fzg](https://open.spotify.com/episode/54kYSnJcyxCDaUzNUyvN9W?si=HBox6t_sQGqUBHUNm49fzg) (1.15 hr, but especially 6:44 to 8:00).





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ASSESSMENT	LEVEL 1 (50-59%)	LEVEL 2 (60-69%)	LEVEL 3 (70-79%)	LEVEL 4 (80-89%)	LEVEL 4+ (90-100%)
<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; UNDERSTANDING</b>	Student does not demonstrate much knowledge and comprehension of whether, and how, sport affects our identities as individuals and as Canadians.	Student demonstrates some knowledge and comprehension of whether, and how, sport affects our identities as individuals and as Canadians.	Student demonstrates knowledge and comprehension of whether, and how, sport affects our identities as individuals and as Canadians.	Student demonstrates great knowledge and comprehension of whether, and how, sport affects our identities as individuals and as Canadians.	Student demonstrates outstanding knowledge and comprehension of whether, and how, sport affects our identities as individuals and as Canadians.
<b>THINKING &amp; INQUIRY</b>	Student's planning and processing skills are not very evident; student has demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes to a small degree.	Student's planning and processing skills are somewhat evident; student has demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes to a satisfactory degree.	Student's planning and processing skills are clearly evident; student has demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes to a good degree.	Student's planning and processing skills are very evident; student has demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes to a great degree.	Student's planning and processing skills are extremely evident; student has demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes to an outstanding degree.
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	Student has communicated their concept of identity through discussions and writing with little degree of proficiency.	Student has communicated their concept of identity through discussions and writing with some degree of proficiency.	Student has communicated their concept of identity through discussions and writing with a good degree of proficiency.	Student has communicated their concept of identity through discussions and writing with a great degree of proficiency.	Student has communicated their concept of identity through discussions and writing with an outstanding degree of proficiency.
<b>APPLICATION</b>	Student used knowledge and skills of the concept of identity to make connections to their hypothetical sporting event with little proficiency.	Student used knowledge and skills of the concept of identity to make connections to their hypothetical sporting event with some proficiency.	Student used knowledge and skills of the concept of identity to make connections to their hypothetical sporting event with a good degree of proficiency.	Student used knowledge and skills of the concept of identity to make connections to their hypothetical sporting event with a great degree of proficiency.	Student used knowledge and skills of the concept of identity to make connections to their hypothetical sporting event with an outstanding degree of proficiency.