

The History of Hockey

[Slightly adapted from <http://www.fih.ch> and published for download on www.northernshockey.co.za]

In the Beginning...

The roots of hockey are buried deep in antiquity. Historical records show that a crude form of hockey was played in Egypt 4,000 years ago, and in Ethiopia around 1,000 BC. Various museums offer evidence that a form of the game was played by Romans and Greeks, and by the Aztec Indians in South America several centuries before Columbus landed in the New World. The modern game of hockey evolved in England in the mid-18th century, primarily around schools.

The first Olympic Hockey Competition for men was held in London in 1908 with England, Ireland and Scotland competing separately. After having made its first appearance in the 1908 Games, hockey was subsequently dropped from the 1912 Stockholm Games, and reappeared in 1920 in Antwerp before being omitted again in Paris in 1924. The Paris organisers refused to include hockey on the basis that the sport had no International Federation.

Hockey had made its first steps toward an International Federation when in 1909 the Hockey Association in England and the Belgium Hockey Association agreed to mutually recognise each other to regulate international hockey relations. The French Association followed soon after, but this was not considered sufficient.

The FIH is Born

Hockey took its most important step forward in 1924 when the International Hockey Federation, the world governing body for the sport, was founded in Paris under the initiative of Frenchman, Paul Léautey. Mr. Léautey, who would become the first President of the FIH, was motivated to action following hockey's omission from the program of the 1924 Paris Games.

Mr. Léautey called together representatives from seven National Federations to form the sport's international governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Hockey sur Gazon. The six founding members, which represented both men's and women's hockey in their countries, were Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Hungary, Spain and Switzerland.

Women join in the Fun

The women's game developed quickly in many countries and in 1927, the International Federation of Women's Hockey Associations (IFWHA) was formed. The founding members were Australia, Denmark, England, Ireland, Scotland, South Africa, the United States and Wales. After celebrating their respective Golden Jubilees – the FIH in 1974 and the IFWHA in 1980 – the two organisations came together in 1982 to form the FIH.

The growth of the International Hockey Federation from its early beginnings has been most impressive. Denmark joined in 1925, the Dutch men in 1926, Turkey in 1927, and in 1928 - the year of the Amsterdam Olympics – Germany, Poland, Portugal and India joined. India's addition marked the membership of the first non-European country.

By 1964, there were already 50 countries affiliated with the FIH, as well as three Continental Associations – Africa, Pan America and Asia – and in 1974, there were 71 members. Today, the International Hockey Federation consists of five Continental Associations – Europe and Oceania have since joined – and 127 member associations.

Today and Beyond...

Today, the work of the International Hockey Federation is accomplished through the efforts of the FIH President and Honorary Secretary General, working together with an Executive Board, eight Committees, three Advisory Panels and the professional staff in its Lausanne headquarters.

In many ways, the FIH serves as the 'guardian' of the sport. It works in co-operation with both the national and continental organisations to ensure consistency and unity in hockey around the world. The FIH not only regulates the sport, but is also responsible for its development and promotion so as to guarantee a secure future for hockey.