On October 15, 1961, the first truly national intercollegiate sport association in Canada was officially formed. That was fifty-five years after the original Canadian Intercollegiate Athletic Union—consisting of only the universities McGill, Queen’s, and Toronto—was established and the NCAA was constituted in the United States, in 1906. The Canadian Intercollegiate Athletic Union (C.I.A.U.) of 1961 was officially a “sports governing body,” overseeing intercollegiate athletics—one of many such national bodies recognized by the federal government. In its first decade, it functioned as an umbrella organization for the five regional athletic associations, which retained considerable power. Those athletic associations were as follows: 1) the Ontario-Quebec; 2) the Ontario; 3) the Ontario-St. Lawrence (all three of which were offshoots from 1955-56 of the C.I.A.U. Central, an expanded version of the 1906 C.I.A.U.); 4) the Western (since 1920); and 5) the Maritimes (since 1910; after 1968, the Atlantic). The C.I.A.U. at first had a minuscule budget, no staff beyond volunteer faculty secretaries, a skeletal constitution, and an unsure future. This article will show how these early years were formative ones and also decisive ones for the C.I.A.U., when issues were debated and policies established that would set its future course. These included 1) organization of the national body; 2) development of national championships; 3) marketing and media relations; 4) national television contracts; 5) regulation of playing rules, eligibility, recruiting, and scholarships; 6) establishment of a national office with full-time staff; 7) the inclusion of women. In addition, the C.I.A.U. forged an uneasy and lasting alliance with the federal government, which provided crucial funding but pushed intercollegiate athletics in directions the C.I.A.U. did not anticipate and unsuccessfully resisted. A nominal organization with an uncertain future and many unresolved crises in 1961, the C.I.A.U. by 1975 had asserted authority over regional associations and had restored national attention for major intercollegiate sports.

There were some false starts before the Canadian Intercollegiate Athletic Union (since 2001, Canadian Interuniversity Sport) was created. The possibility of a national organization was broached in 1921 following the establishment of the Western Intercollegiate Athletic Association in 1920, but no one was really

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interested. Orrin Carson (faculty representative from Engineering at Queen’s) presented the first serious proposal to investigate the practicality of forming a Dominionwide intercollegiate athletic union at the C.I.A.U. (Central) meetings of March 20, 1948. A committee was established first to confer with other Ontario universities and then bring the matter that June to the National Conference of Canadian Universities, forerunner of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. After a report from a committee of five member universities representing all regions of Canada (New Brunswick, McGill, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Western Ontario), that body approved in principle the establishment of a “truly Canadian Inter-Collegiate Amateur Athletic Union with membership open to all member institutions of the National Conference of Canadian Universities who desire to compete in intercollegiate athletics.” It envisioned a union that would be “responsible to a standing committee of the National Conference of Canadian Universities.” It was more interested in assuring that Canadian intercollegiate athletics remained a part of the total educational experience of students than in expanding intercollegiate programs, however. The document begins:

Before the problems associated with inter-collegiate athletics can be assessed and solutions effected, it would appear desirable to establish the premise that in Canadian Colleges and Universities athletics are considered to be an integral part of our educational programme . . . the control of athletics in each College and University should be solely an intra-university activity.

Indeed, McGill University had considered cancelling its intercollegiate program in 1952 for fear of imitating the “deplorable condition of intercollegiate athletics in the United States” but decided to continue it because of “competition, credit to the alma mater [and its] appeal to students, alumni, and the community who prefer amateur to pro [athletics].” Among C.I.A.U.C. members, the University of Toronto was most vocally opposed to joining any national body and, seconded by Western Ontario University, successfully moved at the March 1951 annual meeting of the C.I.A.U.C. that the “matter be tabled indefinitely.”

The next year the National Federation of Canadian University Students asked the C.I.A.U.C. to support a national organization. Its overture was dismissed with the duplicitous promise that the formal addition of the word Central to “C.I.A.U.” had been a prelude to a national C.I.A.U., although the C.I.A.U.C. had vetoed the national initiative months before. A provisional constitution for a national organization was vetted three years later by the C.I.A.U.C. in 1955, but it went nowhere because the C.I.A.U.C. was itself then splitting up into three organizations: the Ontario-Quebec, the Ontario, and the Ottawa-St. Lawrence athletic associations. Ontario initiatives were doomed from the beginning because the Big Four of McGill, Queen’s, Toronto, and Western Ontario saw themselves as just that—the dominant schools—and did not want to weaken their own positions by bringing in more universities. As Pat Galasso, athletic director at Queen’s, 1959–1963, observed, “There was great reluctance on the part of the Big Four to break up what had been a very comfortable basis for competition with traditional rivals; they were not all that interested in playing even newer Ontario schools.” They also had concerns, as we shall see, about some practices in both the Maritimes and the Western associations.