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1-17-2000

## The Changing Geography of Sport in America since WWII

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### Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "The Changing Geography of Sport in America since WWII" (2000). *On Sport and Society*. 531. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/531>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
JANUARY 17, 2000

The heavy presence of the National Football League in Florida on Saturday, three Florida teams involved in two playoff games in the state, may or may not be a record. It is however an indication of how much the geography of sport has changed since the end of World War II. These changes are seen not just in Florida but all across the American landscape and are a reminder of how much sport has changed over the past half-century.

The National Pastime, baseball-for those who don't remember-retained its tight geographic configuration in the northeastern quadrant of the United States until the 1950's. There was no team in the east south of Washington and no team further west than St. Louis until the A's moved to Kansas City. The first major change came when O'Malley took the Dodgers to Los Angeles and dragged Stoneham and the Giants to San Francisco. Expansion brought more teams to the West and then in the mid-Sixties the Braves broke through what Dave Voigt terms the "Cotton Curtain."

In subsequent year's major league baseball moved into the states of Washington, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, and Florida, a tribute to the growth of the Sun Belt and other pockets of prosperity in the postwar economy. Florida and Texas have two major league baseball teams matching the numbers in the older major league locations.

The other major professional sports moved much faster into the new pockets of population than did baseball. The most prolific of the expansionists were the moguls of the NBA who developed an expansion strategy which brought in many of the new medium sized cities which had no major league sports presence. It has proven to be a fairly good strategy, for the most part, although not all franchises have been a financial success. Again Texas, California, Colorado, the Pacific Northwest, and later Florida would be the recipients of the new franchises.

The National Hockey League after it doubled its size in the 60s has gone through considerably more expansion and relocation following the population flow and hoping that hockey fans are to be found in all climates. Two franchises are now in Florida, one in Texas, one in Arizona, two in Southern California, another in Northern California, one in

Atlanta, one in Nashville, and one in Colorado. In Florida the franchise in Miami has done reasonably well, and the one in Tampa has struggled. Miami's success has been due in part to on-ice success, and Tampa's struggle has been occasioned by on-ice failure and severe mismanagement. Both cities have drawn from the transplant populations, and at least in Miami, the Panthers have found a new group of hockey fans in the Latin community.

The National Hockey League has made its foray into the Sun Belt and to a great extent it has succeeded. Whether that success can be sustained of course is still not certain.

The National Football League too has cast its nets across the Sun Belt. The expansion and merger with the AFL in the early and mid-Sixties saw the first explosion of NFL franchises into the Sun Belt. Subsequent expansion and relocation has continued the process. There are three franchises in Florida, one in Texas (formerly two), one in Tennessee, one in Georgia, one in Louisiana, one in North Carolina, one in Arizona and Colorado. The oddity here is that there is no longer a franchise in Los Angeles, although there are three in California.

This movement to the Sun Belt by all major league sports franchises is certainly a function of population shift, and that population shift has also altered the geography of college football success and college sports recruiting. In the past two decades Florida football programs at Florida State, Miami and the University of Florida have been dominant on the college football scene. In addition the State of Florida has become a major recruiting grounds for both college football and basketball players. To some degree Florida and Texas have replaced the coal mining and industrial regions of the northeast as primary football breeding grounds.

Not only do the major football programs in the state get their top prospects from within Florida, but nearly every major university that fields a football team has at least one player from this state. In basketball the ground is even more fertile as until very recently none of the major college basketball programs in the state were recruiting successfully out of the huge Florida talent pool.

When I arrived in the State of Florida at the beginning of the decade of the seventies none of this sports dominance

at either the college or professional level existed. There was one major league team, the Miami Dolphins, and none of the college programs was dominant. Now there are three NFL teams, two NHL teams, two Major League baseball teams, and two NBA teams. Several Super Bowls, The Stanley Cup Finals, the World Series, and the NBA finals have all been held in Florida. This weekend's heavy Florida presence in the NFL playoffs and the recent national championship in football at Florida State underline the enormous power of sport in this state and the great geographic changes that have taken place in the world of sport over the last three decades.

And finally let it be noted that Florida has become not only the vacation destination for much of the world, but it is also the area of choice for athletes to make their residence. Some may think this is a function of the Florida climate that can look so attractive this time of year, but in fact it is a function of the tax climate. With no income tax and low property taxes Florida has become a tax haven for the superrich athletes of our time. It has become the Monaco of the Western Hemisphere. Tiger and Junior have not moved to Central Florida for the waters.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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