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Commonwealth Games 2002: Manchester, England

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The city of Manchester, the capital city of the North West, is of great cultural, educational, and commercial importance. Manchester was chosen to host the Commonwealth Games for the year of 2002. This paper will explore: the origins and development of the Commonwealth nations, the role of the Commonwealth Games, the description of Manchester and most importantly how the *Hamilton Spectator* portrayed the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, England.

The Commonwealth Games host nations from around the world whose members share the same commitment to promoting human rights, democracy, and economic development. All of the members accept the British monarch as the symbolic head of the Commonwealth. The association was previously known as the British Commonwealth of Nations, but is now called the Commonwealth. About 1.7 billion people live in the 54 independent nations and 20 plus dependent nations that make up the Commonwealth. The official language of the members is English.¹



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British Empire in the Early 20th Century

The British Empire, established over the course of three centuries, began in the late 16th century with chartered commercial ventures in sugar and tobacco plantations, slave trading, and missionary activities in North America and the Caribbean Islands. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the British Empire reached the height of its power, ruling over large parts of Africa, Asia, and North America. Most of these former colonies are now part of today's Commonwealth of Nations.²

The first Commonwealth Games were held in 1930 in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Bobby Robinson had a major influence on the implementing of the Commonwealth Games. There were eleven countries with 400 athletes in total at the first Commonwealth Games. Since then the Games have taken place every four years except for 1942 and 1946 because of World War II. Before 1978, Commonwealth Games have been called the following: British Empire Games, British Empire and Commonwealth Games, and British Commonwealth Games.³

The Commonwealth Games Federation has three core principles underlying every decision that they make -- humanity, equality, and destiny. The games are unique because they have one main language -- English. Since, there is one common language between them all the Games has been termed the "Friendly Games". The commonality in language helps to promote the pursuit of health and fitness in each of the member countries and provide a goal for youth to achieve.⁴

Manchester has a population of over 400,000 and more than 33 million people live within a two hour drive. Manchester is a popular spot for conferences and exhibitions because there are more than 200,000 bed spaces within an hour drive of the city center.⁵

The XVII Commonwealth Games was the most recent multi-sport event to be held in Great Britain since the Olympics of 1948. It was the largest in history of the Commonwealth Games with athletes from 72 nations competing in 14 individual sports and three team sports from 25 July – 2 August 2002. The sports that were played are the

following: aquatics, athletics, badminton, boxing, cycling, gymnastics, hockey, judo, lawn bowls, netball, rugby 7's, shooting, squash, table tennis, triathlon, weightlifting and wrestling.⁶

The 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, England, was an event marked by several new events that demonstrated progress and development in the integrity and prestige of the Commonwealth Games history. There were several new events that took place for the first time, the size of the event was very large, and the quality of the competition was arguably the best ever.

In the weeks before the actual Commonwealth Games, the Hamilton Spectator devotes several articles to the history of Manchester, England. Q@

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\$, and despite the very large Canadian influence on every article that is written, it is not too overdone. The Spectator sets the stage for the 2002 Commonwealth Games, and for the Canadian team, through articles such as “*Canadians Set their Medal Sights High*”. The Canadian team consisted of 281 athletes, with a goal of winning more than one hundred medals. They would have to compete amongst 80 medalists from the 2000 Sydney Olympics, 4,500 media personnel, over a million spectators, and estimates one billion viewers from all over the world.⁸

According to the Hamilton Spectator, one big stride in the progression of the Commonwealth Games in 2002 was the full medal accreditation of disabled events. In the past, disabled events were simply demonstration events, and the medalists were not recognized towards a country’s final medal tally. The full medal accreditation marked a big step in the integrity of the games. In only 1994, in Victoria, the only disabled, demonstration event was men’s wheelchair racing, and in 1998, there were no disabled events at all. The Commonwealth Games Committee reached an agreement to mandate a minimum of two disabled events to be full medal events. However, Manchester exceeded that with hosting swimming, track and field, lawn bowling, table tennis, and weightlifting. David Grevemberg, the committee’s sport director, summed up the Games’ intentions, “We looked to balance the program, opportunities for men and women and also for disability throughout the sports.”⁹

The fact that the Hamilton Spectator devotes time and effort towards this subject of disabled sports is admirable and goes to show the development in the integrity of the Commonwealth Games. The support for disabled athletes is noticeable throughout the

article, and this effort can really be appreciated. The decision to add more events for the disabled can be taken a couple of ways. Chantal Petitclerc, a Canadian and world record holder in the disabled women's 800 metres, says, "As athletes, we have no idea how these decisions are made. I just hope they don't have the attitude of 'Let's give everybody a chance because that's not what high-level sport is about.'"¹⁰ While it is possible that this is the case, and Petitclerc poses a valid point, the fact that these events are recognized as full medal events, and also the recognition they receive from newspapers like the Hamilton Spectator, presents a step in the history of the Commonwealth Games in the right direction.

The Hamilton Spectator also raises the serious issues of doping. This problem was not one that suddenly came up for the 2002 Commonwealth Games, but it was a growing problem that required more attention than in past years. New methods of regulating the testing of athletes, as well as implementing an 'Athlete Passport', are all attempts by the Commonwealth Games Committee to maintain and grow the integrity of their competition. The Athlete Passport was intended to give all athletes updated information on banned substances, and gives the World Anti-Doping Agency the knowledge of any doping control records.¹¹

The Hamilton Spectator presents a couple articles before the Games started that speak about the topic of doping. However, throughout the entire Games, only two cases of doping, one Canadian, were reported. The Canadian doping case was largely protested, and a big article was written to question the system by which the athlete was banned.¹² A much smaller article speaks of an athlete from St. Kitts, who tested positive

for a banned substance, but was cleared because he declared the use of medication within the proper timeline.¹³

The fact that the newspaper put so much effort into raising awareness of doping in the Commonwealth Games, and then only questioning the system when the reality came about, is a questionable method by the newspaper. It demonstrates the intent of the paper, which appears to try to sound politically correct and aware, but at the same time would write whatever they know would grab the reader's attention.

The Commonwealth Games has always involved countries that were originally part of the British Commonwealth. There were 72 countries eligible for these Games,¹⁴ and in that sense the talent pool is limited. Despite the still world-class competition, the Hamilton Spectator mentions more often than once the absence of America and their always very strong competitors.¹⁵ As true as this situation is, the Spectator almost takes away from the competition by mentioning the absence of powerhouses such as the United States. One writer states, "As Canada has come to attach itself by an unseverable umbilical cord to the U.S., Canadians have regarded as minor any event from which the Americans are absent."¹⁶ The writer has a valid point, but this fact should not be mentioned as much as it is because it does nothing but degrade the athletes who are competing, as well as take away from the prestige and history of the Commonwealth Games.

Canada finished the 2002 Commonwealth Games in third place, with a total of 114 medals, behind England and perennial powerhouse Australia. This total surpassed the previous total by 15 medals, which was the Canadian team's goal at the start of the Games.¹⁷ Although a few more events were added to these Games, such as the disabled

events, this total demonstrates that Canada was at least as good as the previous years, if not a little better yet.

The Hamilton Spectator provided an extensive amount of coverage of the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, England. Before the Games, they wrote about the history of the city, the Canadian team, and other issues. During the Games, they provided accounts of medal tallies and other pertinent stories that arose. After the Games, a look back on the two weeks was presented, as well as a look forward into the next Games. This coverage is admirable. However, there are a few points that were emphasized that shouldn't necessarily have been, as well as where the emphasis was placed at times.

¹ "Commonwealth of Nations." Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia Standard.2003.

² Ibid.

³ Commonwealth Games Federation. 24 February 2004. <http://www.thecgf.com/home.asp>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *The Hamilton Spectator*, July 26, 2002

⁸ *The Hamilton Spectator*, July 24, 2002

⁹ *The Hamilton Spectator*, July 25, 2002

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *The Hamilton Spectator*, July 25, 2002

¹² *The Hamilton Spectator*, August 3, 2002

¹³ *The Hamilton Spectator*, August 2, 2002

¹⁴ *The Hamilton Spectator*, July 24, 2002

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *The Hamilton Spectator*, August 6, 2002