

Stephanie de Boer, Eileen Hesselink
Dr. John Byl
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The British Commonwealth Games:
1974

The British Commonwealth games began in 1930, in Hamilton, Ontario. “The Commonwealth Games is a unique, friendly, world class, multi-sports Games, which is held every four years”.¹ The Commonwealth currently makes up thirty percent of the world’s population and represents fifty-four countries. The Games are unified by three characteristics: “Humanity, Equality, and Density”.² Unique characteristics of the Commonwealth Games include being the only Games which shares a common language, English. This common bond provides all participants - athletes and officials - with the opportunity to communicate with one another; this has led to the nickname “the ‘Friendly Games’”.³ The 1974 Games were held in Christchurch, New Zealand, consisting of thirty-seven countries, with athletes participating for the 374 medals available. Out of the hundreds of athletes participating, only twenty-two countries came back with medals.⁴ The 1974 Games were the first world-wide sporting event since the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, at which there was a massacre of Israeli athletes. Extreme security measures were taken as a result, which made it the first Games in which safety measures were a primary focus.⁵ Using the Hamilton Spectator, the British Commonwealth Games were followed through their entirety, following the participants and observing the media aspect of the Games.

The media is a window to see into the activities that took place in the 1974 British Commonwealth Games. Throughout the ten days of the Games, certain athletes were held

up in the eye of the public. These people met the media criteria of an athletic hero; this criteria consisted of either previous or expectant medal qualifications and/or broken records. However, generally the only people held up in the Hamilton Spectator were white, Canadian athletes, despite the fact that many athletes world-wide performed exceedingly well. The media blinds the public to the accomplishments of other nations and portrays a biased outlook on the actual events taking place across the world. A comparison between the statistical results of the Games and the picture the media displays for the public shows that the two approaches differ greatly.

On Wednesday, January 23, 1974 the Hamilton Spectator's sports section had an article opening the British Commonwealth Games. The heading read, "Injuries set back medal chances".⁶ There was no introduction to where the Games were to be hosted that year, and only brief details about other countries. Already the media depicts what their main focus will be. The Canadian team will be followed closely, with high expectations from our nation's super-athletes. Out of the whole opening article, there is only one small paragraph about an Australian swimmer that is expected to break many swimming records. Although the article displays certain equality among the male and female Canadian athletes, the males are spoken about more dominantly and the article opens talking about them. The last section displays a derogatory comment concerning the young girls of New Zealand maintaining distance from the male athletes, " 'have fun, be friendly, but not too friendly' that's the advice offered Christchurch girls [by the Christchurch Star] who may be contemplating a romance with any of the thousands of visitor to the games... 'and finding you have been left with an unwanted pregnancy or a venereal disease is a bitter aftermath to Games fever' ".⁷ Women were being treated as a



less intelligent sex, while men were treated as chauvinistic and domineering, at least in Christchurch. Towards the bottom of the sports page is an advertisement promoting the opening ceremonies that can be followed on television. The driving force of the games was completely overlooked by the Hamilton Spectator – taking the importance away from the equality aspect of the games and focusing the public eye on the participation of Canada’s elite athletes.

The Hamilton Spectator’s interpretation of day one of the British Commonwealth Games focused largely on the cold weather, and the swim team. The article *Cool weather hits Games’ opening*, included a brief overview of the opening ceremonies and a summary of Canada’s results in the 1970 British Commonwealth Games. However, the bulk of the article is spent detailing the injuries of certain Canadian athletes. This article is the second to emphasize the fact that the Canadian team was not at their usual competitive level. John Beers and John Hawkins’ ankle injuries and Beverly Boys’ back injury are mentioned for the second time since the Games’ opening. The author then goes on to give information about Canada’s track team and shows confidence in their swim team against the Australians. “The Australians, led by 13-year-old Jenny Turrell, were expected to dominate at the poolside. But a well balanced Canadian team could provide some upsets. Canada won 11 gold medals in swimming and diving 4 years ago”.⁸ The paper constantly refers back to previous successful years in high expectations of the current athletes. The article finishes with the authors expectations of certain athletes from opposing countries – mentioning Don Quarrie of Jamaica and Dick Bedford of England.

The second article of the page deals, mainly, with Canada's swim team and expectations of particular athletes; noting a few female Canadian swimmers. There is also a brief note in the article concerning some male participants in the shooting event. It is interesting to note that the only picture featured on the page is of a female track runner, Glenda Reiser, who is mentioned twice in the entire article, both small notes of her events. One would think that the athletes who are more central to the article would be used for a picture. The *Spectator* seems to stick to their usual focus – that of the certain athletes – while it would appear to be more informative to acquire a well-rounded view of the Games.

The following day, January 25th, displayed a rather abrupt shift in concentration. While the *Hamilton Spectator* had previously showed great dependence on the male athletes, it becomes clear that it is, in fact, the female athletes surpassing expectations. Prior to this, the women athletes had been mentioned in the shadow of the male participants. Now the females were the main subject of the article. The article *Canada leads in New Zealand* goes into depth about Canada's participation in swimming and track. However, the paper barely touches on the lawn bowling event – simply stating that Canada did not do well, neglecting to mention the countries who qualified for medals. Less than a sixth of the article is used to inform the public of the results in the badminton, shooting, and bowling events. Weightlifting also took place on this day – and is completely left out of the paper. All of these events were downplayed simply because the Canadians performed poorly and it reflected badly on the Canadian team. The third article *Canadian swimmers enjoy an extraordinary opening* outlines the accomplishments of the Canadian swim team, focusing on Cindy Shatto, a 16-year-old girl from Toronto; who won the gold in the 3-metre diving event. The article also mentions Beverly Boys

and her disappointment in qualifying for a silver medal rather than her previous gold, attained in the last games. Also, at this point in the Commonwealth Games, Canada was ranking a number one spot due to their tremendous efforts. The general outlook displayed by the Hamilton Spectator, is that of a new found dependence on the Canadian girls for victory.

The 26th of January came with a new found interest in the British Commonwealth Games. The days prior to this Saturday consisted of a page of newspaper covering the Games – half of which was filled with an update on weekly sports and advertisements. This day, however, consisted of a full page dedicated to the coverage of the Games. It was made extremely clear on this day that the true competition was not between many countries, rather it was between Canada and Australia. The article *Canada established track, field beachhead* discussed the Canadian's numerous wins in the swimming events. Contrary to the title of the article, it was in fact Kenya's team that qualified for three gold medals in men's track.⁹ Boxing and shooting are both mentioned early into the article, stating that Tim Taylor, the Canadian Boxer, was eliminated and Harry Willsie qualified for a gold medal in the skeet competition. The article randomly goes through and depicts the winnings of the day, but the main focus is the Canadians and how they performed. The Kenyans picked up 3 gold medals, Wales and New Zealand picked up their first gold medals in the pool – however, this is not mentioned until the middle of the article, after the Canadian and Australian results. The second article depicts the competition between Canada and Australia. Going into detail on the swim team; the Australians were notorious for their swimmers and Canada was providing swimmers of equal caliber. “ ‘We’ve still got a year or two to go before we catch them’ he said [Bruce Robertson of Canada] ‘but

it's getting there in the 100 and 200' ".¹⁰ The paper is blatantly turning a blind eye to the accomplishments of the other countries participating.

Three days later is when the next update on the British Commonwealth Games is published. In comparison to the previous amounts written, January 29th appears to have very little concern with the Games – only printing one article. This article *Aussies take lead in medals table* mentions Dr. Jules Sobrian of Omehee, Ontario who won his 3rd gold medal in the shooting event. However, the only picture on the page is of Claude Ferrange – the bronze medalist in the high jump event. One would think that since Sobrian had placed for his 3rd gold medal, it would be his picture in the paper, rather than a bronze medalist. The Spectator is writing simply to entertain the reader, focusing on a popular event, rather than giving a day-to-day commentary on the actual happenings. We see this again through the victory of Don Quarrie of Jamaica's gold winning in track. If one looks at the highlites of the 1974 Games one will see Quarrie's accomplishments as one of the key events of that year. "On the running track, Jamaica's Don Quarrie successfully defended both his 1970 100m and 200m gold medals".¹¹ This accomplishment is found on the official Commonwealth Games website, underlining how

major his role was in this year. In comparison with the Hamilton Spectator's account of his accomplishments, "Don Quarrie of Jamaica duplicated Miss Boyle's feat by winning the men's 200m to complete a second sprint double,"¹² Quarrie is made to play a minor role.



January 30th brought the Games to the front page. Hamiltonian Mitch Kawasaki and the other Canadian wrestlers had won 5 gold medals. Wendy Cook also won the 100m in the backstroke for Canada. This day was noted as “Canada’s biggest performance in the Commonwealth Games. Along with the six golds, the Canadians took two silver and five bronze medals”.¹³ The accomplishments in wrestling lead to it becoming a new craze and gathered attention to a previously ignored event. Below the details of the wrestling accomplishments, is an article on swimmer Wendy Cook. In *Wendy swam only to win medal* she explains that her success came from determination to swim a good race and do the best that she was able to do. Overall, the Spectator does a well coverage of Canada’s dominating day, while also including the accomplishments of others.

January 31, 1974 publication of the Hamilton Spectator also includes the Commonwealth Games on the front page. This is due to the fact that a second athlete from Hamilton, Russ Prior, won a gold medal in the heavy weight division. Wendy Cook also won another gold medal in the 400 meters medley relay and broke a record by covering 100 meters in 1.47 minutes. Along with Canadian victories, England won ten of the day’s events. The article *Another Hamiltonian lifts a gold* is very specific in its coverage. It speaks of the Canadian team’s winnings and outlines the other competitions. The day’s coverage therefore is very brief and simple even though many great accomplishments were made.

On the 1st of February, Wendy Cook steals the spotlight when she wins her third gold medal. She makes the front page of the Spectator, the first athlete to do so without being from Hamilton. Cook fell short of another record breaking time by only 1.13 seconds. Despite all the efforts made by the mere seventeen year-old she was still not pleased with her results. “But Miss Cook was



dissatisfied with her 200-meter race”.¹⁴ According to Cook, she started her race too fast and ran out of steam. Regardless of the young girl’s self approach to her performance, The Hamilton Spectator declares her “top Canadian” in the article’s title. By the end of the Games, Wendy Cook would be recognized as one of the most significant Canadian athlete-heroes for her triple gold winnings. This was a surprise due to the fact that she was viewed only a rising star and not a hero to keep your eyes open for. This is perhaps why it took the Spectator until the third gold to have Cook’s picture in the paper. The most significant aspect of the February 1st day is that the smaller, lower article, *No rust on Russ*, follows the gold medal winning from a male, Hamiltonian. Russ Prior not only won gold, but broke “all the Commonwealth and Games records he set in winning the event at the Games in 1970”.¹⁵ Along with these winnings, John Primrose won gold in trapshooting, while Becky Smith broke Games records and taking first place in the 400 medley. The February 1st paper focused almost entirely on Canadian athletes, mentioning only a few details from other countries, seeing the narrowing view of the games playing a role again.

The last day of the Games did not receive coverage on the front page, and only filled about half of one page of the sports section. The majority of the page is a collection of data, recording gold medals won by the Canadian team as well as *Final day summaries*. The article talks about Glenda Reiser winning gold in running, breaking Commonwealth Games records. One column in the article is spent talking about Wendy Cook and her overall accomplishments throughout the whole of the competition. The second article's attention is based directly on Glenda Reiser and her gold winning. It appears that as the Games come to an ending so the attention given to the sporting event drops considerably.

The summation of the Games is not slow and steady, but a sudden drop off of events that come to a close. There are no articles reflecting back on days following the ten day event. The only article found on February 3, 1974 is *City to honor 'golden' boys*, where the two gold medalists from Hamilton are to be welcomed back home. Both Russ Prior and Mitch Kawasaki were to receive "top award for athletic achievements".¹⁶ The article speaks of no ending ceremonies, descriptions on how the Games ran or how New Zealand handled being a host.

While the slogan for the British Commonwealth Games is "Humanity, Equality, and Destiny,"¹⁷ the participating countries certainly do not uphold this idea. The top three countries – Australia, Canada, and England – seem to dominate the games, and give little chance to others to represent their countries. The Games accomplish the humanity and destiny aspect of their slogan well. Humanity is the coming together of the commonwealth countries under one mass sporting event with one language. Destiny gives the athletes from the commonwealth countries the opportunity to compete at a high

level of competition. However, the equality aspect is sorely in need of improvement. The Commonwealth Games Federation does a fair job of promoting an atmosphere of friendliness among the teams and athletes. Their website does not only depict the top three countries, rather it gives a complete summary of all of the participating countries' results. Comparing their view to that of the Hamilton Spectator one may conclude that the paper does a poor job of portraying the equality aspect of the Games; despite the fact that, it is a central theme, it is ignored. The paper also undergoes a major shift in focus moving from the men to the women, "In the 1970 Games... it was the men who did most of the winning. Here the roles were reversed... It was the girl swimmers and divers, and the shooters and wrestlers, who helped achieve its highest number of golds in any international meet".¹⁸ The Games is focused on equality between the genders as well, however, it takes a major display of skills and medals to earn the paper's attention and respect. The Games began with the paper outlining their high hopes for several male athletes, and they came to a close with the praise of the female athlete's performance.

When one closely follows both the media's portrayal and the actual daily results of the British Commonwealth Games, a major deviation from the actual events is evident. While the paper spent much of its time covering the accomplishments of the Canadian athletes, they overlooked serious accomplishment of other athletes simply because they did not fit the media's idea of a sport's hero.

¹ The Commonwealth Games Federation. "What are the Commonwealth Games?" 2002. <<http://www.thecgf.com/faq/faq5.asp>> (4 February 2004)

² The Commonwealth Games Federation. "The Role of The CGF." 2002. <<http://www.thecgf.com/about/role.asp>> (4 February 2004)

³ Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games Corporation. "Games History." <<http://www.melbourne2006.com.au>> (4 February 2004)

⁴ The Commonwealth Games Federation. "The 1974 British Commonwealth Games." 2002. <<http://www.thecgf.com/games/intro.asp?yr=1974>> (4 February 2004)

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- ⁵ The Commonwealth Games Federation. "The 1974 British Commonwealth Games." 2002. <<http://www.thecgf.com/games/intro.asp?yr=1974>> (4 February 2004)
- ⁶ 1974. Injuries Set Back Medal Chances. *The Spectator*, January 23, Page 46.
- ⁷ 1974. Injuries Set Back Medal Chances. *The Spectator*, January 23, Page 46.
- ⁸ 1974. Cold Weather Hits Games' Opening. *The Spectator*, January 24, Page 18.
- ⁹ 1974. Canada Establishes Track, Field Beachhead. *The Spectator*, January 26, Page 16.
- ¹⁰ 1974. Paulson in Quarter Finals. *The Spectator*, January 26, Page 16.
- ¹¹ The Commonwealth Games Federation. "The 1974 British Commonwealth Games." 2002. <<http://www.thecgf.com/games/intro.asp?yr=1974>> (11 February 2004)
- ¹² 1974. Aussies Take Lead in Medals Table. *The Spectator*, January 29, Page 15.
- ¹³ 1974. Gold Rush by Canadian Wrestlers. *The Spectator*, January 30, Page 23.
- ¹⁴ 1974. Trio of Golds for Top Canadian. *The Spectator*, February 1, Page 16.
- ¹⁵ 1974. No Rust on Russ. *The Spectator*, February 1, Page 16.
- ¹⁶ 1974. City to Honor "Golden Boys". *The Spectator*, February 3, Page 10.
- ¹⁷ The Commonwealth Games Federation. "The Role of The CGF." 2002. <<http://thecgf.com/about/role.asp>> (11 February 2004)
- ¹⁸ Grant, Gordon. 1974. Ottawa's Glenda Reiser Wins Canada's 25th Gold. *The Spectator*, February 2, Page 14.