

British Empire Games

1934

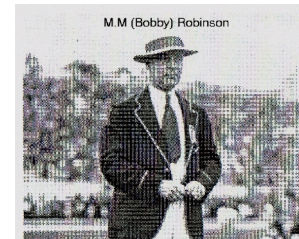


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The British Empire Games 1934

Today the Commonwealth is defined as “a unique family of developed and developing nations, a voluntary association of independent, sovereign states spread over every continent and ocean from Africa to Asia, from Pacific shores to Caribbean. The Commonwealth’s 1.7 billion people make up 30% of the world’s population and are of many faiths, races, languages, and cultures.”¹ The beginnings of the Commonwealth Games, earlier called the British Empire Games, was thought to be inspired by Reverend Astley Cooper who proposed a festival “to draw closer the ties between the Nations of the Empire.”² In July 1891 he wrote in “Greater Britain” magazine and on October 31st 1891, he submitted an article to “The Times”, suggesting a “Pan-Britannic-Pan-Anglican Contest and Festival...every four years as a means of increasing the goodwill and good understanding of the British Empire.”³ It was to be another 40 years later however, before the first unique, friendly, world class, multi-sport Commonwealth Games, took place.

The first Commonwealth Games occurred in 1930 in Hamilton, Canada, due to the influence of “Bobby” M.M. Robinson; the manager of the 1928 Canadian Olympic Track Team, founder and first president of the Hamilton Olympic Club,⁴ and sports editor for the Hamilton



¹The Commonwealth Federation, “Commonwealth Games,” 2002, <http://www.thecgf.com/games/default.asp> (24 February 2004).

²British High Commission Canberra, “The Commonwealth Games,” 2000, http://www.uk.emb.gov.au/CARRIERS/cwealth_games.html (18 February 2004).

³Thomas, “British Empire Games,” 2002, <<http://www.allstates-flag.com/fotw/flags/cwn-beg.html#ori>> (18 February 2004).

⁴Lindsay, W.H. & Wright, T.W. The British Empire Games, 1930 (Scrapbook).

Spectator.⁵ He was finally able to put into action a sports plan that had been talked and discussed amongst the Commonwealth nations for almost three decades.⁶

In the first Commonwealth Games, known as the British Empire Games, eleven countries of the British Commonwealth participated; England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Newfoundland, Bermuda, British Guiana, and Canada.⁷ There were 400 athletes participating in the different sports consisting of athletics, rowing, boxing, wrestling, swimming, diving, and lawn bowling. During the British Empire Games in 1930, Hamilton also hosted many other athletic competitions which resulted in over two thousand athletes temporarily residing in the Canadian city during the time of the Games.⁸ The city of Hamilton took the job of financing the project and guaranteeing against loss. It was a great effort for the City of Hamilton, with a population of 150,000 to finance the British Empire Games. A sum of \$30, 000 was provided by the City to the competing nations to help cover traveling costs. Yet, the undertaking was successful, completed with practically no loss to the City of Hamilton.⁹ A British Empire Games Federation was established in 1932 to set up and uphold the rules of the Games, to promote the occurrence of the Games every four years, to establish regulations for the conduct of the Games, and to encourage amateur sport throughout the Commonwealth.¹⁰ Since then the

⁵Hamilton Public Library, "The Hamilton Gallery of Distinction," 2000, www.hpl.ca/gallery/browse_inductees/ShowInductee.php?IndID=200&Year=1987> (4 February 2004).

⁶Dean Thomas, "British Empire Games," 2002, <http://www.allstates-flag.com/fotw/flags/cwn-beg.html#ori>> (18 February 2004).

⁷Lindsay, W.H. & Wright, T.W. The British Empire Games, 1930 (Scrapbook).

⁸Ibid. [Same as footnote #7]

⁹Ibid. [Same as footnote #7]

¹⁰British High Commission Canberra, "The Commonwealth Games," 2000, http://www.uk.emb.gov.au/CARRIERS/cwealth_games.html> (18 February 2004).

British Empire Games, later known as the Commonwealth games, have been held every four years following 1930, omitting 1942 and 1946 due to World War II, resulting in 2002 being the 17th celebration of the Commonwealth games.¹¹

Each year the opening of the Commonwealth Games is symbolized by the raising of the Commonwealth Games Ceremonial Flag, which will continue to fly throughout the time of which the Games occur and will be lowered during the Closing Ceremonies. The flag will then be handed over to the chief citizen of the host city who will, four years later, send it on to the chief citizen of the next host city.¹²

During the time period of 1930 to 1950 the Games were known as the “British Empire Games”, which reflected the evolving nature of the Old Empire into one. From 1950 to 1962 the Games were known as “The British Empire and Commonwealth Games”. This name continued until 1966 when the Federation met and voted to drop the word “Empire” and was changed into “The British Commonwealth Games”. Then in 1978 the name changed, to its present term, “The Commonwealth Games”.¹³

The 2nd British Empire Games, in 1934, were originally scheduled for Johannesburg, South Africa. However, they were eventually hosted by London, England to prevent political problems concerning the South African ‘Apartheid’ policy which concerned how minority races would be

¹¹The Commonwealth Federation, “Commonwealth Games,” 2002, <http://www.thecgf.com/games/default.asp> (24 February 2004).

¹²British High Commission Canberra, “The Commonwealth Games,” 2000, http://www.uk.emb.gov.au/CARRIERS/cwealth_games.html (18 February 2004).

¹³Dean Thomas, “British Empire Games,” 2002, <http://www.allstates-flag.com/fotw/flags/cwn-beg.html#ori> (18 February 2004).

treated.¹⁴

In London, England sixteen nations sent a total of 500 athletes to the British Empire Games. The new nations that participated were Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Zimbabwe, and Trinidad. It was also the last time that Newfoundland would participate independently of Canada.¹⁵ These sixteen nations participated in six sports including athletics, boxing, lawn bowls, swimming and diving, and wrestling and for the first time ever, cycling.

A highlight of the 1934 Games was that women were allowed to participate in athletics. They were restricted, although, to those events that were not considered ‘too exhaustive.’ The women participated in the short sprints and a shortened 4 x 220 yard relay versus the men’s 4 x 440 yard relay.¹⁶

In 1934 the *Hamilton Spectator* provided extensive coverage of the British Empire Games, held in London, England. The Games occurred from August 4th until August 11th, but the Spectator held coverage of the Games from August 1st until August 10th.

On page 18 of August 1st, the *Hamilton Spectator* had a lengthy article on a local athlete, Bert Pearson, who was the favoured for the British Empire Game sprints. He was said to be the most famous schoolboy sprinter in the world. The article went on to talk about who he has previously conquered in competitions and who his rivals would be for the British Empire Games. Another article had the heading “Girls are Prominent” but only had, a surprising, two sentence

¹⁴Dean Thomas, “British Empire Games,” 2002, <http://www.allstates-flag.com/fotw/flags/cwn-beg.html#ori> (18 February 2004).

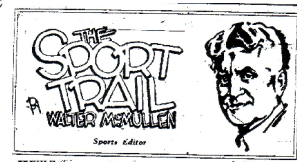
¹⁵ The Commonwealth Federation, “Commonwealth Games,” 2002, <http://www.thecgf.com/games/default.asp> (24 February 2004).

¹⁶The Commonwealth Federation, “Commonwealth Games,” 2002, <http://www.thecgf.com/games/default.asp> (24 February 2004).

description of the female sprinters. Therefore portraying a lack of interest in female athletes and their accomplishments¹⁷

On the 2nd, the *Hamilton Spectator* comments that there is an anticipation of the 1930 records to be broken, even though the British weather makes for a slower track, then in the previous Games in Hamilton. In the previous Games, there were only male competitors in athletics, there were no female records set. Therefore, the best times and distances in 1934, for women, will be the new records. Having only male results created more

pressure for the men to succeed and break records then for the women¹⁸. “The Sport Trail”, was a commentary column written by



Walter McMullan in the *Hamilton Spectator*. On August 2nd his column was focused on Bert Pearson, a Hamilton athlete, who was a favourite to win the sprints. The media discussed Bert Pearson throughout the coverage of the games and selected him to be a big winner in the British Empire Games¹⁹.

On August 3rd, the articles discussed the two female members of the track team that will be unlikely to compete due to illness and injury. M.M. Robinson was quoted, “misfortune has continually followed the girls ever since they arrived in England a week ago...competition at these games is going to be keener than ever...although we have the best balanced team that ever left Canada we should be hard put to score victories. The men’s track team and the swimmers are in fine fettle.” Women were truly seen as the weaker sex because they were the only ones reported with injuries, they never mention men and their injuries and Robinson, although he is positive

¹⁷ “Pearson Given Best Rating With Critics” *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 1st, 1934), p.18.

¹⁸“ Empire Forces Are Threats to Records”, *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 2nd, 1934) p. 22.

¹⁹Walter McMullen, “The Sport Trail”, *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 2nd, 1934) p.22.

about his Canadian team, still heavily favours the men athletes²⁰.

August 4th was the opening day!! The Opening Ceremonies took place in the White City Stadium with 600 athletes from 16 countries who marched, military fashion, into the stadium²¹. There was a crowd of 40,000 although the stadium seats 50,000. Due to the time period we felt that this was a substantial number of spectators. Before the games started messages of good will were read by His Majesty the Prince of Wales²².

Betty Taylor, from Hamilton, qualified for the 800 yard hurdles. “Miss Taylor won the first heat in easy fashion. Her time was 12.1 seconds. The Hamilton girl, one of the most stylish hurdlers in the world, finished a food ahead of Miss Wilson”²³. We felt that this quote was degrading for female athletes because of the “feminine jargon” such as “Miss”, “easy fashion” and “stylish”. When mentioning female athletes the journalist refers to them as being a “Miss” or “Mrs.” which gives a sense of status and ownership.

Bert Pearson, the media’s favoured, disappointed them when he failed to make the semi-finals in the 100 yard dash²⁴. Since he had been described as the favourite since before the games started, his results were extremely dissatisfying for the public. The media then over-emphasized his losses and ignored his accomplishments in the Games.

Herald Webster, a 40 year old from Hamilton, won the classic marathon Tuesday, August

²⁰“Two Members of Canadian Squad Cannot Compete”, *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 3rd, 1934) p.20.

²¹“Parade of Empire Under Way To-day”, *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 4th, 1934) p.7.

²²“Parade Of Empire Under Way To-Day” *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 4th, 1934) p.10.

²³Ibid [Same page as footnote #22]

²⁴Ibid [Same page as footnote #22]

7th. This result was the first item emphasized in the Tuesday paper²⁵.

The next result was that of, “Sam Richardson, the fifteen-year old Toronto negro schoolboy, [who] won the running broad jump title for Canada at the British Empire Games... with a leap of 23 ft, 6 1/4 inches. Richardson missed setting the Empire record by one inch.”²⁶.

The slang terminology used to address minorities was prominent in this time period. This showed a lack of respect for minority athletes. The journalist seems to emphasize his failure, in regards to the record, in non-encouraging method which gave a sense that the ‘black, young boy’ was not quite good enough.

Page 10 of the paper listed the results, of all the participating countries, for athletics and lawn bowling. The top six competitors were mentioned, which emphasized the winners and those who broke records. The fact that all countries were mentioned lessened Canadian nationalism but promoted British unity, which was the ultimate goal of the Games²⁷.

The spotlight then turned towards the boxers and wrestlers because swimming had been completed. The paper then lists the results for athletics, swimming, and lawn bowling²⁸. In “The Sport Trail”, Walter McMullin discussed the disappointment in Bert Pearson and of



Ray Lewis

Ray Lewis, the Hamilton boy favoured for the quarter mile, who failed to make the final cut. He

²⁵“Takes Laurels For Canada in Great Show of Stamina” *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 7th, 1934) p. 7.

²⁶Ibid [Same page as footnote #25]

²⁷“British Empire Games Results” *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 7th, 1934) p. 10.

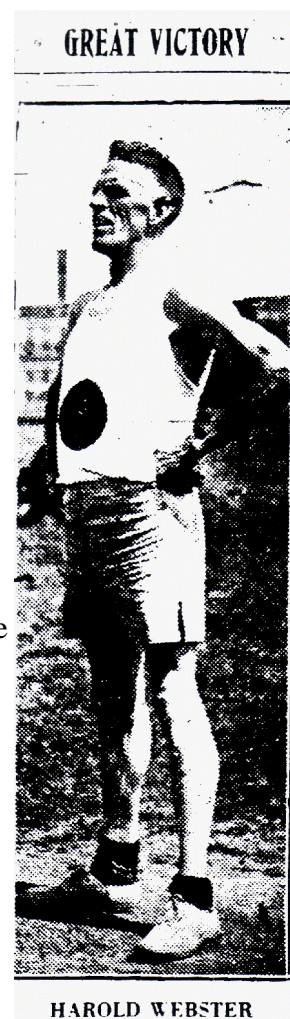
²⁸“Swimmers Put Canada To Fore In Stirring Empire Games Events” *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 7th, 1934) p. 16.

also discussed in a paragraph about the surprising show of two girl athletes²⁹.

August 8th listed the results for wrestling and lawn bowling (singles, doubles, and rinks)³⁰. The commentary in “The Sport Trail” discussed Herald Webster, the Hamiltonian who ran the marathon³¹. There was also an article pertaining to Bobby Robinson who was immensely pleased with the athletics (track and field) meets that closed yesterday. He was quoted saying, “[Canadians] closed this section of the meet with a blaze of glory”³².

August 9th discussed the other competitions that were going on during the same time as the British Empire Games; the opening day of the women’s World Games was of importance because the entire female track team also entered into this competition³³. We found this information interesting because there was a competition solely for female athletes, which went beyond the stereotypical female role of the time period.

The only article in the August 10th issue of the *Hamilton Spectator*, pertaining to the British Empire Games was a small column titled “British Empire Games Athletes Ready to Leave.” It stated that the main body of the Canadian team left that day



²⁹Walter McMullen “The Sport Trail” *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 7th, 1934) p. 16.

³⁰“British Empire Games Results” *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 8th, 1934) p. 10.

³¹Walter McMullen “The Sport Trail” *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 8th, 1934) p. 16.

³²“Robinson Is Pleased With Team’s Showing” *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 8th, 1934) p. 16.

³³“Peggy Matheson of Toronto Qualifies in 60-Metre Dash” *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 9th, 1934)

and that they would sail without the boxers and the girl athletes. The boxers were not finished their competitions till that evening and the female track athletes had stayed behind to take part in the Women's World Games³⁴.

M.M. Robinson was quoted, "we all had a good time and are sorry to leave...we are only sorry the athletes did not have a better chance to see London, they were too wrapped up in training."³⁵ The article was basically on the women, comparing their standings between British Empire Games and the Women's World Games.

We found that the coverage of the British Empire Games took a back page because of the uprising conflict in world politics. The main pages of the paper were set aside for the issues surrounding Hitler and his rise to power. The Games were mentioned approximately on page 10 of the paper and was continued in the sports section on approximately pages 16-18. The coverage of the British Empire Games was more elaborate during the first few days of events than during the final days of the Games. Though the Games did not officially end till the 11th of August, the *Hamilton Spectator* stopped coverage on the 10th. As the week of the Games progressed, the articles filtered to the back pages of the paper and the articles continued to decrease in importance.

There was a trend that women and minorities in sport were not covered as elaborately as the male competitors. Slangs and degrading remarks frequented the coverage of the female and minority athletes.

In conclusion, the British Empire Games were as successful in 1934 as in the previous year. There was an increase in athletes, from the previous 1930 games, and an increase of

³⁴"British Empire Games Athletes Ready to Leave" *The Hamilton Spectator* (August 10th, 1934) p. 18.

³⁵Ibid. [Same page as footnote #34]

spectators. The 1934 games marked the beginning of support for female athletes, though many of the stereotypes still existed surrounding the role of women. The Hamilton Spectator did extensive coverage of the events and the articles showed the success of all the participating countries. The Hamilton Spectator upheld the goal of the games, to exhibit unity within the British Commonwealth countries by recording all of the countries results.

PROGRAMME
OF
BRITISH EMPIRE GAMES, 1934

TO BE HELD AT
LONDON, ENGLAND



Saturday, August 4th

Afternoon	Opening Ceremony	White City Stadium
Afternoon	Athletics	White City Stadium
Evening	Swimming	Empire Pool, Wembley

Monday, August 6th

Afternoon	Athletics	White City Stadium
Afternoon	Swimming	Empire Pool, Wembley
Evening	Swimming	Empire Pool, Wembley

Tuesday, August 7th

Afternoon	Athletics	White City Stadium
Afternoon	Swimming	Empire Pool, Wembley

Wednesday, August 8th

Evening	Wrestling	Empire Arena, Wembley
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Thursday, August 9th

Evening	Wrestling	Empire Arena, Wembley
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Friday, August 10th

Evening	Boxing	Empire Arena, Wembley
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Saturday, August 11th

Afternoon	Cycling	M.A.C. Track, Manchester
Evening	Boxing	Empire Arena, Wembley

With **BOWLING** on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday,
and Friday.

