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# *‘American Boys in Paris’: Canadian Participation in the Games of 1900*

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## **Introduction**

Olympic scholars are well aware that much of the world was relatively unacquainted with de Coubertin’s Olympic Games during the earliest quadrennials. It has been shown, however, that during the period leading up to the Olympics of 1904 in St. Louis that Americans had at least “awakened” towards an acknowledgment and awareness of the Games. Similar to the Americans, Canadians were for the most part oblivious to de Coubertin’s plans, ideas, and things Olympic at least until 1904 and beyond. It might be suggested based on the variables of organization, funding, and the team concept, that Canada did not contribute directly to the process of institutionalization of the Games until 1908. However, Canadians had been involved in international competition for several decades, had utilized sport in the promotion of foreign policy since Confederation<sup>2</sup>, and had many world class athletes, some winning Olympic and Interim Games competitions before 1908.

Indeed by the turn of the century, competitive sport had long been a part of Canadian middle and upper class town life; national championships and organizations existed for most sports; and sport was often invoked in the boosterism campaigns of developing cities.<sup>3</sup> The Canadian government had demonstrated at least a fragmented interest in the use of sportsmen as advocates of the National Policy, state money was used throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to fund Canadian exhibits at world’s fairs and expositions, and the promotion of the idea of industrial, manufacturing, and cultural competitiveness had become an accepted if not mandatory feature of international relations. Yet, sending a team to the Paris Games of 1900 was not seriously considered by Canadian sporting authorities. Individual Canadian athletes competed in Paris and received only modest attention at home, even though one of them achieved victory. Indeed, the Canadian and American press and the newspapers in the athletes’ hometowns often referred to them as American boys, because they represented U.S. universities. The Canadian athletes in Paris, moreover, might even be more aptly labeled as what Dyreson has referred to as *America’s* athletic missionaries, since their efforts were hailed as U.S. accomplishments.<sup>4</sup>

The coverage of these Canadian athletes at the Games of 1900 speaks to the relative ownership of community and national identities. Canadian athletes who competed for U.S. universities were not vilified in the press as traitors, rather, their victories were celebrated for the most part as American achievements. On the other hand, Canadian exhibitors who won awards at the world’s fair, generally received more newspaper accolades at home. The importance of world’s fair representation to Canada as an emerging industrial capitalist country was clearly evident in the

newspaper coverage, government funding, and parliamentary debate. By 1900 the Canadian government had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to show Canadian products at expositions around the world.

Canada had demonstrated both the means and political inclinations towards supporting competitive sporting endeavours. Similar to other industrializing nations, like the U.S. and Britain, the dominant ethos of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Canadian physical culture consisted of rough and competitive expressions of masculinity, manifested through ordered rivalries, leagues, and championship events. On the surface, popularly-followed sports appeared quite similar to those of the other two countries. Regular international meetings existed for some sports, as did national competitions for most of the mainstream activities. But de Coubertin's international athletic competitions in Paris did not have the cultural and political weight that was ascribed to the World Exposition, in which they were both accommodated and ultimately smoothed.

### **19<sup>th</sup> Century Canadian Sport: Competition, Masculinity, and Emergent Capitalist Values**

Without question, in both the popular and exclusive, rural and urban, sporting and leisure venues where competitions, rivalries, fun, bloodletting, pain, and pure joy were played out in 19<sup>th</sup> century Canada, at stake were also world views, political policy and practice, religious expression, and economic determinations. Sporting practices confirmed, resisted, and reproduced the social orderings of both political economy and gender relations, while contributing to the ongoing processes of state formation, economic change, and nation-building. It is not surprising, therefore, that by the year of the Paris Olympics, sport was fundamental to both foreign and domestic political policy.

Early colonial administrators had made provisions for the control of public nuisances like drunkenness, gambling, and fighting, and established a tenuous basis for legitimate expressions of gentry masculinities such as the duel, the private sporting club, and the control of public land to ensure a class-based ordering of outdoor recreations.<sup>5</sup> Later governments, through legislation, expenditure, and revenue collection reconfirmed the class-based control of land and 'appropriate' public leisure-time expressions of masculinity and femininity, while at the same time legitimizing the social value of middle- and upper-class organized sports and private clubs. Non- working hour educational projects and informal military musters were some of the state encouraged activities in place by the 1850s.

The victory of the Paris Crew in 1867, the lacrosse tours to Britain endorsed by the Department of Agriculture, and the annual voyages of Canadian riflemen and artillerymen to the British championships are early post-confederation examples of participation in and sanctioning of international competition. Canadian parliament heartily endorsed the financial support towards the competitive rifle teams and referred to them as international ambassadors.<sup>6</sup> Selected through annual national championships, these were Canada's first state-sponsored sport teams whose appearance, conduct, and performance were positioned as representing the competitive best that Canada had to offer. Parliamentary supporters went so far as to say that the riflemen played a significant role in attracting immigrants and foreign investment in Canadian manufacturing - two key components in the so-called National Policy, Prime Minister John A. MacDonald's blueprint for the economic development of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Canada.

The trade and tariff policies, legislation, revenue generation, and government expenditures secured through the Confederation process by central Canadian businessmen created favourable conditions for the emergence of industrial capitalism. At another level, however, sport organization, event promotion, and the control of leisure activities played a significant role in legitimizing the federal state, while introducing 'national' issues about identity, competition, and social values to regional and local levels. Sport may have been a site of resistance for some but for others it was wielded invariably in the contestation over national culture and, ultimately, the meanings about such events as national and international championships were linked as a matter of common sense to the emerging post-confederation economy.

### **Competitiveness and National Identity**

One of the great ideological projects of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Canada, was the organization of local, regional, national, and international fairs and exhibitions. In a country divided by religion, language, geography, and ethnic identifications, fairs organized locally and by province, in addition to the educational programs of agricultural associations, mechanic's institutes, and literary associations, were instituted in part to create a common ground for the expression of values about competition, progress, and production. All sectors of agriculture, manufacturing, and natural resource extraction were encouraged to participate in local, provincial, and national fairs and to compete for prizes as a matter of national duty and local pride - the same sort of competitive locution invoked later in the celebration of sporting events.

And governments were prepared to pay for the organization of these projects. For every world's fair in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the federal government paid for Canadian exhibits, products, passage for commissioners and some exhibitors, and rent for facilities. Like other promotional programs in Europe such as the stationing of immigration agents, lecture tours, and sport competitions, the idea was to represent a modernized version of Canada abroad to immigrants and investors. Of course, Canada had to be represented as a competitive nation, a place where the right sort of people could bring their families and lead successful and prosperous lives.<sup>7</sup> The rhetoric of competitiveness and modernity was consistent for world's fairs and international sport competitions throughout the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Supporters suggested that exhibits at the fairs demonstrated that Canada was at the leading edge of manufacturing and agricultural techniques, and had unlimited opportunities for resource extraction, while sport competitions invoked more of a cultural competitiveness through which particular notions about honour and manly character were celebrated. And similar to the IOC's present rhetoric about progress, which ultimately depends on the affirmation that each games are successively 'the best ever', world's fairs, too, supposedly got bigger and better, and Canadian exhibits were supposedly better and better.

Like any other government expenditure, these costs had to be constantly defended. Justifying the federal expense of \$206,000 on the Paris Exposition of 1900, the Minister of Agriculture stated, "we were determined to show that Canada could take a position in the industrial world of which she need not be ashamed."<sup>8</sup> He concluded that "the old story of Canada being a few acres of snow has been absolutely and forever set at rest, and to-day Canada is known to be a land flowing with milk and honey, and the people of that portion of Europe appreciate this country at its true worth."<sup>9</sup> The Minister of Public Works declared, "we obtained the grandest advertisement that Canada ever obtained on the European continent. In the estimation of the government in power, the 41 grand prizes, 136 gold medals, 117 silver, 70 bronze, and 30 honourable mentions achieved in Paris had been successful in promoting the appropriate representations.

The overall influence of world's fairs on the establishment of the modern Olympic Games to this date has probably been underestimated. From the Great Exhibition of 1851 at the Crystal Palace, to Paris in 1867 and 1878, to Philadelphia, Antwerp, Chicago, and back to Paris in 1900, to name a few, fairs attracted thousands of international visitors and played a significant role in the self-promotion of industrializing countries. In 1900, for example, 42 countries were represented in Paris, a fact that could not have escaped the notice of the Olympic committee. The notion that Olympic Games organizers borrowed ideas from world expositions for their own festivals - perhaps even the idea of gold, silver, and bronze medals - demands further attention.

Newspaper accounts from the *Toronto Mail and Empire*, *The Toronto Star*, the *London Daily Free Press*, and local papers like the *St. Mary's Journal* provided extensive coverage of Canada's success at the Paris Exposition and some coverage of the athletic events. The point here is that world's fairs at this time were a matter of national interest - de Coubertin's Olympics were not. Similar to Barney's findings for the U.S., the word Olympic does not even appear in any of the meager Canadian press coverage of the athletic competitions in July 1900. They were referred to as the "international games,"<sup>10</sup> the "running events in connection with the exposition,"<sup>11</sup> and "international sporting carnival."<sup>12</sup>

The Canadian press followed the exploits of three Canadian runners, George Orton winner of the 2500m steeplechase, and the St. Mary's brothers, Alex and Dick Grant, no more than the performances of U.S. athletes Kraenzlein, Prinstein, and Connelly. Since Orton and Alex Grant had been running for the New York Athletic Club and the University of Pennsylvania at the Olympics, and Dick Grant for Harvard University, they were often referred to as the *American* runners. This was the state of affairs for some Canadian athletes at the time. It was common for Canadian hockey, baseball, and lacrosse players to be playing in the U.S. Canadian observers lamented that clubs did not give athletes enough support and that U.S. club runners had dominated Canadian championships for years. In a letter to the *Toronto Mail and Empire*, the author praised Canadian athletic talent, while imploring sport organizers to provide more opportunities for Canadian athletes: "That we have material in our midst out of which champions are made is proven by the success of George Orton, the Grant brothers, George Gray, and others, who in receiving encouragement from foreign clubs, have beaten the world."<sup>13</sup> Roxborough makes the same point in his book, listing several international championships won by Canadians in the latter years of the century. He also notes that Orton had won 121 victories by 1900, along with 15 U.S. championships.<sup>14</sup>

Not surprisingly, *The New York Times* in its coverage referred to Orton and the Grants as Americans, and the victory of Orton as contributing alongside the many victories of the U.S.<sup>15</sup> Orton's victory in the steeplechase was given headlines in all of the Canadian papers mentioned; and in the *The Toronto Daily Star* on Wed, July 18, the headline read 'A FAMOUS VICTORY' describing briefly how Orton won for America. In the previous day's paper, the larger type headline had read 'CANADA BEATS WHOLE WORLD' and underneath a subheadline, 'In Its Fruit Display at Paris Exposition'.<sup>16</sup> The *St. Mary's Journal* followed the regional race circuit and American championships and of course the Grant brothers, by virtue of their successes, were featured prominently in many of the articles. Even though they were

local boys, there was little local fanfare for the town of St. Mary's. Dick Grant, for example was grouped with the "other American" boys in a descriptor of an upcoming Hamilton road race. He was referred to as the "Harvard distance runner" in an article describing how he was assaulted and had lost several teeth by the fists of three drunken men in Boston.<sup>17</sup> There was no mention of his local connection or family. The only reference to St. Mary's during the summer of 1900 was in an article describing Alex Grant's win at the intercollegiate championships at Columbia Field - even then it was "The Grant boys of this town, who are attending University in the States, are winning glory for themselves frequently."<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the athletic exploits of the Grants did not feature in any campaigns of local boosterism for St. Mary's.

Canadians, although fairly well represented in the following Games in St. Louis did not send an official contingent. The same can be said for the Interim Games in Athens in 1906. It was not until the 1908 Games in London that an official Canadian team marched into the stadium. According to Kidd, the first Canadian National Olympic Committee was formed in preparation for London.<sup>19</sup> This was also the year that the Canadian federal and provincial governments provided funding for the team. The federal grant was \$15,000, the Ontario government provided \$2,000 and the British Columbia government dispensed \$1,000 to defray the expenses of the 84 person contingent.<sup>20</sup> As with most other Canadian government cultural initiatives, the use of public money to support athletic competition overseas was contested in parliament. Members of parliament had frequently complained about world's fair expenditures and also the costs of supporting a national rifle team annually. It had been argued as early as 1876 and again in 1884 that public money should not be spent on the elite competitions of sportsmen.<sup>21</sup> Even for something as widely supported as world's fairs, the expenses had to be rationalized - and at the level of economic return as opposed to cultural benefit or international relations. The first grant for the Olympic team of 1908 was criticized as a spending direction that some politicians were not willing to take. Member of Parliament, Mr. Sproule argued, "I regard such a vote as the height of absurdity. I think our country is running too far in the line of games and sports and too little in the direction of useful labour and to sanction all this by a vote in federal parliament seems to me to be going too far."<sup>22</sup>

It was not a great political leap for the Canadian government to provide financial support to an Olympic team. In the post-Confederation era, support for such ideological projects was an important aspect of economic policy and became an important part of foreign policy. Of these, fairs and exhibitions were the easiest to rationalize, since commissioners could at least claim that the products and exhibits in front of fair visitors were a representation of the business opportunities, manufacturing expertise, and success stories, in Canada inspired by the climate of economic growth secured by the National Policy.

Canadian newspapers showed little interest in the Paris Games because they were a relative anomaly at this point. This, in spite of the fact that Canadian athletes were participating and that George Orton had won the steeplechase. It is interesting, however, that these papers did not take advantage of opportunities for Canadian or even small town boosterism. Fruit was not necessarily more important to Canadians, but the World's Fair was, at the time, much more culturally significant than de Coubertin's Olympics. And, thus, in the absence of a Canadian contingent, and the competitive sporting opportunities offered by United States athletic clubs and universities, George Orton and the Grant brothers sojourned as 'American' boys in Paris.

## Endnotes

1. Robert Knight Barney, "Born From Dilemma: America Awakens to The Modern Olympic Games, 1901-1903," *Olympika*, 1, 1992, pp. 92-135.
2. Kevin B. Wamsley, "Nineteenth Century Sport Tours, State Formation, and Canadian Foreign Policy," *Sporting Traditions*, 13, 2, pp. 73-89.
3. Paul Voisey, "Boosting the Small Prairie Town, 1904-1931: An Example From Southern Alberta," Alan F.J. Artibise, ed., *Town and city: aspects of western Canadian urban development*, Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1981, pp. 147-175.
4. Mark Dyreson, "America's Athletic Missionaries: Political Performance, Olympic Spectacle and the Quest for an American National Culture, 1896-1912," *Olympika*, 1, 1992, 70-91.

5. See Kevin B. Wamsley, "The public importance of men and the importance of public men: Sport and Masculinity in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Canada," in Kevin Young and Philip White, eds., *Sport and Gender in Canada*, London: Oxford University Press, (forthcoming).
6. See Kevin B. Wamsley, "Cultural Signification and National Ideologies: Rifle-shooting in Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Canada," *Social History*, 20, 1, 1995, pp. 63-72.
7. See Kevin B. Wamsley and David Whitson, "Representations of Competitiveness: International Expositions and Sport Festivals in the Production of National Identity," paper presented to the annual NASSH conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1993.
8. *Debates of the House of Commons*, Dominion of Canada, 1901, p. 966.
9. *Debates*, 1901, p. 968.
10. *St. Mary's Journal*, Thurs. July 26, 1900.
11. *London Daily Free Press*, Tues. June 26, 1900.
12. *The Toronto Daily Star*, Mon. July 9, 1900.
13. *Toronto Mail and Empire*, Tues. June 26, 1900.
14. Henry Roxborough, *Canada at the Olympics*, Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1963, p. 22.
15. *The New York Times*, Tues. July 17, 1900.
16. *The Toronto Daily Star*, Tues. July 17, 1900.
17. *St. Mary's Journal*, Thurs. May 3, 1900.
18. *Ibid.*, Thurs. May 31, 1900.
19. Bruce Kidd, "The First COA Presidents," *Olympika*, III, 1994, p. 108.
20. *Debates*, 1908, p. 13167.
21. See Kevin B. Wamsley, "Cultural Signification and National Ideologies: Rifle-shooting in Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Canada", *Social History*, 20, 1, 1995, p 69.
22. *Debates*, 1908, p. 13167.

