

WHO WAS NORMAN PRITCHARD?

By Ian Buchanan

One of the items of Olympic minutia that has long intrigued me is the case of Norman Pritchard who, according to many record books, was an Indian who represented his country at the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris, placing second in both the 200 metres flat and the 200 metres hurdles.

Together with the ISOH member for India, Gulu Ezekiel, I set out to trace this 'mystery' man and the story that emerged proved to be a great disappointment to Indian Olympic historians. Norman Pritchard was neither Indian nor did he represent India at the Paris Games!

To my delight and surprise, copies of the Bengal parish records were found at the India Office in London and they revealed that Norman Gilbert Pritchard was the son of George Peterson Pritchard and Helen Maynard Pritchard and that he was born on 23 June 1875 at Alipore, a southern suburb of Calcutta. Both his parents were English and his father, an accountant, was well known in the large British commercial community which had prospered in the sub-continent for generations

Thackers Indian Directory for 1905 contained the further information that Norman Pritchard lived on the fashionable Robinson Road and worked for the well known trading house, Bird & Co.

In May 1997, a letter from Gulu Ezekiel asking for information on Pritchard was placed in the Calcutta newspaper *The Statesman* and one reader responded with the news Bird & Co. No longer existed and that Pritchard's old house on Robinson Road was now the site of a high-rise apartment block. The news about the demise of his former employers was disappointing as we had hoped to obtain details of when they stopped paying a pension to Pritchard, thereby establishing his date of death and domicile at the time.

Norman Pritchard was an excellent soccer player and a fine athlete, winning the Bengal 100 yards for seven consecutive years (1894-1900) setting a new Bengal

record of 10.0 secs. in 1898 and 1899. He also won the Bengal title at 440 yards and 120 yards hurdles.

In 1900 Pritchard visited England, although it is doubtful if the Olympic Games were the main purpose of his visit as it is highly unlikely that news of the Paris Games would have reached Calcutta, particularly as details of the Games were not even known throughout Europe. Pritchard presumably first learned of the forthcoming Olympic celebration after his arrival in England.

On 12 June 1900, he was elected a member of the elite London Athletic Club and the very next day won the Club's Challenge Cup for 440 yards hurdles and two weeks later he won the Club trophies for 100 yards and 120 yards hurdles, beating the British AAA champion of 1897 in the latter event.

The next week-end, he competed at the AAA Championships, where he experienced international competition for the first time, facing the top Americans who were on their way to the Paris Olympics. Pritchard entered for the Championships as a member of the London AC and his home club, the Bengal Presidency AC, and this is surely the reason why in subsequent record books he is shown as an Indian.

The minutes of a meeting of the British AAA early on 1900 state:

A sum of £100 was allotted for sending a team of athletes to the 1900 International Championships in Paris.¹ The team to be selected from the competitors in the AAA Championships of July 7th, the selection to be made by the Championship sub-Committee.

¹ (It is interesting to note that the meeting was not referred to as the Olympic Games!)

With the 1900 AAA Championships serving as the British trials for the Games, Pritchard as runner-up to Kraenzlein (USA) in the 120 hurdles, was the leading Briton in that event and consequently was chosen to

represent Great Britain at the Olympic Games.

He ran Tewksbury (USA) close in the heats of the 100 yards and also was chosen to represent Britain in the sprints in Paris.

He was a very busy man in Paris, competing in five Olympic events (60, 100, 200 metres, 110 and 200 metres hurdles) and, including heats and two handicap events, he took part in a total of twelve races.

He did remarkably well to take second place in both the 200 metres and the 200 metres hurdles and for his accomplishments he was awarded a silver medal by the AAA and a penknife, worth a few francs, by the French Olympic Committee!

It is interesting to note that the Olympic programme gives Pritchard's affiliation as 'England' for the 100 metres and 'British India' for the 100 metres hurdles, but more significantly the New York Times invariably refer to him as 'an Englishman' or 'of the Englishman team' in their reports of the Games.

After the Games, Pritchard returned to India and served as Secretary of the Indian Football Association (1900-1902) and the memberships records of the London AC show that he was again in England in 1906, but by 1908 he was listed as "Abroad" and his membership of the Club ceased that year.

After his second visit to England it is not known if he returned to India or went on to the USA. According to Saradindu Sanyal in his book *Olympic Games and India* (1970), at some stage of his life Pritchard lived in America, where he starred in silent films with the British-born movie idol Ronald Colman.

The statement that he 'starred' is probably an exaggeration as MGM have no record of any film he made for the studio and he is not mentioned in a comprehensive filmography of Ronald Colman's films.

He may, of course, have changed his name on entering the world of films, but if Saradindu Sanyal is correct, Pritchard was the first of many Olympians to head for Hollywood.

While details of his later years remain elusive, his early life is now well chronicled and as a result of our researches there is now irrefutable evidence that

Pritchard was a British colonial, resident in India, and that he was specifically chosen to represent Great Britain at the 1900 Olympic Games.

To say that he represented India is just another example of an error being perpetuated from one book to another a situation which is all too common in Olympic history.

CORRECTIONS - LAST ISSUE

The September 1999 issue contained some typographic errors.

First of all, that issue should be re-numbered to Volume 7, Number 3 (three).

{The editor received a few requests from members, asking him to mail them the missing copies numbers 3 and 4, which do not exist.)

Even in a small village like Fochteloo, new houses are being built. Not many, but enough to make the local authorities decide that a renumbering of the *Vogelrijd* was necessary. From 1 March 2000, the address of the Secretary-General and Editor will be changed from *Vogelrijd* 10, into *Vogelrijd* 14, 8428 HH Fochteloo.

Please note this change into your files.

The address (from 1 March) is as follows:

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Please note this information in your files, because the editor, although closing down his postbox number over a year ago, still receives mail with that address on the envelope. Some Dutch postal authorities, especially in rural areas, even in these times still recognize their clients, which is fortunate for ISOH!

Anthony Th. Bijkerk
Secretary-General of the ISOH