

With Pick and Shovel, Slams and Salve, Knocks and Boosts: The Contributions of Lou Marsh to Canadian Sporting Journalism

DON MORROW

Department of Physical Education
University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario N5X 1M5

Since 1937 the Lou Marsh Trophy was been awarded annually to Canada's outstanding athlete, male or female, amateur or professional. Few Canadians are familiar with the trophy's namesake, Lewis Edwin Marsh, gentleman, athlete, humanist, and sportswriter. In the latter category, his chosen vocation. Marsh worked his way up from office boy to copy boy to junior reporter to police reporter to sports editor. His journalistic career spanned the years between 1893 and 1936.

This paper examined Marsh's daily "Pick and Shovel" column as it appeared in the *Toronto Daily Star* from 1925 to 1936, the year of his death. It was the purpose of the paper to use Marsh's column to demonstrate that one of the richest sources of analysis of the meaning of sport to the public during specific periods of history is contained in the editorial columns of newspaper sportswriters. "Old Pick and Shovel's" columns were analyzed in terms of Marsh's personal background, his sporting ideals and the style, techniques, and content used in his journalism.

Lou Marsh was a competent sprinter, football player, sailor, boxing and hockey referee during his career. He was internationally renowned as a referee during the early years of professional hockey. Similar to many sportswriters of the period, Marsh wrote his columns with the benefit of a varied, personal background in sport. Unlike many of his Canadian contemporaries, Marsh was able to do much more than merely report game results. He could write with a dramatic flair when discussing an important sporting event. Just as easily he could be nearly invective when expressing his views about the hypocrisy in sport and sport organizations. In that regard, Marsh would use his pick and shovel to dig into any issue or person regardless of his rank or position in society.

The characteristic features of his daily column were a slangy, breezy, graphic and unvarnished style, the effective use of similes and humour as well as short, "machine-gun" sentences to make his points of view more emphatic, Marsh was one of the most well read sportswriters of the period, and he was hailed by his colleagues as the "dean of Canadian sportswriters".