

The Longboat Incident of the 1908 Olympics: A Study of International Sporting Relations

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The 1908 Olympic Games in London, England were witness to numerous conflicts between athletes and organizers which were significant indicators of the state of relations in international sport. The most outstanding example of international discord at these Games centered around a young Indian athlete from Canada named Tom Longboat. Longboat's meteoric rise to the top of the amateur distance-running world from 1906 to 1908 was accompanied by increasing controversy over

his amateur status in both Canada and the United States. This controversy culminated in bitter exchanges between the Canadian and American representatives at the Games in London.

This paper examined the antecedents to the Olympic controversy as well as the details of the incident in question. Early relations between the Canadian Amateur Athletic Union (CAAU) and the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States (MU) were discussed. Events which led up to the 1908 Longboat incident and which were responsible for the deteriorating state of relations between the CAAU and AAU were explored. These include the 1907 Canadian-American controversy involving skating organizations in both countries as well as disputes surrounding Longboat's involvement in a March 1907 New York meet and the 1907 Boston Marathon. The interconnecting impact of Canada's athletic war on these issues was also examined.

These various antecedents culminated in the James Sullivan-led American protest of Longboat's eligibility to compete at the 1908 Olympics. This, combined with the prior events, resulted in the dissolution of the CAAU-MU alliance. The outcomes of the 1908 Tom Longboat incident included a resolution of the conflict between Canadian amateur bodies but also the termination of friendly relations between Canadian and American amateur bodies.