

This Canary Doesn't Sing: Avery Brundage, Canadian Journalists, and the Barbara Ann Scott Phaeton Affair

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The downtown sidewalks of Canada's capital were filled with proud Ottawans of all ages on a chilly March day in 1947. As the parliament clock prepared for its noontime peal, the scene at Union Station was chaotic. Mayor Stanley Lewis, members of the Board of Control, and the band of the Governor General's Foot Guards competed for space with jubilant citizens. The Citizen noted that, "no accidents marred the occasion though in the near riot . . . several of the younger fry were trampled a bit." The hometown folk were determined to provide a fitting return, including a gift of a canary yellow convertible, for the newly crowned world champion of women's figure skating, Barbara Ann Scott.

The excitement of the procession through the streets, and Scott's whistle stop tour of a number of

Canadian cities which followed, was short-lived. Two months later, Canadian sport journalists learned that the champion's amateur status was under review and that her long time dream of winning an Olympic gold medal was in jeopardy. The city's gift of a convertible auto, had prompted an inquiry to the Canadian Olympic Committee (C.O.C.) by International Olympic Committee (I.O.C.) President Sigfrid Edstrom of Sweden. The acceptance of the gift, a violation of the Olympic code of amateurism, had been brought to the attention of Edstrom by I.O.C. Vice-President (and U.S.O.C. President) Avery Brundage.

Although the incident is well-known to Olympic sport historians, and those specifically interested in Canadian sport history, the firestorm that swept the pages of Canadian newspapers in response to Brundage's action has not been investigated. The events preceding the "crisis," as well as the decision by the C.O.C. that Scott would have to return the car in order to retain her amateur standing, attracted widespread media scrutiny. The journalist's choice as villain in the affair, Avery Brundage, fell prey to a vicious and cynical media attack.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the actions of Canadian sport journalists and determine why they devoted extensive treatment to the issue following Scott's announcement that she would return the car. Specifically, why did the American Avery Brundage become the target for a nation's press? The paper will attempt to show the major contributing factors to the outcry against the outside treatment of a Canadian athletic heroine were post-war Canadian nationalism and anti-American sentiment. In addition, Brundage's past involvement in amateur athletics and his views toward amateurism intensified the indignation of a number of Canadians. The investigation also provides a case study indicative of the special relationship that Brundage shared with the media during his administrative career. Brundage was the man that journalists loved to hate.