

OLYMPICS

America Learns of the Modern Olympic Games? A Content Analysis of the *New York Times*, 1896, 1900, and 1904

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Everyone knows that the first modern Olympic Games were celebrated in Athens in the spring of 1896. Well known, too, is the fact that a small band of American collegians from Boston and Princeton scored sweeping victories in the track and field events. In John MacAloon's in-depth English treatment of the 1896 Games, *This Great Symbol*, the impression prevails that little was published in the American press before, during, and after the great initial festival. MacAloon, as well as Richard Mandell in his, *The First Modern Olympics* refer to the continuing Olympiads of 1900 in Paris and 1904 in St. Louis as a catastrophe in their organization, promotion and attendance.

This paper attempts to address such a prevalent impression by undertaking a content analysis of America's leading newspaper, the *New York Times*, for a period of four months for each Olympic year in question. In the process, an exact quantification of the amount and type of material reported by the Times for the first three Olympics was undertaken. As success in international sporting endeavours was a way in which American cultural patriotism was often expressed, the *Times* was surveyed in an attempt to learn what the *Times* offered that might have contributed to such a phenomenon. An attempt was made to determine the amount of American awareness/reaction of the first modern Olympic Games through a survey of letters to the editor, commentaries, sport pages, front page and then the rest of the newspaper. Where applicable, statistical analysis was conducted in order to achieve greater validity. This study addressed with certainty an existing impression which my preliminary research into the matter told me was perhaps incorrect or, at best, limited.