

OLYMPIC STUDIES

Dewey's Olympics: The 1932 Winter Games

E. John B. Allen
Plymouth State College, N.H.

This paper analyzes the background of American skiing and Olympic participation to understand why and how Dr. Godfrey Dewey, de facto head of the Lake Placid Club, was able to bring the Winter Games to the United States for the first time in 1932. After they were over, the skiing arrangements were judged to be unsatisfactory, and the management, a.k.a. Godfrey Dewey, was blamed.

Using the Dewey archives and material from the International Olympic Committee housed in the library in Lausanne and the archives in Vidy, the paper analyzes the important 1930 Fédération Internationale de Ski meeting which granted -- with great reservation -- the Games to Lake Placid. The Californians, expecting automatically to receive the Winter Games since they already had been granted the Summer festival, put up stiff and continuing resistance; even to promising rival Games.

Dewey also ran foul of a number of institutions: American Olympic Association National Olympic committee, and the state of New York in the person of its governor, Franklin Roosevelt. The problems were mostly financial. These were depression years, so understandably economic considerations loomed large.

At the end of it all only sixteen nations took part in a Games notable for their lack of snow. They were the last nordic-only games, and they were the last to have no skiing events for women. Dewey was upholding a nordic tradition in a Games managed really by and for a private club in order to turn the club and region into the St. Moritz of America. Dewey's Olympics, as far as the skiing events were concerned, failed in just about every respect.