

Greg Gillespie  
Brock University

***The Struggle for Scottish Supremacy: The  
Roderick R. McLennan versus Donald Dinnie  
Rivalry 1870-1872***

In 1870, an athletic rivalry developed between Roderick “Big Rory” McLennan, the acknowledged champion hammer thrower of the Dominion, and Donald Dinnie, the acknowledged champion of Scotland. The rivalry was initially promoted by Canadian Caledonian societies and was the main attraction at the Toronto games of 1870 and 1872, and the Montreal games of 1870. Despite the repeated efforts of Caledonians in both

cities, however, the two celebrated athletes refused to compete head-to-head. Although McLennan and Dinnie were proficient in each other's techniques, they refused to compete in their rival's preferred style when individual reputations were on the line.

Through analysis of archival material, local newspapers, and the files retained by the McLennan family, this paper examines the impact of the McLennan-Dinnie rivalry on the Caledonian games of the period. Although the two hammer throwers never met in direct competition, the Caledonian societies in Montreal and Toronto went to great lengths to accommodate them and in doing so broadened the focus of public interest from athletics to athletic celebrities. The use of titles such as Championship of Canada, America, and the World, the creation of special contests, and the introduction of athlete highlighted advertisements were representative of this transition. In both 1870 and 1872, the McLennan-Dinnie rivalry was crucial to the appeal and popularity of the games in which they were featured.

This study is part of a larger investigation into the athletic career of Roderick McLennan and his contribution to the development of Caledonian games in Ontario during the latter part of the nineteenth century.