

OLYMPIC STUDIES

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Prince of the Podium: **Jack Shea and Olympic Victory Protocol**

On the afternoon of 4 February 1932, medals were awarded to the winners of the 500 meters speed skating race at the Lake Placid Winter Olympic Games. The event had been culminated only minutes before. The award ceremony marked the first ritual of victory at those Olympic Games. As International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Henri Baillet-Latour, Lake Placid Organizing Committee president Godfrey Dewey, and American Olympic Association president Avery Brundage stood by to present the gold silver and bronze medals, respectively, the three winners mounted a strange, roughly-constructed contraption, the first victory podium in Olympic history. Receiving the gold medal was Jack Shea, a 21 -year old Dartmouth College sophomore and reigning American speed skating champion at distances of 500 and 1500 meters.

In the now vast world of modern global elite sport, hardly an athletic meeting is conducted without symbolic victory ceremonial rituals featuring the celebrated and exalted bi-level victory podium. The victory podium as we know it today has been etched in IOC protocol since 1948. Since that time, Olympic victory ceremonial ritual has remained firmly static, the evolution of the podium being the last physical trapping to be added to a protocol that evolved over time between 1896 and 1948. Because of the podium's significance, not only in Olympic sport but in all sport, it seems worthwhile to document the its evolutionary history, a history altogether unknown.

This research paper, then, attempts two historical journeys: first, to accept ritual anthropologist John MacAloon's challenge and answer his question of who should get credit for idea of the podium. And, second, to celebrate the unknown role that Jack Shea the Olympic speed-skater played in what MacAloon characterizes as the great transformation of the victory ritual of the modern Olympic festival.

The primary sources for this mission include: private correspondence between IOC and 1932 Olympic Games Organizing Committee Members, the William May Garland Papers in Los Angeles, the Godfrey Dewey Papers in Lake Placid, the Jack Shea Scrapbooks, pictorial material located in the IOC Archives in Lausanne, the Lake Placid Winter Olympic Games Authority in New York, and, oddly enough, but most critically, the Hamilton City Archives in Ontario.