

The 1908 Olympic Games: Results for All Competitors in All Events, with Commentary, by Bill Mallon and Ian Buchanan (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2000), pp. 516. Reviewed by Robert K. Barney, The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada.

Mention the 1908 London Games and most Olympic history buffs are reminded first of the controversial elements that characterized the festival--the marathon debacle, the tug-of-war debate, the 400 meters athletics event, the display of national flags (or lack thereof), breached etiquette, ignored protocol, and the charges and counter-charges of British and American officials. However, despite all this, the London Olympics, if you discount the Athens 1906 "Intercalated" Games as being "true" Olympic Games, which some do, and some don't, have generally been assessed as the Olympic festival which saved the Modern Olympic Movement from its demise following the perceived failures of Paris in 1900 and St. Louis in 1904. Even though the authors note that the *Official Report* of the 1908 Games was easily the best and most thorough when measured against the reports of predecessor Games, enough was missing to make embarking on this work worthwhile.

Bill Mallon's and Ian Buchanan's *The 1908 Olympics* . . . is the 5th and latest volume in a series originally planned to examine the participation and events of each one of Olympic history's quadrennial festivals from 1896 through the Games of the 7th Olympiad in Antwerp in 1920. Bill Mallon needs no introduction to Olympic historians; neither does Ian Buchanan. Both are familiar to us for their pioneering efforts in helping to establish the International Society of Olympic Historians, which Buchanan served as its first president, and Mallon currently serves in the same way. Then, too, Mallon, an American orthopedic physician, served as the first editor of the society's tri-annual publication, *International Journal of Olympic History*. He is also well known for his co-authorship (with the noted Austrian journalist, Erich Kamper) of one of the genre's most impressive and comprehensive single volumes on the participation and result statistics for each of the Modern Olympic Games, 1896 to 1992 (*The Golden Book of the Olympic Games*). On the other hand, Buchanan, a former insurance executive in Britain and Hong Kong, has for years immersed himself in matters of Olympic history, particularly as that history has related to the participation of Great Britain. Both are dedicated pursuers of the primary source.

In embarking on this book, Mallon and Buchanan strove to weave stark statistics with historical narration, in effect, becoming authors that present both *numbers* and *words*, although, admittedly, with emphasis on the former. The book opens with an introduction that examines the background to the 1908 festival. This is really an overview of the Modern Games, from a discussion of William Penny Brookes and the birth of the Olympic idea in late 19th century Britain, to commentary on the closing ceremonies of the London event of 1908. In between, matters such as how London was chosen as Olympic host, the link between the 1908 Games and the Franco-British Exhibition, the building of facilities, the organization of the events, the execution of the opening ceremony, and highlights in the way of both "Glory and Controversy," are visited. This is followed by almost 300 pages of statistics and commentary regarding the volume's title connotation of "all" competitors "all" events. From

Athletics (track and field), to Yachting, the presentation is impressive, a thorough job of research and compilation. All this is enhanced by appropriate sources, many of them primary in nature, as well as engaging anecdotal moments, including such an obscure but interesting aside that relates to the reader that 36 year old Charlotte “Lottie” Dodd, runner-up in the women’s archery event, had won the ladies Wimbledon singles tennis title in 1887 when she was only 15, remaining the youngest woman ever to win the Wimbledon singles championship. These types of embellishments help to relieve the tedium of absorbing a mass of statistics, many of which have appeared earlier in Mallon’s (and Kamper’s) *The Golden Book of the Olympic Games*.

There are a number of appendices, the most noteworthy of which are Appendices II and III. They fit together like “hand and glove.” Appendix II, a section numbering 13 pages, is entitled “Controversies and Protests.” Here, Mallon and Buchanan outline in graphic fashion each of a dozen major controversies for which the 1908 Games are famous (or infamous). They include rancor, charges and countercharges, and protests attendant to: (1) the opening ceremony and the arrangement of national flags, (2) the marathon footrace, (3) the 4000 meters race in athletics, (4) the method of drawing heats in athletics, (5) the high jump, (6) the pole vault, (7) cycling, (8) high diving, (9) rugby football, (10) the 400 meters freestyle swimming, (11) the Tug-of-War, and (12) Swedish performances in the wrestling event. After setting the scene for the reader by informing about the nature of each controversy, the authors then present Appendix III, a 78 page treatment of “The British and American Responses to ‘The Battle of Shepherd’s Bush.’” This, in my opinion, is the most interesting part of the work. Back and forth the charges and countercharges flew between British and American officials. Mallon, presumably gathering from American primary sources, and Buchanan doing the same in England, gather together the newspaper, magazine, private letter, and formal protest documents from a host of those officially and unofficially involved. Lengthy diatribes, grievances, and explanations flow from the pens and typewriters of a bevy of Yankee and John Bull antagonists, led by Gustavus Kirby and Caspar Whitney in America and Theodore Cooke in Great Britain. Even the noted Swedish Olympic figures, Victor Balck and Sigfrid Edström get into the act. This is, in some cases, new stuff, uniformly interesting and entertaining.



There are a few nit-picks, one in particular, I would like to air. Somehow, at least in every English-language treatment of the 1908 Olympic Games and its marathon event that I have ever seen (and that’s quite a number), the completely exhausted, ill-fated Italian runner who was carried across the finish line by British officials, seemingly to win the gold medal, appears in the record as one Dorando Pietri. Mallon and

Buchanan have followed conventional wisdom on this point, despite an overwhelming amount of primary source notation that alludes to his name in reverse, or “P. Dorando.” One would think that two authors with a reputation for painstaking research to get the record straight, would have come out strongly in correcting the long-recorded but erroneous name of the man who remains a far greater legend in the history of the 1908 marathon event than the man who eventually won it, John Hayes. There were enough references to a “Mr. P. Dorando,” or simply “Dorando” in last name context, in the primary source literature quoted or reproduced in the text or endnote material, (pp. 64, 65, 105, 335, 336, 339, 340, 341, 342, 350, 358, 361, 362, etc., etc.) to have prompted the authors to “set the record straight” once and for all. But they did not. To the contrary, they appear to reject primary source citations to “Mr. P. Dorando” as being incorrect (p. 105-endnote #106, and p. 196-endnote #115). Shortly following the 1908 Olympics, would the young, aspiring, soon-to-be-acclaimed songwriter Irving Berlin have celebrated the Dorando episode by naming a song “Pietri”? Who would know which “Peter” (if Pietri is indeed Peter) he referred to? So, Berlin called his little ditty *Dorando*, Folks would know most certainly which “Dorando” he meant. Then, too, commentators of the time called the celebrated runner “Dorando”; so did Dorando’s fellow marathon competitors. How did the *New York Times*, for instance, refer to Dorando when he performed in distance running events in the United States following the 1908 Games? There remains little doubt that Dorando was the little Italian marathoner’s proper family name. My Italian friends tell me that in certain parts of Italy it is quite common for a person’s name to be expressed with the surname first, followed by one’s given name, similar to that which is convention in China. My conjecture is that an Olympic chronicler, sometime following the 1908 Games, in copying names for the record, either obliterated the comma that usually follows the recording of a person’s last name, followed by that person’s first name, or was oblivious to the nuances of the last name first, given name second phenomenon. If true, then the error has stood uncorrected, decade after



decade, republished record after republished record. Does it all make a difference? Sure it does! For the future, cannot the record be corrected? Mallon himself, in his *Golden Book of the Olympic Games*, carefully explains the last name first dilemma

when listing Chinese athletes in English texts. There, he elected to list them in English context, "given name, followed by family name," thus reversing the normal Chinese order for the sake of standardizing his work. I think he pursued the right tack on this issue and his voluminous statistical history comes off better for having done so. While we're at it, how about Dorando's first name, "Pietri"? Should it not be "Pietro"? Referring to my Italian friends once again, it does not appear that there is such a word as "Pietri" in the language. My feeling here is that the "o" in Pietro somehow has been corrupted to an "i." Presenters of statistics pertinent to the Olympic record, such as Mallon himself, David Wallechinsky, and others, should be bold enough to correct what I refer to as "the Dorando flaw" in the next editions of their work (with an explanation). Or, barring that, how about some debate on the subject by readers of this review?

A couple of other small points prompt a reaction. The authors describe (p. 5) the Shepherd's Bush stadium swimming pool built in the infield of the two concentric-ring tracks used for running (3 laps to the mile) and cycling. They state that the pool was 100 meters long. If true, a facility of that size must certainly have impaired the execution of events held on the infield, of which there were many, including, of course, events that required more than a bit of space, soccer, the discus, and the javelin. This dimension character of this obviously strange physical facility does not seem to arouse the authors' curiosity. Neither do the dimensions of the facility for the diving event(s). The authors state that two diving events (plain and fancy) took place and that a 16.76 meter (5.5 feet) tower was built to accommodate them. They described the two events as platform diving (from 10 meters height) and springboard diving (unexplained as from what height). The authors then tell us that the diving tower was "lowered beneath the surface of the water when not in use." Certainly the water was not 55 feet in depth (was it?). If their statement is true then the tower necessarily would have been lowered longitudinally (perhaps by a winch). Whatever the lowering process, the act must have been equal to witnessing some of the more exciting Olympic contests, or viewing a few of those confrontations between the Brits and Yanks. Finally, in discussing 1908 newspaper commentary, the authors refer (p. 53) to "Amos Alonzo Stagg, a member of the American Olympic Committee, and later a famous football coach . . ." By 1908 there was nothing in the context of "later" that could refer to the fame of University of Chicago Coach Stagg. By that time, he was recognized as one of the nation's best known and respected college football coaches, and had been for some two decades.

These criticisms (which might be held up as "much ado about nothing"), are not meant to take away from a fine book, carefully researched and assembled. The appendix material is outstanding, and so is the index. It is ruggedly bound, the type is of pleasing quality. Indeed, this specialty book on the 1908 Olympics, to my knowledge at least, is the best available in any language, anywhere in the world, including those treatments produced in the host country - Great Britain. Having hurdled the quantitative and narrative dimensions of reporting history, I now invite Messers Mallon and Buchanan to enlarge their portfolio of Olympic themes treatment to include the next obvious step - historical interpretation and analysis. Meanwhile, I shall look forward to the next episode, that being the volume promised on the 1912 Stockholm Games. If it comes close to its five companions - 1896-1908, it will be a delight to read.