

# Britain and the Olympic Games, 1908–1920

## Perspectives on Participation and Identity

Luke J. Harris

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## Britain and the Olympic Games, 1908–1920

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# Britain and the Olympic Games, 1908–1920

Perspectives on Participation and Identity

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# Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	x
<i>The Olympic Games, 1896–1920</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1 The 1908 London Olympics	8
2 The Perspective of the 1908 Olympics in the Nations of Britain	39
3 Preparing for the 1912 Olympics	91
4 The Stockholm 1912 Olympics	114
5 The Perspective of the 1912 Olympics in the Nations of Britain	139
6 Preparing for the 1916 Olympic Games	157
7 The Attitude of Britain towards the Olympic Games in 1919	172
8 British Preparations for the 1920 Olympics	189
9 The 1920 Antwerp Olympics	197
10 The Perspective of the 1920 Olympics in the Nations of Britain	215
Conclusions	227
<i>Appendix</i>	237
<i>Notes</i>	239
<i>Bibliography</i>	276
<i>Index</i>	285



# List of Figures and Tables

## Figures

1.1	'Still Supreme', <i>The Sporting Mail</i> , 25 July, 1908	21
2.1	'The man who beat Denis Horgan', <i>The Freeman's Journal</i> , 31st July 1908, p 6.	64
3.1	'The Horrible Example', <i>The Sporting Life</i> , P. 1	93
4.1	'A contrast', <i>Western Mail</i> , 25 July 1912	135

## Tables

1.1	Medal table from the 1908 Olympics	10
1.2	The performances of British field events entrants at the 1908 Olympics	31
3.1	Field events results for the English Olympic trials, May 1912	104
4.1	1912 Olympic Medal table	116
4.2	British Field Events performances in the Stockholm 1912 Olympics	132
9.1	The Medal table from the 1920 Olympics	198
9.2	Performances at the 1920 AAA and AAU Championships	210

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# List of Abbreviations

AAA	Amateur Athletic Association
AFEA	Amateur Field Events Association
ARA	Amateur Rowing Association
ASA	Amateur Swimming Association
BOA	British Olympic Association
BOC	British Olympic Council
FA	Football Association
FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Association
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
IAAA	Irish Amateur Athletic Association
IARU	Irish Amateur Rowing Union
IOC	International Olympic Committee
MCAAA	Midland Counties Amateur Athletics Association
MCC	Marylebone Cricket Club
NCAAA	Northern Counties Amateur Athletics Association
NCU	National Cycling Union
SAAA	Scottish Amateur Athletic Association
SAAA	Southern Amateur Athletic Association
SASA	Scottish Amateur Swimming Association
SWDN	South Wales Daily News

# The Olympic Games, 1896–1920

1896 – Athens

1900 – Paris

1904 – St Louis

1906 – Athens\*

1908 – London

1912 – Stockholm

1916 – Berlin\*\*

1920 – Antwerp

*Note:*

\*The Intercalated Games

\*\*Despite not taking place because of World War One the 1916 Olympics are still considered to be the sixth Olympic Games

# Introduction

In 2012, London hosted the thirtieth edition of the world's biggest sporting event; the Olympic Games, with 10,500 athletes from 204 nations competing.<sup>1</sup> From the modest beginnings of the inaugural 1896 Games, the holding of the sporting festival every four years since this (excluding the period of the two world wars), has seen the Olympic Games rise to become the 'Circus Maximus of planet Earth'<sup>2</sup> – the great circus of the world. They are viewed as an event of the highest international importance and are not simply a past-time for those involved, but rather, 'a serious proposition for the athletes for those involved be they nation-states, business organizations, the media, or the spectators.'<sup>3</sup>

This book will examine the Olympic Games between 1908 and 1920, from the perspective of Great Britain, a nation that can claim with some legitimacy to be the founder of modern sport. In this period, Britain's position as the premier sporting nation comes under threat, resulting in questions about her sporting ideology and identity. British perspectives are scrutinised from largely the perspective of the press, but also official documentation from the British Olympic and sporting associations. Through these sources, there is an examination of the development of Britain's attitude and identity towards the Olympics, international sport, sporting ideologies and other nations.

This period includes the Olympic Games from London (1908), Stockholm (1912) and Antwerp (1920), along with the abandoned Berlin Olympics of 1916. This period is crucial in the development of the Olympic Games, as they take the shape of the Games by which we recognise them today. It is in this period that the Games first became of national interest, where nations could become internationally recognised and emit their frustrations in what was a major period for the formation of the modern nation-state.<sup>4</sup>

## **Britain and the Olympic Games, 1896–1908**

The 1908 London Olympics are pivotal from a British perspective, not just because she hosted them, but also because they represented her first serious entry into the festival. In the three Olympics prior, Britain had taken little interest, reflected by the lack of a dedicated organising association with which to manage its Olympics welfare. This was despite the fact that two of the founding members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894 were British (Charles Herbert and Arthur Russell).

Despite these men's involvement in the formation of the IOC, British Olympic interest in the inaugural Games that were held in Athens in 1896 was minimal. This would undoubtedly have been different if London, the first choice of the Olympic sub-committee had been chosen as the host,<sup>5</sup> but a team of just four British athletes left for Greece, none of whom were 'very well known.'<sup>6</sup> Three further athletes joined the team in Athens; two were employees of the British Embassy in Athens, and competed in the cycle races, the third was Irish tourist, John Boland, who according to legend competed in the tennis competition because it was the easiest way to find a court in the city.<sup>7</sup> Although it was small in size, the team was successful, winning seven medals. Despite the success these achievements were 'scarcely noticed'<sup>8</sup> within the British press, who did not look kindly upon the Games. *The Spectator*, for example, ridiculed them as an 'athletic whim,'<sup>9</sup> despite the fact that they were an international success.

The second Olympic Games, held in Paris four years later witnessed a more substantial British entrance, with over 100 athletes competing and 30 medals won. Overall, these Games were not as successful as those in Athens owing to poor organisation and that fact that they combined with the World's fair. Such was the confusion that 'some of the athletes returning home were surprised to learn that they had just participated in Olympic Games.'<sup>10</sup> These problems began to occur after the man running the festival, Daniel Merillon, determined that they were not the 'Jeux Olympiques but the Concours Internationaux d'Exercices Physiques et de Sport.'<sup>11</sup>

In 1904, the Olympics left Europe for the first time and were held in the American city of St Louis. Just like the 1900 Olympics, they were held in conjunction with the World's Fair and were also a failure. This gave the movement an uncertain future and Olympic historian, Allen Guttman believes the Games were 'on its last legs'<sup>12</sup> after St Louis. Britain, like many European nations, was barely represented, primarily

because of the arduous journey required to reach the Midwestern city. Consequently, only four Irish athletes made the trip<sup>13</sup> and none of them had any allegiance to the British sporting associations that had previously organised the British entry.

The considerable effort to reach America's mid-west ensured that Coubertin and many members of the IOC decided not to make the journey to St Louis.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the committee's meeting that was due to have taken place at St Louis during the Games happened in London and one of the positives from this meeting was a renewed British interest in the Olympics, with the promise that Britain would form her own Olympic organising body. Subsequently on 24 May 1905, the British Olympic Association (BOA) and its governing council, the British Olympic Council (BOC) were formed in the House of Commons with the desire:

- (i) Spreading in Great Britain a knowledge of the Olympic movement;
- (ii) Ensuring the participation of British representatives both in the Olympic Games and in International Athletic Congress, by supplying information concerning them to British Athletes, and by helping to defray the expenses of such representatives as would otherwise be unable to be present.<sup>15</sup>

The new organisation subsequently organised the British entrants for the 1906 'Intercalated Games,' held in Athens. These Games were organised by Greece, and came about because of a compromise. After the success of the 1896 Olympics, Greek officials wanted the Olympics to be permanently held within her borders, a notion rejected by the IOC because 'the Games had to be celebrated in various places in order to propagate the Olympic ideal, to spread the light.'<sup>16</sup> The outcome of this disagreement were the Intercalated Games, first held to celebrate the ten-year anniversary of the 1896 Olympics and scheduled to be held every four years afterwards. A lack of international support for the second Games due to be held in 1910 ensured that the 1906 Games were the only ones to be held and today they are not considered an 'Olympic Games' by the IOC, but their holding was significant for the development of the movement.

These Games witnessed 20 nations competing and 887 athletes, over 200 more than the 651 competitors in St Louis (of whom only 52 came from outside the United States).<sup>17</sup> These were the first Games that insisted that entries came from national associations, which ended the practice of individuals entering of their own volition. The consequence

of this decision was that the Olympics became of national interest. During the course of these Games, Italy confirmed that it would not be able to host the 1908 Olympics, which it had been awarded.<sup>18</sup> Immediately Britain took up the mantle to host the fourth Olympics.

### **British sporting identity**

As will be documented throughout, the 1908 Olympics witnessed previously unprecedented levels of British interest; one aspect of this was the extensive attention given by the British print media. The lack of British interest in the Olympics prior to 1908 should not be considered an indication of a national apathy towards sport, as the nation was the home to modern sport.<sup>19</sup> Almost all of the sports played at the Olympics, and the majority of the others that were popular internationally, owed their modern organisation and rules to 'British invention.'<sup>20</sup> In 1908, Britain was home to many of the world's premier sporting events, such as the All-England tennis championship at Wimbledon, golf's open championship and rowing Henley regatta, events that did and continued to hamper British Olympic interest.

These sports and events created a philosophy by which those in charge believed they should be played, known as the amateur ethos. This was one of the defining features of British sport and in the view of Lincoln Allison are defined as 'doing things for the love of them, doing them without reward or material gain or doing them unprofessionally.'<sup>21</sup> To the Victorians this principle was also a social construct and an attempt to keep the lower classes out of sport. For example, founder of the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) Sir Montague Sherman, had his own concerns about allowing working-class men into competitive athletics, 'without casting any reflection upon the conduct of the masses as a whole, it is obviously impossible to expect that with many of them the money to be gained by betting or "squaring" races will not offer irresistible temptations.'<sup>22</sup> This description demonstrated the perceptions of the upper-classes towards the people that they perceived to be below them. The rules of the 1878 Henley Regatta were typical of those used across sport; 'No person shall be considered an amateur oarsman or sculler ... Who is or has been trade or employment for wages, a mechanic, artisan, or labourer.'<sup>23</sup> This ruling ensured that only gentlemen from the upper classes could compete in the regatta.

Part of the concern of the upper-class gentleman was that men of the lower classes who did manual jobs would have a physical advantage over the gentlemen. This tied in with the perception that training was



'bad form'<sup>24</sup> and 'practicing too much undermined natural grace and talent.'<sup>25</sup> As Richard Holt states '... amateurs were above all gentlemen, and were not supposed to toil and sweat for their laurels.'<sup>26</sup> Amateur gentleman's preference was for 'effortless superiority, rather than specialist training and their real aim should be taking part in sport for the love of competing rather than for the sake of winning.'<sup>27</sup> This attitude ensured the development of alternative competitions that allowed the men of the lower classes and professionals to compete. Such was the appetite for professional sport within Britain that, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, league competitions in both football and cricket were founded upon the principle of professionalism, but still allowed amateurs and professionals to compete side by side.<sup>28</sup>

The idealisation that Baron Pierre de Coubertin had with British sport and the public school system ensured that one of the instrumental principles of the Olympics was that of British amateurism. Throughout Olympic history, until changes in Olympic legislation occurred first in 1974, with more lenient rulings towards professionals (leading to professional athletes being accepted from 1988), there were conflicts and problems regarding the issue of amateurism. This is a prominent theme that reoccurred throughout the period of this research and provides some of the defining expressions of British identity, both sporting and non-sporting.

## Areas of interest

As stated, prior to hosting the Olympic Games in 1908, British interest in the Games had been minimal. Despite providing the majority of the competitors for the 1908 Olympics there was continued discussion about British participation afterwards. This occurred because of a sense of Olympic apathy and this is present throughout the period under discussion here.

The focus in this book are the events that are of primary importance to Britain before, during and after each Olympic Games, along with the development of opinions and attitudes in the intervening periods between them. These issues are relevant not just from an Olympic and sporting perspective, but some enable a different reflection to some of the wider issues that British society was facing at this time.

One of the non-sporting issues that are discussed here are the military tensions between Britain and Germany. From examining newspapers from the 1908 and 1912, it is evident that there was an enormous interest in German politics, industry and military within the British

press, something reflected within Olympic coverage. Interest in German sport becomes particularly prevalent after the 1912 Olympics when Britain was preparing for the 1916 Olympics, due to be held in Berlin. After World War One in 1919, the thoughts conveyed about Germany competing at the 1920 Olympics help to demonstrate British opinions towards her former enemy in the months after the end of the conflict.

One of the desires of this research was to examine the British Olympic perspective from across all of Britain. There is a perception, both in the present day and historically that 'Britain' means 'England,' and the views of the English press should be considered the British perspective, a consideration that has detrimental effects for both England, and the other nations of the Union. In order to prevent this there are sub-chapters from each Olympics dedicated the fortunes of the athletes and the press from Ireland, Scotland and Wales. These examine how each of these nations perceived the Olympics, both in terms of the British team and how they represented their countrymen who were part of the British team. From the 1908 Olympics, when coverage was at its most plentiful, there is a section dedicated to England, but with less substantial coverage from Stockholm and Antwerp this has not been possible. However, within chapters regarding these Olympics the opinions of the regional English press are present and they help illustrate the differences in regional identities across Britain.

A re-occurring theme is the concern, both sporting and non-sporting, that the British people were becoming physically decadent. These fears began in the late nineteenth century when the theories of 'Social Darwinism' became popular, resulting in theorists beginning to worry about the damage the Industrial Revolution was doing to the population's health.<sup>29</sup> These fears intensified after the Boer War (1899–1902), when British forces struggled to beat an army substantially smaller than her own, a contributory factor to the 1904 government report into physical degeneracy.

International sporting defeats as the close of the nineteenth century and start of the twentieth century was one contributor to the worries of national physical decline. The defeats also damaged the British belief in her sporting superiority. These fears were particularly evident during the 1905 New Zealand rugby tour of Britain, when the colonials swept all that stood in front of her (except Wales). Throughout the period of this monograph, Britain was concerned about her physical condition, and this is evident within Olympic coverage and it becomes a central dimension to her identity. During this period, Britain's primary focus within the Olympics is the athletic events. Curiously, it is only the track events

that are of interest, with those that take place inside the circuit, the field events were almost totally excluded in term of interest, press and organisers alike. Continually here, there is examination of field events, the apathy towards them and the attempts by the British athletic authorities to encourage field event participation in a desire to improve Britain's Olympic fortunes.

# 1

## The 1908 London Olympics

The fourth Olympic Games took place in London, England, between 27 April and 31 October 1908, a period of just over six months, making these the longest of the 30 modern Olympic Games. Twenty-two nations sent athletes to compete, and in total just over 2000 athletes participated. Twenty of these nations had competed in at least one of the three previous Olympics, although there were two nations competing for the first time; Finland and Turkey. Athletes from New Zealand were also competing for the first time since they were part of an Australasian team. The athletes competed across 23 sports and 110 events, which 'not only made the 1908 Games the largest Olympics to date, but also the largest international sports gathering ever staged.'<sup>1</sup>

The athletes that featured in the top three positions were the first in Olympic history to receive the gold, silver and bronze medals that are today synonymous with the Olympic Games. The medals featured a naked male being crowned with a laurel wreath by two women and measured just 34 mm in diameter.

The sporting events began with indoor tennis in late April, and concluded with association football, rugby union, boxing and lacrosse, which took place between 19 and 31 October 1908 (the same date that the Franco-British Exhibition, which was held upon the same site, concluded). The athletics events, the centrepiece of The Games, took place between 13 and 25 July 1908.

The fourth Olympic Games had been awarded to Britain with just 17 months' warning as Rome had been scheduled to host them but dropped out following financial problems after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.<sup>2</sup> The manner by which the British were given the Olympics 'offered a chance to show British organising ability and established an appropriate

relationship with the IOC [International Olympic Committee] which gave the British plenty of leverage in policy matters.<sup>13</sup> The authority by which the British took control of the Olympics was demonstrated by the international rules that their sporting associations established for those sports without such rules. The British also insisted that only British judges would officiate to ensure fair play, moves that also indicated British belief in her sporting hegemony.

The majority of the events took place in the first ever specially constructed Olympic Stadium. Known as 'The Stadium,' 'The Great Stadium' or the 'White City Stadium,' it was located in Shepherd's Bush, west London and alongside the site of the Franco-British Exhibition that was also taking place in the summer of 1908. The exhibition itself was a great success, attracting 8.5 million visitors between May and October. As well as The Stadium the other Olympic locations were; Queen's Club, Kensington (indoor and real tennis), Hurlingham Club, Fulham (polo), Prince's Skating Club, Knightsbridge (figure skating), Northampton Institute, Knightsbridge (boxing), All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, Wimbledon (lawn tennis) and Uxendon School shooting club (clay pigeon shooting).

The stadium was so vast that inside the 440 yards athletics track there was room for a 50-yard swimming pool, diving board, rugby/football sized pitch and outside of it was a cycling track measuring 660 yards. As Britain had only a short time to prepare, the Stadium was assembled in just ten months by George Wimpey and could hold up to 90,000 spectators.

The opening ceremony took place on 13 July 1908 to signal the commencement of the athletic events, with King Edward VII in attendance. On the first Sunday of The Games, a religious service took place in which the Bishop of Pennsylvania gave a sermon where he stated, 'the important thing in these Olympiads is not to win, but to take part,' – a statement that has become synonymous with the Olympics. Hosts Great Britain dominated The Games in terms of total competitors and medals won. Britain provided nearly 700 athletes (36 per cent of those competing)<sup>14</sup> and consequently won 146 medals, as is illustrated in Table 1.1. As will be discussed in detail throughout the following pages, the majority of these victories occurred in the non-athletic events such as boxing, rowing, sailing and tennis (where Britain won every gold medal on offer at Wimbledon). Only British men entered the racquets competition, and polo was competed solely between teams from Britain and Ireland.

Table 1.1 Medal table from the 1908 Olympics

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Great Britain	56	50	39	145
United States	23	12	12	47
Sweden	8	6	11	25
France	5	5	9	19
Germany	3	5	5	11
Hungary	3	4	2	9

Source: Llewellyn, 2011, p. 683.

The athletics contests saw numerous controversies between hosts Britain and the United States, principally the 400 metres and tug-of-war events. Such was the displeasure of the American officials that they produced a booklet called *Tirade of criticism*<sup>5</sup>, which detailed their criticisms. Britain constructed its own response to this, *Replies to criticisms of the Olympic games*. Controversy also occurred in track cycling, when after the 1 kilometre event there were no medals handed out. David Miller explains the reason for this; ‘Of the four finalists, Ben Jones and Clarence Kingsbury of Britain suffered punctures, while Maurice Schilles of France and Victor Johnson (Great Britain) adopted such delaying tactics, finishing outside the time limit, the race was declared void.’<sup>6</sup>

## Organising the British team

During the nineteenth century, Britain had been the driving force behind the formal organisation of many modern sports. It was her sporting associations that created formalised rules and aided sports’ global spread. An outcome of this was that the nations’ of Britain played each other in many of the first international sporting contests. A prime example of this was the first international football match that took place between Scotland and England in November 1872. The match ended goalless, but it was the first of many matches between the two teams, and these refuelled the age old rivalries between the peoples of Britain. Richard Holt states, ‘national difference was the very stuff of sport’<sup>7</sup> and;

‘Scottishness’ and ‘Welshness’ were constantly fed by a sense of antagonism towards the English as the politically and economically dominant force. Sport acted as a vitally important channel for this

sense of collective resentment, which was the nearest either people came to a popular national consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

International sporting matches began during a time that historians believe the identities of the nations of Britain were changing. This primarily concerned the change and loss of their own individual national identities via industrialisation and their role in the British Empire.<sup>9</sup> Paul Ward comments upon British identity and masculinity at this time, 'Man's ultimate function was constructed as the conquest, extension and defence of the "Greater Britain" of the Empire. The "new imperialism" of the late nineteenth century was accompanied by a reconstruction of the central tenets of masculinity, from moral earnestness and religiosity to athleticism and patriotism. In such a way the nation and maleness became entwined.'<sup>10</sup>

When it was announced that for the 1896 Athens Olympics one team would represent England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales it brought about a new sporting concept, as previously the four nations had competed individually. Twelve years later, the concept was still an unusual one, as, apart from in Davis Cup tennis competition, which had begun in 1900 as a contest between Great Britain and the United States of America, the nations of Britain competed separately in sport. The custom of the British nations competing separately may explain why some of the Scottish and Irish sporting associations desired to have their own national team for the 1908 Olympics,<sup>11</sup> rather than for any nationalist desires. The possibility of the British nations competing separately at the 1908 Olympics had been quashed at the 1907 IOC Conference, as this meeting determined that a 'country' is 'any territory under one and the same sovereign jurisdiction.'<sup>12</sup> This ensured that 'Great Britain and Ireland' would have just one team at the London Olympics. The British Olympic Association (BOA) was formed in 1905.

In the three Olympics Games prior to 1905, English sporting associations had organised British participation, for example, the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) had arranged the British athletics team for the 1900 Games.<sup>13</sup> The formation of the BOA saw the inclusion of the Scottish, Irish and Welsh sporting associations in the Council, but often the English Associations dominated. This was the case in swimming, where the selection board comprised three English officials and only one official from each of the other three nations.<sup>14</sup>

The length of the 1908 Olympics, combined with the lack of international interest in some events, ensured that Britain entered more

than one team in some sports. For example in the tug-of-war, three teams represented England (to create a five team competition),<sup>15</sup> and in hockey, each of the British nations had their own team (to make a six team competition).<sup>16</sup> The British teams in both of these events competed under the name of 'Great Britain and Ireland', and ensured that Britain won all of the medals on offer. The Football Association (of England) also made similar plans for their sports competition, but these plans fell through because of a lack of support from the other national associations.<sup>17</sup> The result was that just one British team, comprised solely of English amateurs, competed. This side was captained by Tottenham Hotspurs' Vivian Woodward and, after victories over Sweden and the Netherlands, they faced Denmark in the final, winning by two goals to nil to take the gold medal.

### **The belief in superiority of British culture**

The growth and prosperity of the British Empire had given the British people a sense of superiority, both physically and culturally.<sup>18</sup> Charles Darwin's various works had a major impact upon this feeling, as described by David W Brown; 'throughout the English-speaking world, philosophers, politicians and militarists now considered wider social ideas and issues from a Darwinian standpoint.'<sup>19</sup> At the start of the twentieth century, some people began to question if British superiority had diminished and international sporting defeats were one area that contributed to this feeling.

Sport was a central element to British identity at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries. Mike Huggins comments that 'the games ethic and athleticism variously became a cultural bond, a moral metaphor and potent symbol of British power.'<sup>20</sup> Success in sporting contests was an expectation, and the inevitable defeats led to dismay. A prime example of the sadness of defeat was demonstrated after England's first home cricket defeat. Cricket had established itself as England's national game in the late nineteenth century and enjoyed a strong cross class following. After the eight run defeat to Australia in London in 1882, *The Sporting Times* published an obituary to 'English cricket, which died at the Oval on 29th August, 1882,'<sup>21</sup> leading to the creation of one of the world's famous of sporting contests 'The Ashes'. The growth of sports across the world, particularly across the British Empire and North America, gave Britain previously unprecedented competition. Consequently, defeats occurred and this dented the British belief in her sporting superiority.



One of the most damaging defeats to Britain's sporting identity came at the hands of the touring New Zealand rugby union team in 1905. This team defeated all comers apart from Wales, this went to increase concerns about British physicality and sporting prowess.<sup>22</sup> These fears continued to grow and historian Richard Holt believes that at the 1908 Olympics the British believed their 'racial virility' was on trial; 'the spread of a crude social Darwinism was making nations increasingly sensitive about their sporting prowess'. Sport would reveal 'the survival of the fittest.'<sup>23</sup> The British role in the formal organisation of sport was apparent again for the 1908 Olympics, when the various British Associations came together to produce a rulebook for all 24 Olympic sports.<sup>24</sup> Matthew Llewellyn comments upon what the creation of the rulebook said about British identity:

the BOA's codification efforts highlighted the nation's pioneering role in the modernisation of sport. As the self-appointed leader of modern sport, the British naturally tried to establish their own unique interpretation of how to 'play the game' as the dominant international model.<sup>25</sup>

John Loweson believes that through the creation of this rulebook the 'English organisers had managed to impose, at least in appearance, their gentlemanly ethic of amateurism on the national teams, so a brief moral as well as performance success could be claimed.'<sup>26</sup> He continues by arguing that British national identity could be defined by its need to impose its culture upon others. This is also a point made by Mangan and Hickey.

Victorians were determined to civilise the rest of the world, and an integral feature of that process as they understood it was to disseminate the gospel of athleticism which had triumphed so spectacularly at home in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

Prior to the commencement of the events that took place in July 1908, the interest of the British press, who prior to this had made little reference to the Olympic Games, grew. *The Times* included a three part history of the event to date, with its final instalment including a feature about the coming Olympiad, describing Britain as 'the mother of athletics'<sup>28</sup> and 'the institution of these international gatherings,' descriptions which indicated a British belief in her sporting superiority. A preview

in *The Observer* wrote with satisfaction of how Britain had been able to arrange the Olympics at such short notice, how it was the most suitable location for The Games and had the best public:

Almost at the last moment Great Britain was chosen as the one country in the world which could cater for the great festival in a manner worthy of its traditional past. Italy had been accorded the distinction of arranging for the Olympic Games of 1908, but their council felt unequal to the occasion, and so it came about that the mind of the authorities turned to England, which alone seemed to command the essentials for success – a fine body of athletes, facilities for providing a suitable stadium, and, above all, an enthusiastic and hospitable public.<sup>29</sup>

The article in *The Observer* emits a belief in British/English pre-eminence, with a hint that only Britain/England could organise the Olympics at such short notice. *The Observer* furthered the belief in British superiority, stating, ‘the present gathering is expected to eclipse all previous contests.’<sup>30</sup> The AAA’s Olympic guide also made similar boasts, stating that The Stadium was ‘the largest and best appointed the world has yet known.’<sup>31</sup> Historian Derek Birley backs up these claims, he states, ‘The London Games of 1908 were undoubtedly a great feat of organisation which probably no other nation had the experience and expertise to perform.’<sup>32</sup> An indication that these British statements from the British were not without evidence. One of the leading sporting publications of 1908 was *C B Fry’s Magazine*, a publication edited by the former England international cricketer and footballer. Within this Fry wrote a monthly editorial, and during the summer of 1908 he frequently commented about the Olympic Games. His first Olympic themed editorial appeared in April 1908 and within this, he demonstrated a belief in British superiority:

We have an opportunity this year of doing what has never yet been done; namely, of making a success of a modern Olympia. The point of fact, a revival of the Olympic Games has small chance of being successful anywhere except in Britain, or in the United States of America; for nowhere else in the world the athletic ‘events’ which form the programme, and the necessary organisation and administration ... The first modern Olympic Games at Athens were really a muddle and failure, except as a kind of bombastic show; the second were better, but still unsatisfactory. The Olympic Games held in Paris were a pure farce.<sup>33</sup>

Fry's editorial demonstrated disregard of the Olympics of Athens and Paris. He clearly believed in the superiority of the English speaking peoples of Britain and the United States. Fry's biographer, Kate Jackson, considers that Fry knew what he was doing by making such a comment, as he was aware of 'the national significance of sport and drew on the relationship between the sporting contest and the military or imperial contest and reinforced the connection between sporting culture and imperial vitality – sport could emphasise an ideology of cultural supremacy.'<sup>34</sup>

Fry's April 1908 editorial was not the only time that he expressed such a perspective about the Games. In June 1908, he revisited the subject, stating a belief that the only way the Olympics could be successful was if they were held and competed in by the British world:

What strikes me about the three big attempts at a world-wide Olympia is that they have been magnificently international in plan and prospect, but wonderfully parochial in their realisation. I admit that I believe in the Pan-Britannia; and not in the world-wide idea; and I dare say our Games this year will achieve an International effect far surpassing anything of like nature in the past.<sup>35</sup>

This editorial presented a view that Britain, her Empire and the United States were superior to others. The concept of 'Pan-Britannia,' referred to here was not a new one, having firstly been raised by the Australian-born John Astley Cooper,<sup>36</sup> in July 1891 and 1911.<sup>37</sup> His vision was for 'the establishment of a periodic festival to celebrate the industrial, cultural and athletic prowess of the Anglo-Saxon race.'<sup>38</sup> He foresaw the gathering would be called either the 'United English Festival' or the 'English Festival', although the venture did not get off the ground.<sup>39</sup>

Fry's proposal was to exclude those races and peoples not becoming of British standards. This was further indicated in his July 1908 editorial where he commented; 'if we had Pan-Britannic Olympic Games in London every four years, and if competitors came from all parts of the empire, then we should have revived the ancient Olympic Games in what I consider their true form.'<sup>40</sup> This proposal links in with the theories of 'Socialism Darwinism', and the belief that the British races (of which the United States should be considered one of), were superior to others.

The undertone of Fry's comments suggests that the Olympics and international sport would be best served by British control. In his view, only if this happened would 'Olympic' morals be kept up. Such

comments linked Britain to Ancient Greece, and Fry was not alone in making this connection, often referred to as ‘Hellenism’. Dikaia Chatziefstathiou and Ian Henry state that this was where the Ancient Greeks were portrayed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as an advanced race in Europe and ‘brought ancient Greece to the forefront of European thought.’<sup>41</sup> Across Britain, Ancient Greek style was visible in theatre, literature (through such examples as Thomas Hughes *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*) and architecture, such in the design of the Bank of England building. In the eyes of the British, sport provided another way to link together the two cultures. Sidney Colvin, the Director of Cambridge University’s Fitzwilliam Museum, spoke of this during a public lecture in 1878:

It has been said that Englishmen and ancient Greeks are much like one another in two respects. One is their ignorance of all languages except their own, and the other is their love of physical sports. We have our Epsom and our Grand National, our games of cricket and football, our rowing and our running matches, and we despise Frenchmen and foreigners.<sup>42</sup>

These comments emphasise sport as a link between Industrial Britain and Ancient Greece. This perspective was not just alleged by the British, as the IOC’s founder, Pierre de Coubertin made the association during a 1917 lecture to the ‘The Greek Liberal Club of Lausanne.’ In this, he argued that the Greek revival had begun in public schools.<sup>43</sup>

British performance at the 1908 Olympics encouraged some people to argue that Britain was not in fact the modern successor to Ancient Greece. For example, *The Observer* made the following comment after the first week of Olympic athletic competition:

The heavens may weep; the Stadium promoters may sorrow that the glorious spirit of old Greece for its Olympic games has not been transmitted to England, or if it has, it is dormant; but the athletic spirit of England for foot-racing and feats of strength long ago decayed. Those who thought to revive in a moment that which began to rapidly decay more than twenty years ago must bear no uncommon optimism.

One has only to think of the great athletic meetings in the environs of London which has their little day and ceased to be, and to remember that running as a commanding English sport long ago ceased to reign.<sup>44</sup>

Although the editorial argued that Britain was not comparable to Ancient Greece, its reference to it does indicate that there were people who believed the two were linked. The editorial's focus was upon the apparent diminishing interest in athletics in England, with the belief that her superiority in the sport had disappeared because of this. After British defeats at The Games became frequent, editorials such as that of *The Observer* that bemoaned the nation's lost prestige and superiority in athletics became commonplace.

This was very different to that expressed prior to the commencement of the Olympics, when the press stated a belief that Britain would be triumphant. The *Football and Sports Special* of Sheffield stated that there was 'substantial potential of success'<sup>45</sup> for home athletes. *The Sporting Life's* Olympic preview posed the questions; 'Will the Stars and Stripes beat the Union Jack? Will the Maple leaf beat both? Will the Kangaroo hold its own with the springbok? Will the Mother Country be beaten by her Colonies?'<sup>46</sup> Its conclusion was that despite the strength of the United States' team (the only other nation mentioned by name in the article), 'We still, however, pin our faith in the British Isles.'<sup>47</sup> References to the United States were common in the Olympic previews, and upon occasion, American achievements were belittled.

In *The Times*, 'Olympic history', it wrote how American athletes had dominated the 1900 Olympics, but this was only because 'they were the only nation which took the Games really seriously.'<sup>48</sup> Its argument was that with Britain now taking an interest in the Olympics, she would become the dominant force. Other newspapers were a less optimistic, such as *The Northern Athlete*, which believed that 'England at the present time is a long way below her athletic strength of some twenty years ago.'<sup>49</sup>

As the Olympics progressed, it was American athletes that took the majority of the winnings. Despite this, sections of the British press stood by their athletes and the belief that Britain was supreme. After the first week of athletics events *The Observer* issued defiant headlines, beginning with 'Great Britain's triumph,'<sup>50</sup> and the subheading 'Supremacy in the Olympic Games.' The article below these headlines stated that 'In the aggregate to date, the United Kingdom now leads with 30 firsts in the finals; the United States come next with nine wins, but the other countries have little yet of which to boast.'<sup>51</sup> This argument was based upon the total number of victories across the whole Olympics, rather than those that had occurred over the previous week of track and field events where America had dominated.

The most eagerly and enthusiastically anticipated event of the Olympic Games was the marathon race. This took place on the

penultimate day of athletic competition, 24 July 1908. The marathon had first been run at the 1896 Olympics, recreating the Greek legend of Pheidippides, who had run from the Battle of Marathon to Athens to proclaim that the Persians had been defeated.<sup>52</sup> The running of this event had created great excitement in Greece,<sup>53</sup> and replicated by the British press prior to the 1908 event. Many notable publications issued lengthy previews, featuring the races history, biographies of the favourites and maps of the course.<sup>54</sup>

A familiar theme was to emphasise the race as the ultimate test of a human's physicality, along with the hope of a British victory. Such was the belief in British success that one preview boasted, 'we shall have the first six men home.'<sup>55</sup> These previews gave the impression that a victory for a British athlete would prove the superiority of British physicality, and silence people who believed that she was in decline. The hopes for British marathon success were not to be fulfilled. British athletes began the race strongly with Price and Lord leading during the first eight miles.<sup>56</sup> This did not last and, in conditions described as 'tropical'<sup>57</sup> in one report, Britain's first athlete finished in twelfth position. The failure of British athletes in this pivotal athletic event ensured a lengthy post-mortem in the press. One aspect under great scrutiny were the preparations of the athletes, such as appeared in *The Athletic News*:

The plan of each British runner seemed to be, 'The devil take the hindmost'. Their very keenness to take the lead proved the reason of their downfall. It is all the same old story of the observance of old-fashioned theories. Had a team manager of experience been appointed even a fortnight before to look after the British Marathon men and had good advice and good attendance been vouchsafed the men, matters might have been different. But I do think the chance of a marathon victory was absolutely washed.<sup>58</sup>

This editorial questioned the entire structure of British sport, desiring to amend some British methods, such as a move away from the apparent 'old-fashioned theories.' This referred towards the British ethos of undertaking little training and preparation prior to the event, known as 'effortless superiority.' *The Sporting Life* echoed this sentiment, stating; 'the failure was due to lack of judgement and proper preparation rather than to the heat of the day or any other cause.'<sup>59</sup>

The marathon was won by American Johnny Hayes, but amidst controversy, as he was the second man to cross the finish line. The athlete that finished first was Italian, Dorando Petri who was disqualified after

he received help from the judges after he collapsed from exhaustion during the conclusion of the race in the Olympic Stadium.<sup>60</sup>

The failure of a British representative to win a medal in the marathon represented a major knock to British notions of their athletic superiority. This event came at the end of a fortnight where British athletes had been constantly defeated, primarily by the competitors of the United States. Both before and after this race, editorials appeared that bemoaned the British performance and American methods. *The Athletic News* stated that the United States had been the dominant force at the Olympics, as they 'have carried off all the greater honours of the London Olympiad.'<sup>61</sup> *The Times* also wrote about the dominance of American athletes and the disappointing British display. It felt that:

We have learnt some useful lessons. Especially we of the United Kingdom have learnt that in speed and strength we are far behind the Americans, and even our last confident hope that the older nations was endowed with greater powers of endurance than its mighty rival received a rude shock when our chosen long-distance runners were hopelessly outclassed in the severest test of all.<sup>62</sup>

Such an editorial demonstrated how much of a shock the defeats were, illustrating the dominance of American athletes. In *The Sporting Mail*, E W Cox stated that British athletes believed they had much to learn from the Americans.<sup>63</sup> Other editorials were harsher, and felt that the Olympics 'has had a most disastrous effect upon the reputation of British athletics.'<sup>64</sup> *The Birmingham Daily Mail* believed that Britain, the 'home' of distance running was 'not altogether pleasant to be forced to realise that in this particular department of athletics we have apparently lost ground.'<sup>65</sup>

A scathing article in the *Review of Reviews* believed that Britain's athletic ability was owed 'to a few selected experts,'<sup>66</sup> and that the preference for the majority of the population was to watch sport rather than participate in it. It believed; 'Do we not pursue sport rather as a spectacle than as an activity?'<sup>67</sup> Such an editorial hinted towards a belief in the general physical decline of the British people, also a questioning of the national sporting identity.

Other journalists were in denial about the loss of British athletic supremacy. *The Observer* featured a table with the full Olympic medals by nation listed, and stated that the "'United Kingdom" is proudly ahead with 38 points from the United States, with just 22.'<sup>68</sup> Another editorial from the same publication stated that America had been the dominant Olympic nation because they had twice the population of

Britain, before giving the first indication that Britain would be better served by an all encompassing Empire team:

The moral in sport is the moral in politics. The Mother Country and the colonies together can hold their own against the world, but the island alone is not large enough to keep pride of place we have held in the past.<sup>69</sup>

Talk of a team encompassing all of the British Empire would become more prominent four years later, after the Stockholm Olympics, with some sections of the press believing it to be a real possibility.

*The Western Mail* was defiant of British defeat in an editorial where it declared; 'Great Britain has every reason to be proud of her achievements in the Stadium, where her victories far exceed in number those of the United States or any other country.'<sup>70</sup> This statement had merit, as Britain had won a large percentage of Olympic events, however, in the athletic events that gained the majority of attention and prestige had witnessed a disappointing British performance. The same tone was present via a cartoon in Birmingham's weekly sporting newspaper *The Sporting Mail* (Figure 1.1), on the final day of events at the track. At the centre of the cartoon, is John Bull, 'the national personification of Britain.'<sup>71</sup> The by-line of the cartoon was that 'there's life in the old dog yet'. Underneath, it commented that Britain had taken the 'Lion's share of the Olympic spoils', which is partially true as overall the host nation had been the most successful at the Olympics, although in the athletics events such as that pictured here the lack of victories indicated she was not 'supreme.'

*The Sporting Life* claimed that the Olympics were not evidence of degeneration within the British race.<sup>72</sup> Its belief was that the contests between Britain and the United States were the outstanding feature of the Olympics. It continued:

a table of wins and losses shows that victory has gone on Stadium events to the British Isles, we are surely entitled to claim, in no proud spirit of boasting, but with a degree of proper pride, that we are still in the front rank of athletic nations, and there is no need for despair so long as we are able to command such splendid material as that which for the past fortnight has been fighting our athletic battles in the Olympic Games.<sup>73</sup>

Such an article suggests that Britain had been dominant in Olympic competition, rather than struggling to compete with the United States, which



## STILL SUPREME.



**John Bull:—This'll show 'em there's life in the old dog yet!**

[The lion's share of the Olympic spoils have fallen to the United Kingdom.]

Figure 1.1 *The Sporting Mail*, 25 July, 1908  
Source: 'Still Supreme', *The Sporting Mail*, 25 July, p 1.

had been the reality. The same newspaper was more realistic in another article when it compared the results of Britain and the United States. In this it stated that Britain had taken 30 victories to America's nine, although it was noted that the Americans had only entered 23 events in total, and she had 'won all she expected and one more (the 1,500 metres)'<sup>74</sup>, concluding it was America that had won the 'duels' between the two. Reflections on the British performance in the Olympic Games brought about differing opinions about how well the nation had performed.

Those newspapers that stated the number of victories alone was proof of British supremacy did have merit to their argument. Although, the duration of the Olympics, and the number of foreign entrants in some events in comparison to Britain's made British superiority in terms of medals always likely; there were nearly 700 British athletes out of the total 1,900 athletes that competed in The Games, well over one-third of competitors.

The athletic defeat to the United States proved a hard pill for the British media to swallow. This explains why some sections of the press preferred to reflect on The Games as a whole in their reviews, rather than just the athletics contests. Those that did solely reflect upon the athletics did in instances indicate a belief that Britain had been defeated and usurped in athletic prowess by the United States. The marathon race in particular brought some of the most extensive and damning criticism of Britain's athletic performance. In the aftermath of this race, concerns about British approaches to preparation and training were raised for the first time, concerns that would become of a feature of Olympic coverage in future years.

### **Evidence of British apathy to the 1908 Olympic Games**

The shortage of British success in the Olympics prior to the 1908 Games can be partly attributed to its lack of interest in them. The 1908 Olympics brought the festival to British attention for the first time, and the response in the British press was to be predominantly apathetic.

Prior to the Olympics, the majority of the press were apprehensive about their holding, and sections of it could be described as being openly negative. One of many examples of this came in an editorial from the weekly illustrated publication, *The Sphere*, where it ridiculed the Games:

We seem likely this year to be under the dominion of the world Olympic. I observe that there is even to be Olympic lawn tennis, though it will be played not at Shepherd's Bush but at Wimbledon

just as if it was not Olympic at all. This reminds one of the crockery dealer who finding his wares hanging fire relabelled them 'Art designs' and sold them?<sup>75</sup>

This satirical comment exposes one of the long-standing criticisms of the Olympic Games, that there are too many events taking place. The 1908 Olympic Stadium had been built to host many of the 22 sports, but it could not host all of them and consequently they were held at other venues, such as Wimbledon for tennis and Henley for rowing. The problem for these Olympic events was that they did not generate the interest or excitement either from athletes or spectators that the venues primary sporting location did. For instance, the tennis competition came shortly after the pinnacle event of the summer; the All-England Championships at the same venue and many of the top players were absent from the Olympic event, both factors that undoubtedly damaged public interest.

The British public's Indifference and its potential lack of awareness that The Games were taking place were reflected in the numbers that attended the opening ceremony on 15 July 1908. The ceremony took place after the start of the first events of the Olympics in April, but prior to the athletic events in July. The Games were formally opened by King Edward VII on a wet Monday afternoon, and press reports indicated that the small number of the public were there to see King Edward VII, rather than the athletes.<sup>76</sup>

The sparseness of the crowd at the opening ceremony can be potentially dismissed as a sign of public apathy, as no actual sport took place. The lack of spectators was to continue during the first week of competition, something picked up on in the press. Potential spectators were no doubt put off by the rain (which persisted for long periods of the first week), and with much of the stadium, particularly the cheaper stands, exposed to the elements, it made attendance an unattractive proposition.<sup>77</sup>

Another factor attributing to the lack of spectators was the price of the tickets, portrayed in the press as being too expensive.<sup>78</sup> A *Western Mail* editorial asked, 'Where are the public?' and described that the atmosphere within the stadium as 'nonexistent,' alleging that it was 'difficult to realise whether contests were actually going on or the competitors were merely practicing.'<sup>79</sup>

After a week of competition, *The Bystander* published a page spread under the heading 'The limp Olympiad'<sup>80</sup> and the subheading 'Happy contestants and Miserable spectators,' accompanied by photos of a few

spectators watching in damp conditions and the description; ‘A few of the few spectators, damply interested in the proceedings. (There is room for 90,000 in the Stadium).’<sup>81</sup> The average attendance for the first week was just over 19,000 a day.<sup>82</sup>

Despite these expressions of apathy from sections of the press, the London evening newspaper, *The Star* tried to change this, launching a campaign for ‘Free seats and Cheap Seats for the Olympic Games,’<sup>83</sup> an action that inspired other newspapers to take up the crusade. This resulted in reduced ticket prices being introduced and more spectators attending the second week’s events, with the average attendance over 50,000 a day. Undoubtedly, the improved weather for the second week, which was noted to be particularly hot on the day of the marathon race, was another important factor that encouraged the public to attend. The reduction in ticket prices helped to improve the attendance, but apart from at the final stages of the marathon race, the Stadium remained far from full.

The crowds of the second week of the competition did demonstrate that there was British interest in the Olympics. Arguably, the first week of The Games is perhaps not the best marker for judging public interest, as the weather made attendance an unattractive proposition. Not all sections of the press were as proactive as *The Star* in promoting the Olympics. Many remained apathetic throughout. A theme perused in some articles was that the lack of spectators was because of a downturn in interest in athletics within England. This formed part of the argument in an editorial in *The Observer*, on 19 July. It declared that the ‘glorious spirit’ for the Olympics had not been transmitted to England:

the athletic spirit of England for foot-racing and feats of strength long ago decayed. Those who thought to revive in a moment that which began to rapidly decay more than twenty years ago must bear no uncommon optimism.

One has only to think of the great athletic meetings in the environs of London which has their little day and ceased to be, and to remember that running as a commanding English sport long ago caused to reign, to easily account for the alleged apathy.<sup>84</sup>

This article was just one of a long list of articles that used ‘England’ and ‘English’ when ‘Britain’ and ‘British’ would have been a more accurate description. In content, it repeatedly mentioned the decaying interest for athletics in England, suggesting that the loss of prowess in this sport was a possible reason for the apathy. Britain’s athletes had certainly not been

successful as had been hoped for in athletic competition, but the defeats endured during the period in international cricket and rugby contests had not been to the detriment of attendances of these sports in Britain.

The lack of athletic success had an impact on how *The Sphere* viewed the Olympics. It belittled the performance of the home athletes, struggling to believe that Britain had only been successful in 'eight events out of twenty-seven!'<sup>85</sup> Its view was that there was little hope of improvement because; 'Our "varsity men" – or the majority of them – do not care a fig for serious athletics; many of our artisan runners are keen on keeping good marks than on showing speed in scratch races, and our officials are quite content to let matters drift along.'<sup>86</sup> Such a perspective indicated that there was a class distinction within British athletics and this was holding the nation back. These comments do expose a problem within British athletics. University athletes of the period commonly stopped running after graduating, while many other top athletes' preference was for handicap races and professional meetings with financial rewards, which prevented them from competing in amateur events. *The Sphere* concluded by bemoaning Britain's position in the athletic events, describing it as 'disgraceful.'<sup>87</sup> It had expected Britain to be dominant in the athletic contests.

Another theme that was prevalent in several articles was the apparent British preference for her sporting championships and festivals. These events were generally well established by 1908, with even some of the more recent additions having been in existence for several decades. By contrast, the Olympics had only been in existence for 12 years, and had previously barely registered within Britain. From the depictions found within the press it would be reasonable to suggest that there was a lack of excitement regarding the Olympics compared to the other sporting events that took place that summer. Some publications clearly had little time for the Olympic Games, such as *The Bystander*:

The time is that there is no room in England at any rate-for these 'extra turns' in nearly every branch of sport. The sporting public doesn't see the force of them, and doesn't want them. Nor is this to be wondered at ... Too much has been attempted, and the public have shown that they think so by the small amount of heed which they have paid to the superfluous items. The chief thing that will be remembered in connection with the Olympic Games of 1908 after they are over will be that they *are* over.<sup>88</sup>

Comments such as this would not have encouraged public attendance; it was derisory and had nothing positive to say. The belief expressed

here was that the Olympics are ‘extra turns’ – additional to the events that dominated the English sporting summer. This view was echoed elsewhere, such as in *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*:

There is neither enthusiasm nor interest for any ‘sport’ but horse-racing amongst the English ‘upper classes’; and the working people are not in a position to attend at Shepherd’s Bush every day. They would prefer a cricket match, in any fail financially.<sup>89</sup>

Such a comment indicated a class division in terms of sporting interest, indicating the impression that athletics was followed predominantly by the working-classes. The attendance of the working-classes was not aided by the fact that the Olympics began on a Monday and continued uninterrupted until the Sabbath and took place during the daytime. The comment that the upper classes had no Olympic interest in the Games had some merit to it.

The British sporting summer was well established by 1908 and the events were not only important sporting gatherings, but also important social occasions, attracting the patronage of the wealthy.<sup>90</sup> Events such as the Henley Regatta, Wimbledon, the Open golf Championship, cricket at Lords and summer’s numerous horse racing festivals ensured that the British summer was full of sport. *The Bystander* made an argument that there was no room for the Olympics within the British sporting summer:

there is no room for them in a season already crammed to overflowing with games and sport of every sort and kind, has been borne out by the meagre crowds which came day by day to witness the contests in the Stadium in Shepherd’s Bush.<sup>91</sup>

The article continued by proposing the idea that the British public’s apathy occurred because the Olympics were ‘migratory’ and ‘intermittent,’ concluding by stating that they ‘occupy no permanent place in the annals of sport.’<sup>92</sup> The Olympic Games were very much in their infancy in 1908, they had certainly not built the sense of anticipation that exists for them in the twenty-first century, neither did they have the history many British sporting events enjoyed, or the momentum that holding The Games every year might have generated.

The press were also critical of the organisation of The Games, such as in the following *Northern Athlete* article. It bemoaned that spectators present for the morning session had only the archery to watch, but those in the afternoon had ‘so many events were crowded on one after the other that it was impossible to follow the multiplicity of races.’<sup>93</sup> It

concluded that the organisers 'might learn points from the promoters of the ordinary athletic meeting.' It appeared that their scheduling did not aid their cause.

Despite the weather (a constant issue in the first week of the Olympic athletics events) and high admission prices, the British people were by their own admission lovers of watching sport. This devotion was referred to in a *Times* article, which argued why the British public should be attending the Olympic events:

If it was only possible to believe that the public do not come in their thousands because they cannot spare the time, there would be no cause for regret. But the large gates which can be drawn, even before lunch-time, by any important cricket match at the Oval or Lord's, seem to confute that argument. There are plenty of people who have the leisure to come.<sup>94</sup>

Cricket, referred to in the *Times* article is a good sport to compare the Olympics with, as both took place during the summer, were contested in the daytime and in similar types of settings. Keith Sandiford states that daily attendances for first class cricket matches in 1900 were between 8000 and 24,000,<sup>95</sup> and although it was played on a Saturday, the majority of match days were during the week. Cricket was the 'national' sport of the time,<sup>96</sup> and followed by all the classes up and down the country. The attendances at these matches indicated a deep love of the game, but also an appetite for paying to attend sport during weekdays from all members of the social classes.

As previously illustrated C B Fry in the magazine to bear his name wrote several scathing editorials upon the 1908 Olympics. His final Olympic themed editorial appeared in October, it ended with a positive: 'having regard to the great difficulties and stupendous organisation required, I must admit that the recent cosmic Olympics were remarkably successful – within the limits of their possibilities.'<sup>97</sup> Fry did credit The Games, as he admitted they had been successful, he stated they had reached their 'limits' although; he did not indicate what these were. Fry's perspective was by no means the most negative representation of the Olympics. The following is a quote from *The Saturday Review*, which stated that it did not see anything significant in The Games:

You cannot make games 'Olympic' by entrusting their international organisation to generals, counts and princes, merely because they

know nothing, and are never likely to know anything, about athletics, ... your games will still be nothing but a modern athletic meeting of unusually large dimensions, and you may be thankful if they are not spoiled, even as such, by the tin trumpets and rattles and misconduct of vulgarians from the Regions where Pindar, poor innocent, located (the Americanism is inevitable) the Islands of the Blessed.<sup>98</sup>

This article began by attacking the many members of the IOC, who were aristocrats, and doubting their ability to run such a sporting organisation. It represented further British criticism of the organisation of the Olympic Games and gave the indication that British sporting organisations were superior.

A large proportion of British journalists presented an apathetic perspective of the Olympics via numerous editorials. The indication given was that there no desire for the Olympic Games in Britain, with numerous reasons given that went to belittle the Games and the events that took place. Many of the negative comments made about The Games were mere conjecture, although the lack of public attendance represented evidence of British apathy. In the first week of competition in athletics, the poor weather, timing of competitions and the cost of tickets were all factors that harmed spectator numbers. This had been somewhat remedied in the second week when ticket prices were dropped and the weather improved.

The Olympic Stadium was the largest in Britain and held roughly 90,000 spectators, far more than even the biggest football and cricket matches attracted. For example, the FA Cup Final, the pinnacle of the football season, attracted 74,967 spectators to Crystal Palace for the Newcastle United versus Wolverhampton Wanderers match in 1908, and the average First Division league attendance was between 30,000 and 40,000 people, with home matches generally occurring fortnightly.<sup>99</sup> Based upon the figures from football and cricket it appears that the hopes of filling the Olympic Stadium every day were somewhat unrealistic. The marathon race in particular attracted a large crowd, of between 80,000 and 100,000 people.<sup>100</sup>

Despite evidence of an improving attitude towards the Olympics, as the athletics section drew to a close there were still people that remained apathetic towards them. One such perspective was expressed in *The Scottish Referee*, by 'Cockney Cackle.' His standpoint indicated that some British journalists would continue to remain firmly against the Olympics, a sentiment that remained in place across this period:

I am sick and tired of the Olympic Games, and of discussions as to the hard fate of the Italian performer, who was the first to breast the



tape, but did not win the race [in the marathon]. I fancy, too, that the rest of you are weary of the babble and the balderdash in regard to the events at the Stadium, ... I have been to the Stadium on several occasions and I found the place dull – except on the day of the Marathon Race, when I found the place ghastly.<sup>101</sup>

## **British performance in field events at the 1908 Olympics**

A continuing theme throughout this monograph is the performance and depiction of field events by Britain at the Olympic Games. These events represented a particular area of athletics in which Britain did not fare well during the 1908 Olympics, and one where her major rival, the United States, took the majority of the medals, winning eight of the 12 titles on offer and Britain just two.<sup>102</sup> These victories ensured that it was the United States who dominated the athletics medal table with 42 medals, of which 16 were gold, substantially more than Britain who won just seven gold medals and less than half of the medals of the United States.

The little success Britain enjoyed in field events came through Irishmen, as, although there were a number of Scottish athletes in the team who were capable of winning medals, they performed poorly. England's representatives performed particularly badly, resulting in suggestions from the press for more to be done to encourage these events.

This section will concentrate upon the press coverage of field events at the 1908 Olympics, with examination of the expressions of British identity seen towards them. In particular, there will be consideration of the expressions of apathy that regularly appeared within the press and whether they were a representation of a British or English identity? The two British victories in field events came in the hop, step and jump (the triple jump) and the tug-of-war. The former was won by Irish athlete, Timothy Ahearne, who immigrated to the United States the following year. The latter victory was a contentious one, as during the quarter final the Liverpool Police (one of three British teams competing) apparently used illegal footwear against the American team. This plunged not just this contest, but the whole athletics programme, into controversy.<sup>103</sup>

Aside from the victory by the City of Liverpool Police in this event, the best performance by a non-Irish athlete in the British team was by Scotland's Thomas Nicolson, who finished fourth in the hammer<sup>104</sup> and ninth in the shot put events. All of the other British medal winners

were Irishmen; Cornelius ‘Con’ Leahy (silver medal for high jump) was born in County Limerick and his loyalties lay with Ireland, not Britain. This had been previously established via his involvement with Peter O’Connor’s demonstration at the Intercalated Games, and his choice to compete in Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) events after the London Olympics.<sup>105</sup> Denis Horgan (silver medal for shot put) came from County Cork, arguably upon statistics alone he was seen as a much more loyal British athlete, as he had competed in 20 AAA Championships, taking 13 titles.

As demonstrated by Table 1.2, apart from these athletes, British field event athletes generally finished in lowly positions in the final standings. *The Times* described the British performance in field events as ‘distinctly humiliating’<sup>106</sup> and *The Sporting Life* stated that British competitors in the javelin ‘were absolutely outclassed,’<sup>107</sup> after the sole British entrant finished in last place. Another article from the publication believed this occurred because javelin ‘is a neglected sport among Britishers.’<sup>108</sup> Disappointingly, there was no British entrant in the pole vault, an event in which E R Archibald had competed with success at an ‘Exhibition’ meeting at the Stadium on 11 July, when he won with a height of 3.50 metres.<sup>109</sup> If he had achieved this height at the 1908 Olympics he would have shared sixth position, but for reasons unknown he did not compete.

A 1910 reflection upon the London Olympics commented that in field events ‘in the Olympic Games, we found that Englishmen were left behind by Americans and Swedes, and it was only when an Irishman came along that the British got a show.’<sup>110</sup> A problem for field events in England was that they received little exposure within athletic circles. Despite being part of the inaugural Olympic programme in 1896, some of the Olympic events remained excluded from many of the top English athletic meetings in 1908.

At England’s premier athletic meeting, the AAA Championships, the javelin, discus and triple jump were barred from the programme until 1914. The long and high jumps, pole vault, shot put and hammer events were included, but they were just minor events in comparison to the track events, and barely registered in public interest and press reports. For example, after the 1908 Championships the reviews of the competition in both *The Athletic News* and *The Sporting Life*<sup>111</sup> limited comment about field events to just a couple of couple of paragraphs at the bottom of the page.

The disregard for field events at the AAA Championships, the biggest British athletics meeting, no doubt filtered down to other events in the English calendar and consequently these events can be viewed as the poor cousin to the track events. There are many suggestions for apathy

Table 1.2 The performances of British field events entrants at the 1908 Olympics

Event	British competitor	Position	Distance	Winners distance
Long jump	Tim Ahearne	8	6.72	7.48
	Denis Murray	9	6.71	
	Charles Williams	11	6.65	
	Alfred Bellerby	16	6.44	
	Wilfred Bleaden	17	6.43	
	Lionel Cornish	N/A	N/A	
Triple jump	Tim Ahearne	1	14.92	14.92
	Doug Stupart	10	13.4	
	Cyril Dugmore	11	13.31	
	Michael Dineen	12	13.23	
	George Mayberry	T18	N/a	
High jump	Con Leahy	T2	1.88	1.9
	Patrick Leahy	9	1.78	
	Edward Leader	T10	1.77	
	Haswell Wilson	T10	1.77	
	Al Bellerby	20	1.59	
Pole vault	No entry	N/A	N/A	
Standing long jump	Tim Ahearne			1.57
	Wilfred Bleaden			
	Lionel Cornish			
	Walter Henderson			
	Frederick Kitching			
	Lancelot Stafford			
Standing high jump	Walter Henderson	T8	1.42	1.57
	Lancelot Stafford	T17	1.32	
Shot put	Denis Horgan	2	13.62	14.21
	Edward Barrett	5	12.89	
Discus	Edward Barrett	N/A	N/A	51.92
	Michael Collins	N/A	N/A	
	Alfred Flaxman	N/A	N/A	
	Walter Henderson	N/A	N/A	
	Henry Leeke	N/A	N/A	
	Ernest May	N/A	N/A	
	John Murray	N/A	N/A	
	Thomas Nicolson	4	48.09	
Hammer	Alan Fyffee	9	37.35	51.92
	Henry Leeke	N/A	N/A	
	Ernest May	N/A	N/A	
	John Murray	N/A	N/A	
	Robert Lindsay-Watson	N/A	N/A	
Javelin	Henry Leeke	N/A	N/A	54.83
	Ernest May	N/A	N/A	
	Leonard Tremeer	N/A	N/A	

Note: N/A – not applicable.

towards field events, such as the suggestion that they were ‘slow burners’,<sup>112</sup> time consuming and did not provide the same thrills as the track events. Such perceptions as this made the events less commercially attractive, as stated by Derek Birley, who wrote; ‘since they were unspectacular, were less susceptible to commercial exploitation.’<sup>113</sup> Commercial value was an important factor in British athletics, as the sport had developed with a strong spectator influence. The indication appears that from the perspective of organisers of athletic competitions, guarantying entertainment for paying spectators was more important to them than ensuring that Britain was able to put competitive athletes into all branches of athletic competition.

Field events did have areas in Britain in which they were popular, primarily in Ireland, Scotland and Northern England. In Scotland, Birley argues that the emergence of field events in Scotland owed to the revival of Highland Culture during the Industrial Revolution.<sup>114</sup> This brought with it sporting festivals such as the Highland Games, Border Games (in Southern Scotland) and Lake Land Games (in the Lake District of North-West England), which included events both comparable and identical to Olympic field events, encouraging athletes to take up these sports. For example, the Highland Games included tossing the weight and caber, throwing the hammer, the long jump and ‘hitch and kick’ (a form of standing high jump).

In Ireland, part of the nineteenth century’s resurgence in interest in ancient Irish culture was the revival of the Tailtean Games, a sporting festival that had previously taken place between 2000 BC and 1180 AD. A feature of these ancient games had been the strength events such as hammer-throwing, hurling a wheel, leaping and hopping,<sup>115</sup> which were similar to the modern revivals and they were once again popular aspects of the festival, helping to produce Irish interest in them.

Irish enthusiasm in field events ensured Ireland’s athletes became a dominant force in field events at the AAA Championships that began in 1880. At the close of the nineteenth century, Ireland’s competitors had won over 50% of long jump championships, three-quarters of the 16lb weight throwing championships, including an unbroken sequence of six victories by Denis Horgan<sup>116</sup> (he won 13 in total) and good records in almost every field event. The dominance of field events did not continue in the twentieth century, as Ireland youth’s preference for Gaelic football and hurling became apparent. Consequently, Irish victories in the AAA Championships became more infrequent, and the 1908 Olympics were the last time that an Irishman won a field event at the Olympic Games.

## The reaction of the press to the performance in field events

After the conclusion of the athletics events at the 1908 Olympics, the British press included an extensive post-mortem upon their athletes' performance. The failure on the track was the chief concern, particularly when the defeats came at the hands of American athletes, but the poor performance in field events did not go unnoticed. *The Sporting Life* believed the lack of success owed to 'no inclination'<sup>117</sup> for the events in Britain. It alleged that the situation could be remedied through the promotion of the sports, stating, 'until that course of procedure is adopted we must lag in the rear.'<sup>118</sup> The article recognised the problems for field events and indicated the idea that only the events' promotion in England could remedy the situation, an attitude that demonstrated a belief in the domination of England within British athletics. *The Times* review also referred to English adversity for field events. It believed the contests were not popular because:

It is generally believed that spectators so not care to watch these feats of agility and strength; and where a number of weak competitors have to eliminated they are apt to become rather wearisome.<sup>119</sup>

This quote indicates the importance of spectators in defining what contests took place, rather than ensuring British success in international competition. The constant reference to England, rather than Britain, could be an occasion when the terms are used interchangeably, but if this is a reference to England alone, it is an indication of a distinct English identity towards field events.

Spectators' indifference towards field events was mentioned in other publications, such as within the fictional Olympic stories of *The Boys' Realm*. During the summer of 1908 it published a series of stories about the Olympics, entitled *Tales of the Stadium*. One of the instalments described field events as being as 'dull as ditch water to the onlooker.'<sup>120</sup> This is a similar tone to that mentioned by *The Sporting Life* during the Olympics:

But is there such a thing as a featureless Olympic Games final? Certainly not so far as track or swimming events are concerned, but as to weight putting, hammer throwing, the discus, and javelin events, and other on the same lines, it is impossible to follow the amphitheatre, and they do not thrill the pulses like a rousing cycling finish, a great struggle between swimmers who are going neck and

neck in the last dozen yards, and the win is by a touch, an electric sprint in a long-distance run or a dash in at the end of a steeple chase event.<sup>121</sup>

This quote further reinforces the influence of spectators as a reason for the lack of field events promotion in England. The events were described as being ‘slow’, ‘impossible’ to follow and does little to entice organisers of athletics meetings to include field events within their schedules.

The javelin represented a field event that did not enjoy any popularity across Britain. Its Olympic final took place on 17 July, but the result received little mention in the British press. *The Sporting Life’s* sole reference came the day after the final, when it stated that the winner, Eric Lemming was the ‘most capable exponent of what is a neglected sport among Britishers.’<sup>122</sup> This comment further reinforced the manner by which field events were held. In a *Sphere* article that reviewed the British sporting summer wrote light-heartedly about the sport:

Had it not been for those glorified athletic sports we should never had the opportunity of reading at breakfast (while waiting for ‘The muzzled ox’ to begin) an illustrated article on ‘How to throw the Javelin.’<sup>123</sup>

This comment demonstrated the exposure that the Olympics had brought, and the ignorance that was still present in England. Not all writing about the javelin was as positive, such as the comments from C B Fry who revealed his feelings about the javelin in his April editorial:

It seems to me a pity that a programme of our Olympic Games should endeavour to include quite so many events ... Why have throwing the javelin? Or, indeed the discus? Both are obsolete. In no civilised country in the world does it avail a man to throw javelin. Our modern equivalent is rifle shooting; and that is enough. In the times of ancient Greece javelin-throwing was a soldierly requisite – it meant something real. Who in England cares about the champion spear-tosser? The events included should cover all athletic exercises which are genuinely in vogue, and others. Otherwise, why not revive a contest between the gladiator armed with shield and sword and him who wields net as trident?<sup>124</sup>

Such opinion as this does little for the promotion of the javelin and discus within Britain. Fry’s opinion upon the events is different to the norm,

believing that the javelin was obsolete because it was like an ancient weapon and argues that rifle shooting was its direct replacement in the modern Olympic Games. The use of the term 'spear-tosser' associates the event with societies that had been colonised by the British Empire.

These articles demonstrate a uniquely English thinking and identity towards field events. Such descriptions as those found in Bishop Auckland's *Sports Gazette* are typical of those found within the English press. Prior to the Games it stated; 'throwing the discus, throwing the javelin, and the marathon foot-race are among the peculiarly Athenian features of the Olympic Games,'<sup>125</sup> a description that demonstrated an ignorance and apathy towards these events.

The discus and javelin events in particular appeared to have little grounding in any part of Britain. *The Birmingham Daily Mail* believed they did 'not appeal strongly to the British Race.'<sup>126</sup> In Scotland and Ireland, there was interest in these events, which may have been in decline in Ireland, but was still present nevertheless.

### **British perceptions regarding Germany in 1908 Olympic coverage**

A feature of this period are the growing tensions between Britain and Germany, resulting in the outbreak of war in 1914. The British interest towards Germany is such that Britain's national identity can be partly defined by its thoughts towards Germany, which was particularly evident in the press and could be described as 'obsessive.' Here will be an examination of the comment of the British press regarding Germany at the 1908 Olympics, six years prior to the outbreak of war, but a time of rising tensions.

The birth of the German Empire in 1871 began her rise to becoming a world power and saw her become Britain's primary military rival after France became an ally upon the signing of the 1904 Entente Cordiale. The German military might lay in the strength of her navy, which had been constructed as an 'instrument for countering British influence in the world.'<sup>127</sup> Her prowess came from a rapid growth in population (from 56.7 million in 1901 to 67.7 million in 1914), enabling an industrial economy to develop quickly. Such was the speed of its growth that by 1910 it had surpassed Britain's steel output, after being of no consequence just 20 years before.<sup>128</sup>

British failures in the Boer War, the conditions in towns and cities, along with international sporting defeats in the early years of the twentieth century gave birth to concerns that Britain was declining physically. Some believed that Germany was a nation who was physically superior,

demonstrated in 1903 by the Earl of Meath who compared the British youth to their German counterparts as part of a House of Lords debate that stated that the British people were feeble because they had ‘weakened blood.’ He argued that this was because the majority of the population lived in towns and were now less likely to be replenished from tough ‘country stocks.’<sup>129</sup> Germany, by comparison, despite its comparative levels of industrialisation diminishing countryside population was in the view of Meath the nation that Britain should aspire to be like.

From viewing any national newspaper during the summer of 1908 there is plentiful comment relating to Germany in the form of editorials, reports and cartoons. Articles examined aspects such as German military strength in comparison to Britain, the ever-fragile relations between France and Germany, and the Kaiser. Germany’s sporting talents at the Olympic Games were not of interest to much of the press, as the United States represented the primary rival, but there was some comment present. In April 1908 when the Olympics began, the military rivalry between Britain and Germany intensified with the publication of a letter by the Kaiser to the First Lord of the Admiralty in a Munich Journal. Historian Paul Kennedy believes this ‘brought the Anglo-German relationship to the forefront of politics.’<sup>130</sup> He continues by stating that ‘Grey, Haldane, and other ministers believed that German spies were crawling all over the English coast, the naval issue was the catalyst for all sorts of quarrels.’<sup>131</sup> Such was the tone of some articles from this period that it appeared that war was imminent.

During the opening week of the athletic competition, concerns were expressed about the potential for war, such as the *Western Mail* article headed ‘Are we prepared for War? ... What would happen in a fight with Germany (our naval organisation explained).’<sup>132</sup> The fear of a potential war even spilled over into articles about the Olympics, with *The Sphere* including an article headed ‘Challenging England’s position in sport.’<sup>133</sup> The focus of the piece was the likelihood of the United States taking the majority of the Olympic medals, but it concluded with a statement about the strength of the German military:

Germany is not prominent in sports; on the other hand, she is well to the front in aeronautics, and the immense earnestness with which she has set about the conquest of the air, especially with Count Zeppelin’s ships, is giving anxiety to many people in this country.<sup>134</sup>

This article appeared alongside a picture of a woman competing in the Olympic Games and another illustration with the caption, ‘The



German Emperor at Kiel – The ships of his increasing navy saluting his imperial majesty, who went to see the Yacht-racing.’ Such an article demonstrates the level of interest in German military strength during the summer of 1908.

As previously demonstrated previously in this chapter, C B Fry wrote editorials in his monthly sports magazine about the 1908 Olympics, and in his October 1908 editorial, he referred to Germany. He began by stating that the Olympics would not be returning to Britain for 60 years, when things would be very different:

Sixty years hence, before another Olympic festival falls to Britain’s lot, and how many of those who saw or took part in the Olympic festival of 1908 will be here? Perhaps Walker, the Natal lad, not yet twenty, who won the 100 metres, will be hailed in London’s Stadium (then under German rule, see the Daily press prophets passim) as the sole survivor.<sup>135</sup>

This type of comment, however sarcastic, demonstrated the level of fear present in Britain in 1908, evident across the mainstream, sporting and fictional press.

The German Olympic team for the 1908 Olympics consisted of 79 male and two female athletes who competed in 12 sports (athletics, cycling, diving, fencing, figure skating, gymnastics, hockey, rowing, shooting, swimming, tennis and wrestling). The team won three gold medals: one in swimming (100 metres backstroke by Arno Bieberstein, pushing Britain’s Herbert Haresnape into third). A second in pairs figure skating (with British entrants coming in second and third positions) and a third in the three metre springboard, where a German athlete also took the silver medal. With ten other medals, split equally between silver and bronze, Germany ended the Games in fifth position in the unofficial medals table.

The majority of the team competed in the athletic and cycling events, but, apart from a silver medal won in the medley relay and a bronze medal in the 800 metres, they failed to make an impression. The British press believed that Germany had underperformed at The Games, such as stated in *The Northern Athletes*, ‘Olympic Afterthoughts’; ‘Germany, perhaps did not make such a prominent show as the Swedes in athletics, but they had their individual athletes, who strove with might and main for success, and only missed their ambition by a narrow margin.’<sup>136</sup>

To others, the poor German performance allowed them to feel better about how Britain had fared. This was the opinion expressed in

*The Bystander*, which commented, ‘the only consolation about the Games is that, for some reason or other, we do not seem to have fallen foul of Germany.’<sup>137</sup> This statement was as much about the apparent poor British performance as about Germany, but demonstrates the importance of defeating Germany to British identity. Historian Arnd Kruger explains how this formed part of proving British superiority:

The British were particularly anxious about Germany’s economic penetration and its growing naval strength. In this situation sport was seen ambivalently as a means of increasing and at the same time testing national strength. It could boost national morale in case of victory, but in defeat bear out the decadence everybody was talking about.<sup>138</sup>

Despite claims of a ‘victory’ for Britain over Germany at the 1908 Olympics, there were still people who worried about British youth in comparison to Germany’s. Monthly magazine, the *Review of Reviews* believed that, ‘The German works longer hours, takes fewer holidays, and often spends his leisure in perfecting himself in his business. The young Englishmen likes to watch sport.’<sup>139</sup> The suggestion here was that Britain’s preference for sport, rather than work (believed to be a German trait) was sending the two nations in opposite directions. Sport had become an intrinsic part of British society and identity, but it stated, contrary to what others argued, that the British put more of their efforts into sport than work.

Despite the irregularity of comments about Germany within the British press during the 1908 Olympics demonstrates an interest in German affairs and concern about her growing military stature. The quantity of articles in the British sporting press referring to Germany sport intensified during the aftermath of the 1912 Olympics when British thoughts turned to performing in front of German crowds at the 1916 Olympics. As with other aspects of the German relationship in 1908, the British media’s coverage of Germany at the Olympics acted only as an indication of what was to come.

# 2

## The Perspective of the 1908 Olympics in the Nations of Britain

### England and the 1908 Olympics

From many historical aspects, establishing a solely English identity and viewpoint is difficult because as Krishan Kumar explains 'Englishness modulated into Britishness.'<sup>1</sup> This occurred because England was the most dominant nation in the Union of Great Britain and Ireland. Kumar argues that this resulted in English identity consuming British identity, encouraging the other nations of the Union to cling onto their own identities, while still enjoying a British identity.<sup>2</sup> He attributes this to the fact that the first British Empire was the conquest by the English over the other nations of Britain.

England's dominance brought about the continual use of the terms of 'England' and 'English,' when 'Britain' and 'British' would have been more appropriate. The use of these terms creates problems in that 'both the English and other British are often uncertain whose identity is in question, England's or Britain's.'<sup>3</sup> Both are these terms are commonly used throughout the sources examined for this research and create a problem for identifying both an English and British identity. Such descriptions were commonplace in other sports, such as cricket, according to the Williams and Huggins:

the terms British and English have tended to be interchangeable, sometimes synonymous. In the archetypal game of Cricket, for instance, the national team has always been known as England, despite the inclusion of distinguished Scottish and Welsh players ... In this imperialistic rhetoric Mr Welldon, as we have seen, equated British with English, using both indiscriminately in the same sentence.<sup>4</sup>

The English cricket team was certainly not alone in using players from other nations as the national rugby team in particular commonly included Australians and South Africans. The blurring of English and British national identities has led some historians argue that no sense of English nationalism existed during the heyday of the Empire, but rather its identity was consumed by British nationalism. Jeffrey Richards added to this debate by stating the effect of England's centrality to Britain for its national identity:

Because England was the centre, the seat of power, the hub of Empire, the character of the new Britain was provided by England, which is why Britain and England are still often spoken of interchangeably by the English and by foreigners though never by the Welsh and Scots.<sup>5</sup>

Ben Wellings states that the distinction between England and Britain became 'blurred when the ideology of nationhood was beginning to emerge'<sup>6</sup> in the nineteenth century. The primary sources used for this monograph constantly demonstrate an extensive 'blurring' of these terms. At all three of the Olympic Games under consideration here, the competitors stated to be part of the British team were often referred to as being part of the English team, even when it was apparent that the athlete in question was not from England.

It is not just sportsmen and women that were termed interchangeably as being English (when they are not), as Parliament and the Monarchy are examples of institutions termed as 'English.' The English language took an even wider sense, becoming a possession of the Empire. Kumar argues that it was 'hardly surprising' that England lost its identity, when both Britons and foreigners say 'English' when they mean 'British,' stating that 'it is a clear if largely unconscious recognition of the brute facts of the matter.'<sup>7</sup> A modern example of this blurring, although perhaps a potentially biased one, comes from Gwynfor Evans a former leader of Plaid Cymru in *The End of Britishness*:

What is Britishness? The first thing to realize is that it is another word for Englishness; it is a political word which arose from the existence of the British state and which extends Englishness over the lives of the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish. If one asks what the difference is between English culture and British culture, one realizes that there is no difference. They are the same. The British language is the English language. British education is English education. British television is English television. The British press is the English press. The British

Crown is the English Crown, and the Queen of Britain is the Queen of England. The British Constitution is called by Dicey, the main authority on the subject, 'the English Constitution.' The British Parliament is that which is termed in Kenneth MacKenzie's authoritative book, *The English Parliament*. The English language is the only language it is permitted to speak there. There is no British.<sup>8</sup>

Sport was a place that allowed England to develop her own identity during the nineteenth century. This occurred because national sporting teams represented England, rather than Britain because the majority of the early sporting internationals took place between teams compiled of the British nations. Consequently, the notion of representing Great Britain and Ireland in the Olympic Games represented a sporting anomaly at the first modern Olympic Games of 1896. Despite this, throughout the 1908, 1912 and 1920 Olympics, the British team and her athletes are misconstrued as being of 'England' and not Britain.

Defining the role of England and English people at the 1908 Olympics is not as easy to define as it is for the other British nations. Officially, the name for the Olympic team was 'Great Britain and Ireland,' and one commonly shortened to the acceptable abbreviation of 'Britain.' The press, both from England and elsewhere often falsely refer to the team as 'English' and from 'England.'

Publications writing about British Olympic athletes being of Britain and British, England and English, sometimes occurred in the same articles. For example, *The Northern Athlete's* Olympic preview, wrote of England's, not Britain's chances at the Games. It believed that 'unless we can unearth new talent or some of the old champions come to the rescue, England will be badly beaten.'<sup>9</sup> It continued by indicating that it only held out hopes for success for J W Morton, the 1906 English Champion, and Scotsman, Wyndham Hallswelle.

The mixed use of the terms was not just limited to the English media, as publications from other parts of the Union also referred to the team as 'England's.' Cardiff's *The Western Mail* regularly used the 'English' and 'England'; to describe the efforts of British athletes, such as in an article from 14 July 1908,<sup>10</sup> despite the fact that Scottish athletes competed in the event referred to. The publication's daily, 'London Letter' editorial column also wrote in this manner regarding the marathon. It stated, 'the Englishmen started as though running a sprint ten miles in fifty minutes.'<sup>11</sup> The difference in the latter example was that there were only English representatives in the British marathon team, but this was just one example of a trend frequently seen across the non-English, British press.

The articles found describing the team as ‘English’ was the norm in the English newspapers; *The Bystander’s* review of the Olympic events of July 1908 was entitled ‘England to the fore,’ and continued by writing of English competitors:

As far as the racing was concerned, it is pleasant to record that England’s representatives have acquitted themselves admirably. We can still pride ourselves upon the fact that at distance work, whether on foot or on wheels, we can show the way. In one or two instances, our men would have done even better if they could have been induced to subordinate their own interests to those of their country.<sup>12</sup>

Branding the team as ‘England’ was not the only identity present in the media’s coverage of the 1908 Olympics. Just as common as it being called solely ‘English’ is the team being referred to as both ‘British’ and ‘English’ in the same article. A prominent juggler of these terms was Sunday weekly, *The Observer*. In an article on 19 July 1908, its first sub-heading was ‘Great Britain’s triumph’<sup>13</sup> and its second was ‘Eight finals for England.’ The mixed uses of descriptions of the team continued in the body of the article, firstly declaring ‘British victories,’ and then stating that ‘England, after losing her Champion, had won the great race.’<sup>14</sup> The final reference indicates how the victory is thought of as ‘England’s,’ rather than ‘Britain’s.’

The dominance of England within Britain was spoken about by Lord Roseberry to an audience at the University of Edinburgh in 1882. He described it as a ‘takeover,’ and remonstrated that the English set out to dominate Britain and they believed that all parts of the nation were ‘England,’ as Keith Robbins explains:

He noted that Englishmen generally eschewed the terms ‘British’ and ‘Great Britain’. They tended to think that every part of the United Kingdom was ‘English’. This self-possession, characteristic, he thought, of dominant races, had indeed made England what it was.<sup>15</sup>

This statement is undoubtedly relevant here, as the view presented is that the athletes and teams are of England, not Britain. England’s dominance within Britain, along the new concept of a British sporting team could be both potential reasons for this.

It was not just the athletes of Britain that were considered English, but also the nation’s ethos towards sport. Sports historian Richard Holt

describes the moral of 'playing the game' as 'a combined physical and moral activity an exercise in the art of being "British".' He continued by stating that the problem was that to those who ran the Empire this 'unconsciously translated' as being 'English.'<sup>16</sup> Holt also wrote that 'sports were not just the source of high-minded ideals, they were inseparably associated with the more down-to-earth, assertive, and patriotic Englishness.'<sup>17</sup> These two descriptions illustrate the inter-woven nature of sport to the national identities of both Britain and England, and the problems of separating the two.

The debate about the morals of sport is also referred to as being both English and British in character. The following quote comes from *The Observer*, and argues that America has taken a more serious spirit of sport, apparently beyond 'English' identity:

The Americans improved their proportion of points, and from every technical point of view, their performances were magnificent exhibitions of combined strength and skill. They throw into their work a lean and deadly keenness more alert and intense than the English spirit in games.<sup>18</sup>

Such articles as this promote the belief that not only the Olympic team was English, but also that the ethos of sport is an English, rather than a British characteristic. Certain articles did write of British sporting morals, such as the following from *The Western Mail*, which stated; 'Great Britain can claim to have set before himself a high standard of sportsmanship.'<sup>19</sup> Sportsmanship is a difficult trait to determine as British or English when it is used interchangeably and inconsistently.

## English regional perspectives

The industrial revolution transformed the make-up of England via the growth of new towns and cities through industry and commerce. One consequence of this was the emergence of a new civic identity in urban towns and cities. Sport became prominent in the new industrial Britain and gained an intrinsic part of this identity, one often defined by social class. Identities, sporting and otherwise, varied from town to town, county to county. Despite new forms of communication and travel, the nation remained varied and local in definition.<sup>20</sup> Ward comments upon this that:

As the north in particular constructed a distinct image of itself composed of progress, industry, manufacturing, civic pride and

municipal enterprise, which were contrasted to the values of the southern aristocracy and financial middle class—whereas the south talked, as the saying went, the north did. In addition, local identities were enhanced by the nature of government legislation in the nineteenth century, as local authorities were encouraged and later required to deal with the problems of urban society. As these problems became more complex, the central state took over a greater role, restricting local initiative and action, and in turn provoking a sense of regionalism that responded to government initiatives.<sup>21</sup>

The industrial revolution witnessed the North and Midlands of England becoming the nation's centres of industry, taking power away from London. An example of this was Birmingham, which by the 1860s could boast that within a 30 mile radius every piece of hardware in the world was made,<sup>22</sup> bringing with it pride and a unique regional identity. Other new industrial towns such as Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield also enjoyed new identities based upon their exports. These places were construed as being industrial and working class, while the South of England was seen as middle class.

In the view of Paul Ward, such is the diversity of England (both from a historical and present day perspective), he questioned if England were a nation at all? To present this argument he used a description by George Orwell from the inter-war period, a time that came after the interest of this monograph, but a description still relevant when commenting about the start of the twentieth century:

Then the vastness of England swallows you up, and you lose for a while you're feeling that the whole nation has a single identifiable character. Are there really such things as nations? Are we not forty-six million individuals, all different? And the diversity of it, the chaos? The clatter of clogs in the Lancashire mill towns, the to-and-fro of the lorries on the Great North Road, the queues outside the Labour exchanges, the rattle of pin-tables in Soho Clubs, the old maids biking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning—all these are not only fragments, but characteristic fragments, of the English scene.<sup>23</sup>

Orwell's perspective was that England's diversity via different traditions and cultures meant there was not one 'single identifiable character,' believing that it varied from region to region. Ward argues that regional identities are 'problematic and varied'<sup>24</sup> and 'fragmented,' but are



'fluid,' a trait that has allowed them to survive modernisation and communication developments. He arrived at the conclusion that 'regions are geographically unstable and the sense of regional identity is uneven in different areas.'<sup>25</sup>

As was the case with national identities, sport was a place where the 'imagined community'<sup>26</sup> of regional identities could be realised. In the regions of England, through the unique identities of various sports, this was (and still is) apparent through styles of play, attitudes to games and those that support it. Martin Polley states that this was still very much 'Englishness,' but it was varying in 'north/south and urban/rural,'<sup>27</sup> while Ward believes that this could also 'be an expression of the rest versus London.'<sup>28</sup> Both of these statements have extensive evidence to support them in this research. One regular dividing issue were attitudes towards the issue of professionalism in sport.

In 1895, the difference in attitude between the North and South split the game of rugby in two. The split occurred because the people administering the game in the North began to compensate working class players that were forced to miss work in order to play matches, known as 'broken-time' payments.<sup>29</sup> The people in the South that administered the game were against this, desiring for a strictly amateur game. Consequently, the people in the North split away from the South and established the 'Northern Union.' This was the foundation of the game that is today known as rugby league.

Rugby was not the only sport to be divided by regional attitudes to professionalism. Association football experienced similar issues with the payment of players after the creation of the Football Association Challenge Cup for the 1871–72 season.<sup>30</sup> Initially the game's ruling body had outlawed professionalism and expelled teams for the payment of players. Owing to pressure and the strong working class following that the sport had developed, professionalism was legalised in 1885.<sup>31</sup> The consequence for clubs was that they needed extra income and could not just rely upon the infrequent income created by cup and friendly matches. Subsequently, in March 1888, William McGregor of Aston Villa Football Club sent a letter out to all the major clubs with the desire to set up a league, with regular home fixtures, the result of which was the 'Football League,' that guaranteed clubs 11 home matches a season.<sup>32</sup> This league began in September 1888, and a notable feature was that all of the participating clubs came from the Midlands and North-West of England.<sup>33</sup> Comparable with rugby, players from the South remained amateur and consequently separate from the professional clubs in the North and Midlands of England and it would be some years before London's association football clubs joined the football league.

Cricket, the national sport of the period, owing to its mass, cross-class following up and down the country,<sup>34</sup> embraced professionalism like no other sport. Since 1825, when the sports' ruling body the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) had employed working class men to bowl to its members, there had been a professional element to the sport.<sup>35</sup> When the formalised County Championship began in 1890, there was an acceptance of professionalism, as it was agreed that a solely amateur competition was unfeasible because of the length of cricket matches. As a result, professionals and amateurs played alongside one another in the same team, and continued to do so until 1962 when all cricketers became formal professionals.<sup>36</sup>

Athletic competition developed along a different path, with professionals and amateurs competing in separate competitions. Athletics was controlled by the southern gentry (through the London Athletic Club) and consequently, they excluded all artisans and professionals from its events, viewing them with disdain, referring to them as pot hunting 'athletic criminals.'<sup>37</sup> Professional athletics contests were referred to as 'pedestrianism,' featuring handicaps and betting.<sup>38</sup> The purpose of handicaps was to allow slower athletes to start at an advantage in a bid to make races competitive. Their use created deep factions in the sport, as described by John Lowerson:

London-based athletics were dominated by the professional classes, the midland and northern events included middle and working-class participants, and the extra-metropolitan events were usually dependent on other activities for their base. When the northerners dominated the Stamford Bridge championship of 1886, it signified the withdrawal of southern runners from serious activity outside the universities.<sup>39</sup>

Following the victories of Northern athletes, the athletic authorities introduced the 'Henley definition' for athletics.<sup>40</sup> These amateurism of Northern Athletes was perceived to be questionable, particularly the win of W J Morgan at the London Athletic Club (LAC), a man who was commercially linked with the sport. Dissatisfaction with this decision in Northern English circles led to the creation of the Northern Counties Amateur Athletics Association (NCAAA). This association allowed 'working-class runners to appear as amateurs, provided only that they had never run for money.'<sup>41</sup> Despite this rule, Derek Birley believes that money was still an influence in northern circles: 'Even if there was no actual betting, the prizes, convertible into currency, brought excessive keenness amongst the largest artisan competitors, and the system of

handicapping encouraged “running for a mark” even amongst the very young.<sup>42</sup> This feeling was still a prevalent one during the period of this monograph, and was the basis of many of the divides seen.

The continuing provincial tensions led to the LAC heeding its control over the sport to the newly formed Amateur Athletic Association (AAA 1880). This new association became the regulating body for some 20,000 national athletes. It did have a firm negative attitude towards money, although the new association had a far more open philosophy in terms of class than the LAC’s earlier use of Henley.<sup>43</sup>

During the period of study many of the towns, cities, counties and the regions of England had their own newspapers, published both daily and weekly. These are a valuable source for examining English identity in this monograph. The coverage in these publications produced different opinions and allowed for a different focus than in London publications.

Prior to the commencement of the Games, *The Northern Athlete* felt that British athletes were potentially not getting a fair opportunity to compete thanks to the system of entries. The AAA Championships was the premier athletic event prior to the Games, but because Olympic entries had to be in by mid-June, three weeks before the AAA Championships, it was possible that some British champions may have missed out on the opportunity to represent Britain at the Olympics. This newspaper felt the system of selection did little for her regions men’s chances of selection.<sup>44</sup> It believed that the men from the North and Midlands of England were not getting a fair chance to compete at the Olympics, and this was a feature of many of the editorials within regional newspapers both before and after the Games.

Prior to the Olympics, English regional publications wrote in a similar tone to the London press and talked up their athletes’ prospects of success. As was prominent in national publications, the marathon race featured most prominently in previews. *The Northern Athlete* believed that Duncan of Salford Harriers was the favourite for the race, and Voight, the Manchester-bred Austrian, along with Wilson from Hallamshire Harriers would contest the medals.<sup>45</sup> W W Alexander of *The Sporting Mail* had high hopes for Birmingham man, Jack Price in particular, but believed that ‘the chance of the Old Country is a great one; in fact, I fancy we shall have the first six men home.’<sup>46</sup> These previews were a demonstration of the sense in confidence in local men, but were also an indication of the arrogance and the belief in the superiority of Britain, an identity present across the British media.

An influential source throughout the period of study for this research is the Manchester-based *The Athletic News*. This weekly publication

concentrated solely upon sport and, throughout the summer months, included detailed athletic writing from not only a local perspective, but also a national one. One particular angle it pursued was the apparent lack of help northern athletes had received from the national authorities to help them compete:

The treatment of our athletes has been nothing short of scandalous. I have written the sentence and I shall withdraw not one word of it. Thousands of pounds has been spent upon the gorging of foreign athletes and off officials who could well afford to pay for their entertainment. What has been done for the artisan runners of the North of England, who wasted time and money to respond as best they might to the call of their country. They were grudged practically their train fares to London and home again. The men were soured before they took the track, yet they did their best.<sup>47</sup>

This article argues that the artisan runners of the North who required expenses in order to compete had not been given them, as all available money had been spent on foreign athletes. The lack of funding for British athletes was also the subject of a *Sporting Mail* article by W W Alexander. Within this he wrote about the lavish treatment that was being afforded foreign guests, before posing the question ‘What about England.’ He then went on to describe how an English representative fared: ‘(he) arrived on the scene after a night railway journey, a few hours before he had to run. The British runners did not know one another even, and thus it was, to paraphrase Longfellow “Nothing attempted, nothing done”.’<sup>48</sup> Another article in the same publication by E W Cox, directly examined the plight of Midland’s men:

We in Birmingham are proud of our Birchfield Harriers, our Sparkhill Harriers, and our Small Heath Harriers; we boast that Midland athletes can beat any others over a country, and yet our champions eight days ago were not even able to reach their goal. Why was it? Ah, my athletic brothers, you will never get the truth from official sources, for it is with these people that the cause of our humiliation lay.<sup>49</sup>

*The Northern Athlete* wrote that it believed all the British athletics representatives had been given something towards their expenses, but the cyclists were self-funded.<sup>50</sup> An article in *The Athletic News* vehemently argued that not enough had been done to aid British athletes, indicating a perception that their needs were not being catered for. In all of

the articles grievance appears to be felt towards the group in control of athletics; the Southern gentry. Their philosophy was that athletes must compete entirely at their own expense and this made competing a difficult proposition for many of the athletes from the North and Midlands of England, men who were primarily from the working classes.

Regional newspapers not only defended their athletes' cause, but also expressed concerns about how the entire British team was being organised. The following comment appeared in *The Sporting Mail* and indicated the importance of the Games (something not always felt in the press) and bemoaned the preparations of the British team:

An Olympiad is no hurried affair; ample opportunity is afforded each nation desirous of sending forth champions to make preparation, and every nation but the British did deliberately prepare for the trials of skill at the stadium. As Britain was the least organised, so was her great rival-America-the best equipped.<sup>51</sup>

This article defended the AAA, citing that it had financial shortcomings, but bemoaned that it had not done enough to ensure things were properly organised, concluding that it had 'No schedule, no organisation, no one in authority!'<sup>52</sup> The majority of athletes from the Midlands' who competed at the Olympics and enjoyed funding received it via a small pot of money that had been raised by the Midland Counties Amateur Athletic Association (MCAAA), although this was said to have covered nothing more than a train fare.<sup>53</sup>

Regional publications were not just critical about athletic preparations. *The Sporting Mail* included an extensive article on the arrangements for the team gymnastics competition, indicating a poor level of readiness: 'The rehearsals on the British side were few, owing to lack of opportunity. The team had practiced in the late hours of the Tuesday evening and the small hours of the Wednesday; but, of course, the cohesion was not marked.'<sup>54</sup> The lack of practice showed in the competition, where the British finished in eighth and last place.

Although there is evidence that the divide is North/Midlands versus the South, there is also suggestion that opinions were varied across these regions, such as in the editorial entitled 'Great Britain not decadent,' from *The Northern Athlete*. It wrote, 'Let us only remember that, despite the hypercritical and caustic comments of certain writers – notably those of Lancashire – British athletics have been proved to be in a sound, healthy condition, and that we still maintain our proud position in the very forefront.'<sup>55</sup> Such an opinion was an indication

that not all of the British press believed the nation was on the physical downgrade as was so often said.

After the relative failure of many of Britain's athletes at the Olympics, regional publications proved to be some of the most opinionated as to where England was going wrong and should look to make amends. W W Alexander of Birmingham's *Sporting Mail* suggested that Britain look towards the United States for a method of improvement:

If it be necessary to reform our methods we must do so, and our inherent conservatism must not stand in the way of effecting a much-needed improvement, with a view to producing better results. We are not croakers, but we emphasise what our Transatlantic friends have done this week and last in field and sprint work, and we must not be too obstinate to learn from them, nor too proud to profit by the points they are able to give us.<sup>56</sup>

Alexander was not the only one who believed that Britain needed to amend its sporting ideology in order to compete upon the Olympic stage, and this would become more a widespread argument throughout this period. British attitudes were slow to change, held back by the closeness to the amateur ethos of sport. London publication *Vanity Fair* also commented. It believed that Britain had gone in with 'half-trained men,' but despite this, they had fared well. It called for a trainer to ensure things were better organised for the future:

The root fact of the whole business is that a first-rate trainer improves his whole team. The individual does not see his little fault; perhaps indeed he cherishes it, but the trainer won't have it; gets it corrected, and the man's time improves. Our teams must put themselves under trainers if they would win the next Olympic Games.<sup>57</sup>

Despite these articles and the pressure they brought upon the athletic administration, the universal wish was to remain as 'true amateurs'<sup>58</sup> across England. A *Sports Gazette* editorial went against the grain of many of the sporting press and portrayed a view more in common with those administrating British sport: 'if British athletes are to devote themselves, like the Americans, to naught else but training, then, we think that would be bad, very bad.' It continued by arguing that 'sport is the sport, and they are the sportsmen who utilise it for bodily and mental development advantages.'<sup>59</sup> Statements such as these across the press, indicates a strong appreciation for the amateur ethos in England.

Defining the identity of England, from the perspective of the English at the 1908 Olympics, is difficult. The national press of Britain continually term the Olympic team as English when it was, in fact, British. This makes it difficult to separate which material focused solely upon English athletes, and attaining a sense of English identity problematic. One aspect that was determinable from these articles was that there are different perspectives in operation across the country, and commonly it was divided between the North/Midlands and the South. In the North/Midlands there was the feeling that their athletes were at a disadvantage to those in the South East because the bulk of major competitions took place in London and the financial assistance required by many of these athletes was not available. Despite the desire for financial assistance, there was no indication that there was a desire to copy American approaches, which were considered to be 'professional' and featuring organised training and coaching.

### **Ireland at the 1908 Olympics**

In 1908, the entirety of Ireland was governed by Britain, and the country was part of the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.' The rules of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) determined that this ensured that Irish athletes would have to compete as part of the British team at the Olympics Games, not in the separate Irish team that many Irishmen desired. The London Olympics of 1908 came in a period of Irish history described by Tom Garvin as of 'nationalist revolution,' occurring between 1890 and 1914.<sup>60</sup> Within this period, a strong yearning for home rule developed, with the Irish Nationalist Party becoming particularly prominent. In addition, in November 1905, the Sinn Fein political party, which was to become crucial for the nationalist movement, was formed.

Prior to the formation of Sinn Fein there had been two failed home rule bills, the first in 1886, which was defeated in the House of Commons, and the second in 1893, which was passed by the House of Commons, but defeated in the House of Lords. To some Irishmen at least, there was a desire to stand by themselves, but the British Government denied them the opportunity, creating resentment towards England in particular.<sup>61</sup>

Those that ruled Ireland were branded 'Dublin Castle,' a group said to be 'small, remote and unpopular' and had little sympathy either within the Anglo-Irish community or the catholic masses.<sup>62</sup> Irishmen despised the fact that they had no voice in the running of their country. In comparison with Wales and Scotland, which were equal partners

in the Union, Ireland felt that it was ruled like a Colony of Empire. In his research about the making of the British nation in the nineteenth century Keith Robbins stated that, ‘the island of Ireland did not become “West Britain.”’ He argued that the creation of ‘British identity’ came through ‘the blending of the English, the Scots, and the Welsh,’<sup>63</sup> but not Ireland.

Ireland’s hostility towards Britain originated from the hardship that she endured in the nineteenth century. Many people in Ireland blamed Britain for the ‘Great Famine’ (1845–52), which left more than a million Irish people dead, and a similar number immigrating, mainly to North America. The famine increased the Irish desire for self-governance, with the tensions coming to a head during Easter 1916, when Irish republicans took over the General Post Office in Dublin and proclaimed an Irish Republic. This group proceeded to hold out for a week before the British Army took back control and, despite the failure, it did begin a movement that ended British control over Ireland.

Part of the aversion to Britain came via its sport, and nationalists desired to promote ‘Gaelic’ sports rather than the ‘foreign’ sports of rugby, association football and cricket, which the British had brought with them to Ireland. This led to the formation of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in 1884. The GAA primarily promoted the traditional Gaelic games of hurling and Gaelic football (along with athletics) and damaged ‘British’ sports by banning its members from competing in them.<sup>64</sup>

Writing on the importance of sport to the Anglo-Irish relationship and the development of Irish nationalism, Mike Cronin argues that it ‘shapes the nature of that nationalism, as the Irish often seek to define themselves in a manner that is oppositional to the British, rather than in their own terms.’<sup>65</sup> Not being British was certainly prevalent in the nineteenth century organisation of Irish national sports and was a sentiment seen across the Irish coverage of the Olympics across this monograph.

The importance of sport to the nationalist movement was demonstrated through the belief that it presented a place where the ‘imagined community’<sup>66</sup> of Ireland could be realised. Adrian Smith and Dilwyn Porter stated, ‘international competition generates a seemingly endless number of occasions when nations are embodied in something manifestly real and visible.’<sup>67</sup> To Ireland, a nation without her own government, sport provided a place where she was a nation. At the turn of the twentieth century, Ireland played international sporting fixtures of hockey, rugby, water polo, athletics and football. The problem was that only Britain recognised Ireland as a legitimate sporting nation. This was demonstrated in 1908 when the Football Association (of England) put forward a proposal



to Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) asking for the associations of Ireland and Scotland should be recognised as national governing bodies. The notion was rejected on the basis that if they were allowed to join, then 26 Austrian and 12 German 'nations' would have to be admitted as well.<sup>68</sup> This presented a major blow to Ireland and her desire to be recognised as a sporting nation.

The commonness of Irish independence in sport was undoubtedly one of the reasons why the Irish Amateur Athletic Union (IAAA) and the Irish Amateur Rowing Union (IARU) desired for an Irish team at the 1908 Olympics. Kevin McCarthy argues that on this evidence neither should be considered as 'vehicles of extreme nationalism'<sup>69</sup> but rather were both just 'independent minded bodies,' that wanted to enter their own teams at the Olympics, just as they had attempted to do for the 1906 Intercalated Games. The demands of the Irish Associations were not quashed by the British Olympic Association (BOA), but the IOC, who determined at their 1907 conference that a nation was 'any territory having separate representation on the International Committee, or where no such representation exists, any territory under one and the same sovereign jurisdiction.'<sup>70</sup>

There is no evidence of a reaction by the IAAA or the IAFU (although the inclusion of the IAAA in the meetings to determine the United Kingdom's team indicate it had put aside its demands),<sup>71</sup> but the GAA reaction was to ban their members from competing upon the British Olympic team. The numbers that dropped out of the British Olympic team as a result of this are unknown, but 53 Irishmen represented Britain in athletics at the Games. However, the Irish nationalist publication *Sinn Fein* stated that this stance had denied them at least one athlete, Peter O'Connor:

Mr P O'Connor of Waterford did not compete. It is hoped he refrained from doing so because of Ireland. It is understood some of the others from Ireland who competed are now sorry for what they have done. It is sorrow of the man who locks the stable door when the steed is stolen.<sup>72</sup>

'Mr P O'Connor' was Peter O'Connor, who had competed for Britain at the 1906 Intercalated Games, and finished second in the long jump. In reaction to the Union Jack being raised during the event's victory ceremony he 'climbed the pole about 20 feet in height and remained aloft for some time, waving my large flag.'<sup>73</sup> The flag was green, embellished with a Shamrock and the words 'Erin go Braugh' – *Ireland forever*.

Patrick O'Sullivan believes this incident points to a deep-rooted antipathy towards Britain felt by nationalistic Irish athletes at the time.<sup>74</sup> O'Connor's actions demonstrated his allegiance to this cause, and in the view of McCarthy, he had retired from athletics by 1908, and so would not have competed.

The source of the article is significant as the newspaper was described as 'the voice of Sinn Fein.' The anti-British nature of this newspaper, and the desire to ensure that the GAA's ban had success, makes the publication a potentially unreliable source for determining O'Connor's intentions. It was quite plausible that O'Connor was considering coming out of retirement for the London Games, but equally it is likely that this was a piece of propaganda intended to demonstrate that a prominent Irish athlete had answered the call of the GAA not to compete for the British team.

Support for an Irish team came from wider than just the world of sport. British consular and Sinn Fein member, Sir Roger Casement wrote an article on this subject in 1907 entitled 'Ireland and the Olympic Games – the Olympic Games of 1908.'<sup>75</sup> In this, he pressed his desire for a separate Irish team, stating; 'Let the Englishman, the Scotsman, and the Welshman stand each to himself, and his own land, and let the Irishman enter himself in the name of and for the fame of Ireland.'<sup>76</sup> His argument was that in government statistics, Irishmen were listed separately from the 'British,' so 'Why should we not own our own Irish athletes?'

Casement bemoaned that Irish victories were not recorded as such, but rather seen as 'great English victories.' He lamented that the 'remarkable English quality of annexing what is good and fameworthy has in no respect been more strikingly illustrated than in the frequent purloinment of Irish athletic success.'<sup>77</sup> This line of argument also appeared during the 1908 Olympics in an *Irish Independent* article that grumbled about Irishmen competing for America. It wrote with disdain about the fact Irishmen had been competing for Britain: 'What is still a greater grievance as far as Irishmen are concerned is the fact Irish athletes direct from this country are returned as Great Britain.'<sup>78</sup>

The BOA was considerate to Ireland and her athletes competing at the 1908 Games, designating the team 'Great Britain and Ireland.' The Shamrock, along with the Rose, Thistle and Prince of Wales Feathers were also used in the insignia for team at the track and field events. Matthew Llewellyn states this gesture 'illuminates just how far BOA officials were now willing to go to placate their Celtic neighbours in an effort to foster a far greater shared sense of Britishness.'<sup>79</sup>

In polo, hockey and cycle polo events,<sup>80</sup> Ireland was permitted her own team, although all teams were called; 'Great Britain and Ireland,' but only contained Irish athletes. In hockey, all the home nations

entered their own teams after the Irish association rejected the notion for a combined British team, and consequently the Welsh and Scottish associations followed their lead.<sup>81</sup> The Irish team was primarily comprised of men from Dublin (apart from three members) and took home a silver medal<sup>82</sup> after they were defeated by England in the final. In polo, the Irish team took the silver medal in the three-team competition, despite losing the only game they played. While the cycle polo competition featured just one match, in which the Irish team defeated Germany.<sup>83</sup>

The Irish athletes that competed for the British team 'performed outstandingly well'<sup>84</sup> in the view of Kevin McCarthy. There were numerous gold medals in athletics, for men such as Joseph Deakin, in the three-mile team race, Timothy Ahearne, who won the hop, step and jump and for Con Leahy, in the high jump. There was also a notable silver medal for Dennis Horgan in the shot put. Outside of athletics, George O'Kelly from Cork won the super heavyweight freestyle wrestling competition, and Joshua Milner took the free rifle shooting title.

Irishmen who competed for other nations also enjoyed success, such as Bobby Kerr, who won a gold in the 200 metres and bronze in the 100 metres. He was born in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, but immigrated to Canada at the age of five and competed for his adopted home at the Games. The majority of Irishmen competing for other countries represented the United States. The most notable examples of such men were Martin Sheridan (discus), John Flangan (hammer) and Patrick MacDonald (shot put), who were all born in Ireland and were celebrated as Irish victories in the Irish nationalist press. They also considered Johnny Hayes, winner of the marathon race as one of their own. He was American birth but to Irish parentage.

A divide between the Irish athletes and the rest of the British team was visible at the parade of athletes during the opening ceremony when they marched several feet behind the rest of the team. Little is known about why this occurred, and the only publication to make reference to it was the *New York Evening World*.<sup>85</sup> Historians have only been able to make presumptions about the meaning of this event, and the currently accepted view is that it was an attempt to show the dissatisfaction about the lack of a separate Irish team although this can neither be confirmed or denied.

The ceremony also witnessed another notable action that is believed to be making comment about the plight of Ireland. This came with the failure by Ralph Rose (the American shot putter) and American team flag carrier to dip the star spangled banner when he passed the King. Irish Olympic historian Kevin McCarthy believes that Rose took this action because he was heavily influenced by the Irish-American

contingent, primarily the ‘Irish Whales’ (the nickname for the Irish-American weight-throwers),<sup>86</sup> a group known to be fiercely anti-British.

Almost all of the Irish press reflections upon the 1908 Olympics appeared in July. The depictions of, or lack thereof, of Irish athletes within the Irish press is an indication of the political persuasion of the publication.

The Irish press that were of a Unionist political persuasion, preference was to concentrate on the success of Britain and British athletes at the Games, often at the expense of commenting on Irish people. The Belfast publication, *The Northern Whig*, included extensive Olympic articles throughout July 1908 and is a prime example of the reports seen in the unionist press. Its reports had headlines such as ‘Great Britain doing well,’<sup>87</sup> and ‘British Swimming Victory.’<sup>88</sup> The article that followed the latter headline further demonstrated its British persuasion, preferring to mention just British successes:

It was a great day for the United Kingdom’s representatives. Seldom has a competitor received such as by the little Wigan cyclist, Ben Jones, when he won the 5,000 metres race by a few inches from Schilles and A Auffray, the crack French cyclists. The British representatives made excellent beginning by carrying off the first four events. These were the steeplechase, which went to the ex-champion, Arthur Russell, of Rugby; the 200 metres breast stroke swimming race to F Holman, after a desperate struggle for first place with another British veteran, W W Robinson; the City Police, who formed the British first tug-of-war team; and the before-mentioned 5,000 metres cycle race. Further victories followed in the five miles flat race, going to the four miles champion, E R Voigt, and the 100 kilos cycling race, which C H Bartlett won. Previously to these track and field events the British archers had been shooting so successfully that Mr Dod won the gentleman’s and Miss Newal; and the ladies.<sup>89</sup>

As is common within the Olympic articles from *The Northern Whig* throughout this period, its angle is particularly pro-British, and its Olympic coverage is comparable with an English publication. Although an editorial from the end of the Games reveals a different perspective; preferring to take a philosophical look back upon the Olympics:

In the modern glorification of sport we have been told so often that there is nothing more conducive to friendliness than the rivalry in athletics that we have come to ignore the other side of the picture.

When there is a struggle for supremacy it is impossible to eliminate the uglier elements in human nature entirely. Wounded pride creeps in to mar the satisfaction which every good sportsman feels in the victory of those who have been worsted when they hoped to be victorious cannot help feeling. It needs time to engender in those who have lost the conviction that the best side has won. In the case of the Olympic Games the fortunes of the competitors were not only of individual but of national import, and both the elation of victory and the humiliation of defeat were experienced over a wider area than in any previous athletic contest in the history of the world.<sup>90</sup>

This editorial is not dissimilar to those seen in English reviews of the Games. The tone of the article and the arguments it made portrayed a British perspective, with the suggestion that the British morals of sport have taken a blow during the Olympics as a consequence of American actions. There was also a strong sense of Olympic apathy present in this article, another feature found in the English press.

The political persuasion of *The Belfast Weekly News* as a unionist publication were revealed through its descriptions of the Battle of the Boyne, and William of Orange, as 'one of the world's great heroes'<sup>91</sup> alongside an Olympic article. In comparison to *The Northern Whig*, this newspaper's Olympic coverage was substantially less, although it included a detailed article upon the marathon race and the opening ceremony when it remarked the Games was 'bid fair to be the most remarkable athletic meeting which has taken place in modern annals,' continuing that 'never have so many highly-talented competitors been pitted against each other.'<sup>92</sup> These comments promote the Olympics as a British success.

*The Daily Express* was another publication that wrote from a Unionist perspective. It also concentrated upon British performances,<sup>93</sup> although it had occasions when it wrote of solely Irish success. An example of this appeared on 21 July 1908, when the headline of its Olympic article was 'Irish Swimmer defeated.'<sup>94</sup> The article that followed then made no reference to this performance apart from within the results section, but it represents a rare example of the unionist press writing about an Irish athlete. The conservative *Irish Times* also wrote from a British standpoint in its infrequent Olympic Games articles. A prime example came after the 400 metres final, here it wrote from a British perspective, where many in the Irish nationalist press preferred to take an American stance.<sup>95</sup>

The nationalist press examined the Olympics from an opposing perspective to the unionist press and demonstrates the diversity in Irish identities. The concentration of the nationalist press was upon Irish success, whatever nation they competed for, although there were frustrations that these people's achievements did not count towards an Irish team. The general tone of these publications was anti-British and this was widespread within Olympic coverage.

The annoyance at the lack of an Irish team was apparent in the nationalist daily *The Irish and Belfast News*. In one editorial, it briefly mentioned the opening ceremony before stating its disgruntlement at the lack of an Irish team, 'King Edward VII will formally open the Olympic Games in the Anglo-French Exhibition to-day, and the great series of contests between the picked nations will continue for two weeks.'<sup>96</sup> The reference towards the 'picked' nations of the world appears to be a statement of disgruntlement about the lack of an Irish team at the Games. Reference to the Olympics was only part of this editorial and the majority of it was concerned with a paper released by the Secretary of State for War about the rejection of many potential recruits for the British Army on account of their physical condition:

Last year 34,000 men sought admission to the ranks of Great Britain's 'regular Army.' Of these 16,000 were rejected as 'physically unfit.' When we consider the Standard of physical capacity required in candidates for enlistment has been lowered again and again, and when the poor physique of the English regiments one sees in Ireland is taken into account, an idea of the wretchedness that merited rejection may be formed.<sup>97</sup>

Mocking the physical condition of Britain and emphasising a separate and superior Irish physical stature was a feature of the nationalist press's coverage at these Olympics and those of Stockholm in 1912. This was a prime way by which they attempted to signify a separate Irish identity. The frustrations of Irish athletes competing for other nations was widespread across the nationalist Irish press in their Olympic coverage. Some of the most interesting comment upon this theme came in sporting publication, *The Cork Sportsman*. McCarthy describes this as 'the most vocal publication when it came to Irish identity within the Great Britain and Ireland team.'<sup>98</sup> Published weekly, its first Olympic reference came at the end of the athletic events:

remember these are your countrymen and mine. How long, then is Ireland to be exploited for the athletic development of other nations? As long as we permit it. When we, with one united voice, demand

International recognition in the athletic world, no power on Earth can prevent us from securing it. Our record is such a stupendous one that our request will be immediately granted. That this happy consummation may speedily be brought about this is, I believe, the sincere wish of every lover of the old country.<sup>99</sup>

This editorial's primary frustration was with what it saw as the 'exploitation' of Irish athletes. Its desire was for this to come to an end and for Irish successes being attributed to Ireland. In the same publication, regular columnist 'Carberry' indicated that there was a pride in how all Irish athletes, whatever nation they represented had fared:

And how has Ireland fared? Splendidly. Though no distinct team represented our own nation, Ireland's sons have helped materially to swell the list of victories of both the United States and United Kingdom. The greatest authority on English athletics, referring to little Ahearne's victory in the hop, step and jump says 'well, well,' how these Hibernians have come to the front in these games. No less than six American victories have been secured by Irishmen, namely Hammer throwing, 800 metres, 1,500 metres, the Discus throwing in both styles and last but not least, the great Marathon race. We might also have mention of the fine jumping of Con Leahy and the plucky running but hard luck of P J Roche.<sup>100</sup>

This editorial is unusual in that it looked upon the success of all those competing for Ireland. The norm in the Irish press was to either concentrate on those Irishmen competing for Britain or the United States, rarely both. Carberry took pride and satisfaction that Irish athletes had performed well, whatever nation they competed for. It is not until the final line of the article that any sense of frustration about the position of Irish athletes not being able to compete for Ireland became apparent:

It is sincerely to be hoped that when the next Olympiad comes around, the ruling powers will see their way to allow a team of athletes to go forth to defend Ireland's athletic honour, and Ireland's only.<sup>101</sup>

Annoyance of Ireland's victories being attributed to other nations is clear to see. This theme is one seen in other nationalist publications, such as in this article from *The Irish Independent* on 21 July 1908:

Of course the writer that they are Irishmen who came over with the American contingent, and are, therefore, returned in the winning

results as ‘Americans.’ What is still a greater grievance as far as Irishmen are concerned is the fact that Irish athletes direct from this country are returned as ‘Great Britain.’ This occurred yesterday, and has occurred over and over again from the commencement.<sup>102</sup>

This editorial demonstrated the displeasure of Irishmen competing for any nation, but those that compete for Britain presented the biggest grievance. Undoubtedly, the success that the Irish-American athletes enjoyed, such as the gold medals won by John Flanagan in the hammer and Martin Sheridan in the discus, was a source of frustration as both men were born in Ireland. These two men were at the heart of a *Freeman’s Journal* editorial, which stated; ‘Many of these, no doubt, are American citizens, but many were born in Ireland, and of the American born none had a long Transatlantic pedigree to take from us our good share of the credit.’<sup>103</sup> As so often was the case, the lost opportunity to credit Ireland was the primary source of annoyance.

Irish victories for Britain were a source of particular source of resentment. The *Munster Express* claimed that despite Irishmen competing for Britain, ‘England will never succeed in Anglicising the Gael,’<sup>104</sup> and continued:

Irishmen competing for other nations has only intensified along with the desire for Irish freedom. There is a belief in that Irishmen are the world’s premier athletes, but this will not be realised until Ireland is allowed to compete by herself.<sup>105</sup>

This final quote, and all those from this section, demonstrated the frustrations of nationalists about not having an Irish team. Nonetheless, there was pride in the achievements of Irishmen whatever nation they competed for.

Both these previously referenced articles and others wrote with pride in the performances of Irishmen. For example, the *Irish Independent* wrote with pleasure that ‘it may be pointed out that the American competitors who won the most laurels last week are Irishmen.’<sup>106</sup> Its reports of 17 and 18 July 1908 were further examples of this. Upon the former date it wrote; ‘Perhaps the most interesting feature of the day, as far as Irishmen were concerned was the weight competition, in which Denis Horgan defeated.’<sup>107</sup> The following day it then stated ‘the many friends of Mr George Dockrell, the well-known Dublin swimmer, son of Sir Maurice Dockrell, will be pleased to learn that he won his



heat in the 100 metres race.’<sup>108</sup> These reports made little or no reference of British athletes, occasionally mentioning their achievements (if it was relevant to an Irish triumph), but it did not belittle them as was seen elsewhere. The promotion of Irishmen was the primary object in this publication. This was a theme not widely seen in the nationalist press, but one present in some newspapers, often in connection with comments regarding physical superiority, or like those previously used that bemoaned how Irish successes were aiding other nations medal counts.

One aspect widely written about was the belief in how well Ireland had performed in comparison to its size, and a conviction that she had fared better than Britain. This was a theme in *The Irish and Belfast News* on 17 July. It began by quoting an editorial from the English *Daily Telegraph*, which believed the British performance was good in comparison to the United States and Germany, nations greater in terms of size and population:

Their physical vigour and intelligence is the same as our own, and they have four times the chance that we have to produce, from one or other of these countries. Republic or Fatherland, the best amateurs in any established form of international sport. The wonder is that the little island holds its own with that measure of success which has been hitherto maintained.<sup>109</sup>

From a British perspective, this editorial was in no doubt in the belief of the nations’ superiority when defeats at the Olympics were leading some people to question this. Proving that Britain was doing well considering her size was not the reason why this article was included, but rather it was used to argue that Ireland’s size and population made her performances all the more notable. *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News* continued with the following statement:

but let us apply the principle to Ireland. Great Britain, America, and Germany have nearly 40 times the population of this country; yet men of Irish birth dominate the world of ‘pure athletics,’ notwithstanding the perpetual drain of our youthful manhood to other Lands. Members of the Gaelic Athletic Association at the present moment hold no less than fourteen unbeaten ‘world’s records’ in running, jumping, and weight-throwing events. There are only a few left in the hands of the nations whose combined populations exceed Ireland’s by nearly forty to one.<sup>110</sup>

The reference to the GAA indicated a potential political motivation behind this article. Its main purpose was to demonstrate the physical superiority of Irishmen, with the statistics used to argue that Ireland's small population makes it superior to both the United States and most importantly, Britain.

Superiority over Britain was a reoccurring theme across both the Irish nationalist press coverage of both the 1908 and 1912 Olympic Games. Commonly, its purpose was to make comparisons with Britain and to demonstrate Irish physical superiority over Britain. There can be no doubt that bitterness towards Britain was certainly the most prominent theme within the Olympic coverage of the Irish nationalist press.

Throughout its Olympic coverage, *The Freeman's Journal*, was fiercely anti-British, demonstrated by its inclusion of solely the American perspective to the controversial 400 metre final.<sup>111</sup> A feature of the publications coverage was its comments regarding Irish physical superiority. The next group of quotes all come from this publication relate to Irish physicality, and are fiercely anti-British in nature. The first relates to the remarkable nature of the Irish success, despite the apparent conditions that Ireland had endured:

It is a remarkable record for a people who had more than their share on penury as well as of persecution. Plain food, and not too much of it, fresh air, and clean living have told with a success known to many lands. For nowadays the conquering Irish athlete seems to be everywhere; often presented as an American as an Englishman. Avowedly competing as an American or Irish-American in the Olympic Games in London he was described by the English newspapers, obeying an old habit, as an Anglo-Saxon-when he won.<sup>112</sup>

This quote related to the food shortages that Ireland had endured, most notably the Great Potato Famine. It also wrote positively of the rural nature of Ireland, in comparison to concerns in England that its society was becoming overly urban,<sup>113</sup> and the frustration of Irishmen being identified as Englishmen when they won. Despite these irritations, a letter to the newspaper's editor indicated that there was still a pride in seeing Irishmen compete, whatever nation it was for, contributing towards evidence of Irish physical superiority:

at the same time demonstrated beyond the possibility of doubt that, so far as Irishmen are concerned, there is as yet no sign of that physical deterioration, which is, and has been, noticeable in other races by those who have given attention to the subject.<sup>114</sup>

The comment about other races 'physical deterioration' was undoubtedly a reference towards the British, a people who had begun to fear that they were becoming physically decadent. The third quote comes from after the conclusion of the Olympic athletics contests, and referred to the post-Olympic athletic match between Ireland and America. This presented an opportunity to emphasise Irish physical superiority:

Citizens of all classes and creeds vied with each other in honouring the athletes of Irish birth and descent who helped to sustain not only the athletic prowess of America but of the Old Land in the great international contests which have come to a close in the English capital. Men who never took the slightest interest in athletic exercises were profoundly impressed by the world-wide distinction achieved by Ireland's sons in the Olympic contests, in which the greatest athletic talent of the world struggled for supremacy. The result was a demonstration of the largest and most enthusiastic character ever witnessed perhaps in any country in the world in honour of physical prowess.<sup>115</sup>

This quote demonstrated the pride in the performances of Irish athletes at the Games. Despite the lack of an Irish team, it gives the indication of an Irish victory at the Olympics with the intention to include all men of Ireland.

The latter part of the nineteenth century had witnessed Irish dominance in the throwing events, and although this was on the wane in the first decade of the twentieth century, there was still an expectation of medals in these sports at the 1908 Olympics. One Irishman expected to win a title was Denis Horgan, of Lyre, near Banteer, who had dominated British shot-put competitions for over a decade, although at the London Olympics he was 37 years of age, and 'past his best.' At the Games, he was pushed back into second place by the American thrower Ralph Rose who threw 59 centimetres further. A cartoon that appeared in *The Freeman's Journal* claimed that Rose was 'considered a perfectly developed specimen of manhood,'<sup>116</sup> a comment that could indicate that in the minds of the Irish, for her athlete to be defeated, the opposition had to be perfect? (Figure 2.1).

As within British press, the coverage within the Irish press of the Marathon race was the most extensive of any event at the Games. There was an interesting Irish perspective to the race, as the winner, Johnny Hayes who competed for the United States was of Irish parentage. His Irish heritage ensured that the nationalist press considered him one of their own. The marathon race had been built-up in the

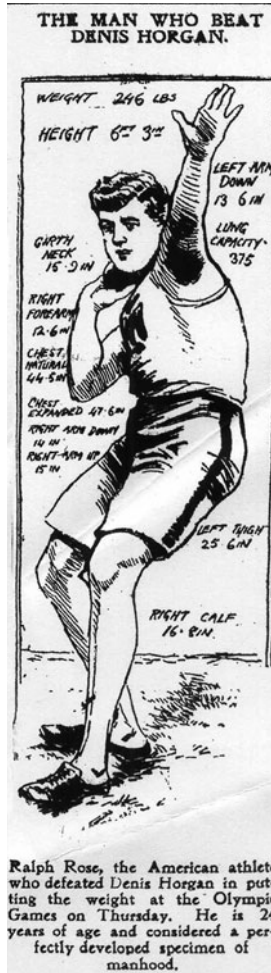


Figure 2.1 'The man who beat Denis Horgan', The Freeman's Journal, 31st July 1908, p 6.

Source: Ibid, p 1.

British press as the ultimate test of physical endurance, and this was something that the Irish press used against them after the success of a Man from Irish heritage. The nationalist press were keen to emphasise Hayes' Irish nature, as it gave them victory in the most physically demanding event of the Olympics, a major plus in their desire to prove themselves physically superior to Britain. Coverage of this race gave further insights into Irish thoughts in its physicality.

The failure of the British athletes in this race provided a means by which the Irish nationalist press could state their superiority over Britain. *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News* used the opportunity to state Britain's apparent faults. Its marathon article was headed 'Will the English ever learn,' and stated:

The government of Ireland by England has always been an amalgam of criminality and stupidity. Thoughtful Englishmen who have succeeded in ridding themselves of hereditary anti-Irish prejudices have recognised this fact.<sup>117</sup>

After this politically charged statement, it moved out directly onto the subject of the marathon race. It used the British claim that she was the supreme long-distance running nation in the world to put her down:

During the past few months we were assured again and again that, though the Americans might win the jumps, the sprints, and the weights, and the Continentals 'romp off' with 'events' pertaining to the swimming tank and the gymnasium, there was no doubt whatever regarding the result of the premier contest: the Marathon Race was a 'moral' for the 'boys of the bull-dog breed.' There was just a possibility that a Canadian might secure the coveted prize: but if that happened, why Canada is in the Empire, and we are all Anglo-Saxons.<sup>118</sup>

The article ended with the line 'the crown remains with the Irishman J J Hayes,'<sup>119</sup> a statement that not only derided the British but indicated an Irish identity of physical superiority. The disdain for the English (and the belief in their superiority), was central to this piece and the marathon race presented an opportunity for Ireland to emit a belief in their superiority over England.

*The Freeman's Journal* mocked the English press' belief that her eight athletes would be the first men home.<sup>120</sup> This publication poked fun at the English performance throughout, although notably never the British (preferring to always deem them 'English'). One editorial concluded with the hope that the next general election would see home rule implemented, and with it a better future for Ireland.<sup>121</sup>

In another edition, a letter to the editor expressed a sense of joy felt from the success of 'Irishman,' Johnny Hayes 'let Ireland fill the cup of fame for the Olympic champions. Thanking you in anticipation and resting assured that the Irish will come forward as one man to honour

her sons.<sup>122</sup> Hayes' portrayal as an Irishman was central to the nationalist's press coverage of the Marathon race. No article emphasises his Irish identity more than the interview with him that appeared in the *Irish News and Belfast Morning News* shortly after the race. The articles subheading was 'Gallant Tipperaryman's sensation run,' and went at length to state his Irish character:

he is clean-shaven, and is typically Irish in his dark hair and eyes and kindly expression. His accent is more Irish than American, and, in an interview with an IRISH NEWS representative, he said he was Irish right through. He looked quite fresh and fit, and said he did not feel a pin the worse after his great struggle. The majority, if not all, of the successful members of the American team are Irish, according to Hayes. He was delighted to meet so many good Irish friends at the House. He thought his team had done splendidly, considering the distance they had to travel and all the circumstances. His grandfather is still alive in Tipperary, and he is to visit the old country before he goes home.<sup>123</sup>

The description of Hayes emphasised his Irish heritage and the prowess of Irishmen competing as part of the American team. He was portrayed as a fine physical specimen, and a man of Ireland. The article also indicated his views upon the rest of the American team, how all the successful athletes were Irish; emphasising the physical superiority of Irishmen and their separate identity from Britain. Hayes also spoke disdainfully of the British when reflecting upon his comparable receptions in each nation: 'his reception in Ireland was "fit to kill," and not like the lukewarm handshaking with which his victory was hailed in England.'<sup>124</sup>

This was not the only article in the publication to write about the success of Hayes, as the following day another editorial reflected upon the race and wrote of the man who had finished first only to be disqualified; Dorando Pietri. The editorial linked the two men by their common cultural heritage:

This 'Marathon race' bids fair to figure in athletic history as the Waterloo of English long-distance running. No excuse but one can be offered for the defeat of the ten Anglo-Saxon candidates: they were inferior in speed, strength, pluck and endurance to the Latin and the Celt. Lord Salisbury, in the famous speech already referred to, ranked 'the Celtic fringe' with the Latins as 'dying nations.' The physical vitality of Celt and Latin has been abundantly testified in London within the past two weeks.<sup>125</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing statement within this extract is 'Celtic fringe' – the belief that there was a 'Celtic nation' and the desire to differentiate between the English (Anglo-Saxon), and the rest of the Isles (Celts). The author refuses to believe that the Celts (and Latins) were 'dying nations,' suggesting rather that it was the English who were 'dying.'

The Irish press present an interesting perspective for understanding the differing Irish identities present from a sporting and wider viewpoint. The examples here demonstrate the contrasting Irish identities present. Unionist publications read more alike a typical English newspaper, reviewing and promoting the success of British athletes, with little to no space to make reference to the performances of Irish athletes.

As expected the coverage from the nationalist press is different; it writes from a pro-Irish perspective, it ignores the performances of non-Irish British athletes in the same manner which the unionist press ignored Irish performances. The nationalist press see all men of Irish heritage, whatever their nationality as Irish. The main difference between nationalist and unionist press is that (the nationalists) do not ignore Irish athletes, not even those competing for Britain, despite their annoyance at the lack of an Irish team. One summary of the frustrations felt during the Olympics appeared in *The Freeman's Journal* at the end of the Games:

Why, our team was made up of men 75 per cent, of whom had Irish blood in them, and it grieved us to think that Irishmen were competing against us, with England's flag, the Union Jack, on their breasts. Why, we Irishmen in the states cannot understand how it is that any Irishmen should wear England's flag, and especially defend England's flag, as some men did at the games in London.

It is cruel to think of it, after all those hundreds of years of persecution to find some Irishmen still so slavish.<sup>126</sup>

The article concluded with a quote from American James Sullivan regarding the American team, stating, 'The English hate us.'<sup>127</sup> This is yet another example of England being referred to in the Irish press, in preference to Britain. This could be a further example of the interchangeable use of England and Britain, but it also could be an indicator of the hatred for English institutions rather than those of Britain, which include Scotland and Wales, nations of shared 'Celtic' heritage.

The defeats that Britain endured at the Olympic Games further damaged the British belief in her sporting superiority. The Victorians in

particular became obsessed with ideas of ‘racial science’ and ‘Social Darwinism’ that sought to explain why some races were dominant over others. From the perspective of the Irish nationalist press the performances of Irish athletes at the Olympics was an opportunity to demonstrate how Ireland had her own physical identity, separate and superior to England.

### **Scotland and the 1908 Olympics**

Scotland’s representatives at the 1908 Olympics won nine medals, of which five were gold. The most notable Scottish medal was the gold won by 400-metre runner, Wyndham Hallswelle who, prior to the Games, was one of Britain’s primary athletic hopes for an Olympic title in athletics. The controversy and aftermath of this race ensured that it was one of the most talked about events of the 1908 Olympics.

Scotland’s contribution to the British medal haul in London was small, but her contribution to the Union and Empire during this period was substantial. From a political, military and industrial perspective, she did proportionally more than her population size suggested.<sup>128</sup> Her industry provided for the world, her soldiers were influential across the Empire, and her inventors such as James Watt and Alexander Graham Bell, made significant contributions such as the invention of the steam engine and telephone. This position is summed up by Tom Devine:

So intense was the Scottish engagement with Empire that almost every nook and cranny of national life from economy to identity, religion to politics and consumerism to demography were affected by this powerful force. The great industries of the nation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were believed to depend for their success on imperial markets.<sup>129</sup>

The Act of Union of 1707 between Scotland and England had seen Scotland become a junior partner. The industrialisation that commenced in the eighteenth century continued into the nineteenth, and Scotland became heavily industrialised, through shipbuilding, coal mining and steel production. The consequence of this was a loss of a distinctive Scottish identity, and the emergence of a British Imperial identity, Devine states, ‘The British Empire also had a potent influence on Scottish national consciousness and identity.’<sup>130</sup> Richard J Finlay states, ‘the Scottish institutions which did much to differentiate Scotland from England and maintain a distinctive Scottish national



ethos found their influence in Scottish society being eroded by the pressures of urbanisation.<sup>131</sup>

A prime example of Scotland embracing the Empire came in Glasgow, which became the unofficial 'Second city of Empire'<sup>132</sup> in the early nineteenth century, a position it retained 'until at least 1914'<sup>133</sup> and specialised in the imperial markets and has earned such titles as 'Workshop of Empire' or 'Engineer Extraordinary to the British Empire.'

In the words of Hutchinson the Union was advantageous to Scotland, or, as Hutchinson states; 'the Union was seen as highly beneficial to the Scots, since economic growth was ascribed to the merger of the two nations.'<sup>134</sup> He continued by describing the importance of the growth of the British Empire to Scottish identity:

The wars with France, which ended in 1815, helped bind Scotland closely into the idea of Britishness, as the menace of invasion unified opinion and identity. The prominent part played by Scots in acquiring and running the Empire cemented wholehearted identification with Britain. ... The presence in the settle colonies of hundreds of thousands of people with Scottish origins further underlined the identification. It was no coincidence that opposition among Liberals to Irish Home Rule was especially strong in Scotland, for it was regarded as presaging the break-up of the Empire.<sup>135</sup>

At the start of the twentieth century, the closeness between Scotland and Britain was demonstrated in adversity. Britain's problems were acutely Scotland's. This was illustrated by the sense felt in Scotland following criticisms of the Boer War campaign, 'bitter industrial disputes',<sup>136</sup> and economic downturns such as the 2.4% that Britain lost in world manufacturing during this period, which all impacted upon Scotland.

Sport was a sphere where a unique Scottish identity thrived in this period. This occurred via the sports internationals played between the British nations. Primarily through rugby and football, the age-old rivalry between Scotland and England was renewed. Richard Holt describes how 'national rivalry in rugby was friendly but in football it was fanatical',<sup>137</sup> with both sports allowing a sense of personal identity for Scotland to develop that was different to the rest of Britain, and one that was often adverse to England.

Derek Birley believed that not only did sport create unique national identities across Britain but, it was an important force in the forging of British national identity; 'It was not always a unifying influence, at least on the surface: in this it was a microcosm of the complex political and

social relationships of the alliance.<sup>138</sup> Football was the defining sport for Scotland, and prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the game provided a focus for Scottish national feeling,<sup>139</sup> but it did not threaten or conflict with the broader British identity.<sup>140</sup>

The extensive writing about the development of a Scottish identity through sport would be to suggest that Scots did not feel part of Britain. Outside of sport this appears to be wrong, as from examining the argument made in I G C Hutchinson's chapter on nineteenth century Scotland, entitled 'Scots or Britons,' it appears that Scots considered themselves Britons:

Nineteenth-century Scotland presented an unusual picture of a people who were intensely conscious of their distinct national characteristics, but were uninterested in any outright form of separatism or independence. This was primarily because most Scots felt no serious grievance against England, believed that their prosperity was intimately bound up with the union of the two countries, and encountered no barriers to advancement because of their ethnic identity.<sup>141</sup>

In this chapter, Hutchinson does note that a Scottish Home Rule movement had begun in 1886, but its desire was not to create a separate Scotland, rather it wanted to raise awareness how of Parliament was not giving enough time to Scottish affairs. After the IOC determined that Britain would only be able to enter one team for the 1908 Olympics in 1907, there was dismay from some of the Scottish sporting associations. There were letters from both the Scottish Amateur Athletic and Amateur Swimming Associations to the Secretary of the BOC [British Olympic Council] demanding their own teams to compete at the White City. Upon the refusal, 'annoyed responses'<sup>142</sup> were sent to the BOC. McCarthy believes that the Scottish Associations were angrier about this decision than their Irish counterparts.<sup>143</sup>

The adverse reaction also suggests that Scotland was not happy with its place within the Union, but this was not the case. From a sporting perspective, the indication was that Scots felt Scottish rather than British, but in other spheres, they were British. John Macintosh argues that a 'sense of a dual consciousness or loyalty is true of most periods and most people in Scottish life.'<sup>144</sup> Bernard Crick adds that in Scotland, as in Wales, many people had a 'vivid sense of dual nationality,' which gave them an 'enhanced quality of life in being able to live in two worlds, enjoying two cultures and their hybrids.'<sup>145</sup>

The lack of entries for some events, particularly those of the 'autumn'<sup>146</sup> games saw proposals made for teams from each of the British nations proposed, although only in hockey did this happen (the proposals for Scottish teams in association football and water polo came to nothing, owing 'solely to expense').<sup>147</sup> Here the Scottish team finished joint third with Wales after losing to England in the semi-final.

Keeping in with the Olympic coverage from across the Union, that within the Scottish press was substantial, although there was little comment relating directly to the Scottish athletes who competed. The preference in the Scottish media was for a British perspective, yet further indication of the closeness between Scotland and Britain. One of the few examples of a uniquely Scottish perspective being presented appeared in *The Scottish Referee*, in an editorial that bemoaned the lack of Scottish medals:

we regret that Scotland in these is to play such an insignificant part. We have, sorry to say, only one representative likely to bring Olympian honour over the border, and he, of course, is Lieutenant Hallswelle, upon whom we pin our faith to win the quarter-mile for Britain and Scotland especially.<sup>148</sup>

This presented a rare expression of a uniquely Scottish perspective towards the Olympics, although it should not be seen as an expression of individualism, but rather, a disappointment that her athletes did not add more to the British effort. The potential for Scottish success was thwarted by the injury sustained by J M'Gough (winner of the 1,500 metres at the Olympic trials) shortly before the Games.<sup>149</sup>

One general observation of the entire Scottish press is that the use of the terms 'England' and 'English' when 'Britain' and 'British' would have been more appropriate was common. There were instances of the use of England, such as *The Scotsman's* description of the parade of athletes during the opening ceremony. It commented that, 'the Swedes and Danes were particularly well received, as were the Canadians, Australians, and Englishmen.'<sup>150</sup> It should be considered that only the Englishmen were given a good reception, but with the British team coming out as one (apart from the Irish athletes that followed shortly behind), it would have been incredibly unlikely that any group within the British team would have been singled out.

The indication from the Scottish press's coverage of the 1908 Olympics was that they saw themselves as being British, and enjoyed

the success of all British athletes as their own. Scotland's identity was of Scotland and Britain, identities that Richard J Finlay describes as 'mutually reinforcing'.<sup>151</sup>

The English media emitted a belief in British national superiority prior to the commencement of the Games and this was also present in sections of the Scottish media, such as *The Weekly News for Edinburgh and the South*:

The country over which King Edward rules is famed for its prowess in practically every sphere of sport, and there could be no more appropriate centre for such a gathering than London, especially at a time when the Exhibition at Shepherd's Bush is attracting visitors from all parts of the globe.<sup>152</sup>

This editorial wrote of the pride in being British and the belief in British superiority, which was a feature of the coverage within the English press. The belief in the superiority of British methods and morals was a feature of the Scottish coverage, such as that was expressed in *The Edinburgh Evening News* Olympic editorial on 14 July 1908. This came after the controversial victory of the Liverpool Police over the United States in the tug-of-war competition:

The Yankee team were apparently hopelessly outclassed, and the plea that the British team were wearing heavy boots will not explain their easy victory, it is an unfortunate fact that Americans are neither good winners nor good losers. In the first case they 'crow' too much, write in the second case they are too ready to find excuses for defeat.<sup>153</sup>

This editorial demonstrates sympathy for the United States team and considers this distinctly English team its own. There is a reference of the American complaint about the use of illegal boots by the British, but the preference is to focus upon the apparent poor sporting attitude of the American team, the need for sporting morals and the willingness to be a good loser. One attribute of sporting Britishness was a sense of fair play, mentioned on other occasions, such as after the 400-metre final:

Such incidents as the foul in the 400 metres race at the Olympic Games cause doubt as to the healthiness of international rivalry in sport. Our British ideals of fair play appear to be too strict for our Yankee and colonial cousins.<sup>154</sup>

This article further supports the theory that Scotland's identity was that of Britain, done here by arguing that fair play is a British trait. It also reflected an apparent British identity in another editorial, with a reflection about the feeling of superiority arising from being the premier Olympic nation:

Although the British competitors did not by any means distinguish themselves in the great Marathon race, the summary of results at the Stadium is entirely favourable to Great Britain. It shows that the representatives of this country have achieved far more successes than those of any other nation. Even after liberal allowance is made for contests in which the awards were disputed by the Americans, the number of wins credited to Great Britain considerably exceeds that allotted to the United States. Obviously, the Americans are taking their beating badly.<sup>155</sup>

This perspective came after Britain endured many defeats, resulting in questions about her sporting prowess. This opinion defended the British and her record at the Olympics.

There are numerous other instances of the Scottish press considering them self as British. Examples came via *The Glasgow 'Evening Times'* subheading to its Olympic article of 27 July, that was 'How Britain stands.'<sup>156</sup> British success was also the theme in *The Weekly News for Edinburgh and the South* in its headline of "The Olympic Games: "British successes".<sup>157</sup>

One concern of the English press in the wake of the defeats in athletics was the nations' apparent physical decline. This was also a feature within a Scotsman article reflecting upon the marathon race in an article headed 'American wins Marathon race', with the third subheading posing the question, 'Where were the Britishers?' It continued:

But where were the Britishers? A fourth and fifth American, three successive Canadians, a Swede, and the Russian, a Finn, and another Canadian were cordially welcomed before the first of the few British survivors arrived. Only two others finished – a fact reflecting in no favourable manner upon the physical status of the Englishman of to-day.<sup>158</sup>

This article is interesting in that after the subheading the first line of the article mentions British and 'Britishers,' but its final reference is to 'Englishmen.' This could potentially just be a prime example of the interchangeable nature of the terms 'England' and 'Britain,' but it could

also be potentially acting to separate Scotland from the Englishmen that competed (who were Britain's sole competitors in the Marathon), and whose best placed athlete finished twelfth.

The only other separation of Scotland from the rest of Britain came in an editorial regarding the tug-of-war, an article that mocked the three English police teams that competed for Britain in this event:

Scotland is not equal to (now, so far as we know; is any home nation through their police forces) sending athletes to the Stadium. Not that they have not members able to engage in the various competitions, but that duty compels them to do their 'bests,' and by all men's, if possible, capture the lively, alter, and ubiquitous criminals who night and day prowl and plaque against the lives and property of decent, law abiding citizens.<sup>159</sup>

Despite this article, the consensus from the Scottish press was that they saw themselves as British through their Olympic coverage. There was a defence of the British performance at the Olympics, and regular reference towards the British nation's superiority.

### **The representation of Wyndham Hallswelle**

The most prominent Scottish athlete at the 1908 Olympics was 400-metre runner, Wyndham Hallswelle. Hallswelle was London born to Scottish parentage in 1882,<sup>160</sup> but apart from his birth he was Scottish, having being educated in Scotland and served as an officer in the Highland light infantry during the Boer War. When fighting in South Africa, his natural talent for running was noticed by former professional athlete, Jimmy Curran, who was serving alongside Hallswelle.<sup>161</sup>

After the War, Curran persuaded Hallswelle to take up running seriously and coached him to success in the 880 Yards at the 1904 Army Championships. In 1905, Hallswelle won both the Scottish and AAA 440 Yards Championships, and, at the 1906 Intercalated Games, he won the 400 metres and finished third in the 800 metres. A leg injury kept him out of the 1907 season, but in 1908, he set two national records on the way to collecting the 100, 220, 300, 440 and 880 yard races at the Scottish Championships. Nicknamed the 'Scot,' his record in the 300 yard event lasted for 53 years.

At the 1908 Olympics, Hallswelle solely competed in the 400 metres, and set an Olympic record (48.4 seconds) in the semi-final. In the four man final he came up against three Americans, and unlike in

modern 400 metre racing, that is run in lanes the 1908 contest was more reminiscent of modern 800 or 1500 metre racing – without lanes and athletes all battling for front position alongside each other. In the race, physical contact occurred, and in the view of the British referees, American John Carpenter nudged the Scotsman unfairly and the race was deemed void before the finish.<sup>162</sup>

In the aftermath, the judges (who were all British) disqualified Carpenter and determined that the race must be re-run. In protest at the decision Carpenter's compatriots, William Robbins and John Taylor, boycotted the re-run, leaving Hallswelle to run the race alone and to the only walkover in Olympic final history. The controversy of the event had ramifications upon both sides of the Atlantic, and was central to American complaints about the way her athletes were treated during the 1908 Olympics.

Here will be examination of Hallswelle's portrayal with regard to how he was perceived as being Scottish or British. One perspective in the English press was to state that Hallswelle was English. This could be one of the many examples of the interchangeably used terms of 'Britain' and 'England' that was so common throughout this period of research. One example of this appeared in *The Bystander*, which began its article describing the first running of the final and how 'there were three Americans to one Englishman.'<sup>163</sup> This is just one of many examples of Hallswelle being referred to as being English in the English and Welsh press.<sup>164</sup>

Keith Robbins gives a suggestion as to why institutions and people from Scotland are referred to as being English, such as occurred here by using the example of an address by Lord Roseberry to an audience at the University of Edinburgh in 1882. Roseberry observed how the English set out to dominate Britain, believing that all parts of the nation were 'England,' a concept that may help us explain why so many of the newspaper articles refer to 'England' and the 'English' when they should have referred to Scotland: 'He noted that Englishmen generally eschewed the terms "British" and "Great Britain".' They tended to think that every part of the United Kingdom was 'English.' This self-possession, characteristic, he thought, of dominant races, had indeed made England what it was.<sup>165</sup>

The general perception of Hallswelle in the press was of him being primarily British, but also Scottish on occasion. There are instances of him being stated as both, such as in an editorial in *The Evening Times* of Glasgow. It called the 400-metre final 'The Affair,' and identified Hallswelle as being both British and Scottish, and wrote about the high morals of the nation:

To the enthusiast and the devotee the shorter events of the week were indefinitely more interesting than the Marathon race. It was in these that Scotland, at all events, was chiefly centred, for although we had representatives in the big race, men who under more favourable circumstances, might have done well, yet we knew exactly where we were in the 400 with Lieut. Halswelle. That race – the equivalent of the British quarter – was gradually installed as the real sporting culmination and climax of the fortnight's struggle between Britain and America. What actually took place is the best proof of that contention. It was Halswelle against the world, and the world, unfortunately, did not give him a fair and unfettered chance to win his laurels.

My sympathies are all with Lieut. Halswelle in the unfortunate position in which he was placed, and I am only a representative of 99 per cent of the country in this matter. He did not seek a cheap honour and in ordinary circumstances would have declined the walk-over, which completely spoiled the race of the fortnight. I am altogether cock-sure that he would have won in any case but I know that during the past month he has lived for the great effort he meant to make, and is well worthy the honour. More power to him!<sup>166</sup>

This article appears to be in no doubt of the nationality of Halswelle. He was stated as being Scottish, in a race that was referred to as being the 'climax of the fortnight's struggle between Britain and America.'<sup>167</sup> There appears to be pride in Halswelle's role in defending British honour in winning the race, and by the manner he conducted himself.

*The Edinburgh Evening News* also wrote about the controversy in an article entitled 'Sensation at the Olympic Games.'<sup>168</sup> This notes him to be the Scottish champion and an officer in the Highland Light Infantry, and believes that in the event, 'Great Britain were expected to have a fine chance.'<sup>169</sup> The notion of being not just Scottish, but British at the same time was again emphasised here.

Halswelle's Scottish identity was a theme in an article in *The Weekly News for Edinburgh and the South* regarding the event. This included a headline of 'The Scotsman who broke the record,' with a short accompanying article that emphasised Halswelle's Scottish identity:

The rise to the front rank of athletes of that 'Flying Scotsman,' Lieutenant W. Halswelle, has been phenomenal. A couple of years ago he was practically unknown, and now he has broken the record at the Stadium for the 400 metres flat race. The pity is that he had not the opportunity of showing his mettle on Saturday against



the American 'cracks,' owing to the contretemps arising out of the annulled final.<sup>170</sup>

This was the only reference across the Scottish media of Hallswelle being the 'Flying Scotsman,' a nickname he is referred to at other times. It demonstrates a great pride in him being from Scotland and competing against the American 'cracks.' There was a genuine belief in his ability as an athlete, but in comparison to other articles regarding Britain's athletes, there was no belief in his superiority and expectation that he should be victorious, as was frequent within the English press. Belief in the high morals of British sport is a theme present throughout this monograph. *The Edinburgh Evening News* made comment about this after Hallswelle's victory:

Such incidents as the foul in the 400 metres race at the Olympic Games cause doubt as to the healthiness of international rivalry in sport. Our British ideals of fair play appear to be too strict for our Yankee and colonial cousins.<sup>171</sup>

Yet again, this comment is further indication of a pride in the British performance and an indication of the British nature of the Scottish press.

In conclusion, the representation of Hallswelle within the various sections of the British press fits in well with those reached by commentators upon Scottish identity. He is commonly identified as being British and Scottish, and this keeps in with the centrality of Britain to the Scottish identity, represented through the pride that was emitted when Hallswelle defended British honour by defeating the athletes from the United States.

### **Anti-British sentiment from within the Scottish press**

Not all of the Scottish press were pro-British or even pro-Scottish with regards to their Olympic coverage. Part of the diversity of Imperial Scotland was that there had been mass immigration into the country from Ireland, which swelled the country's population to 4.7 million in 1911 after being just 2.3 million in 1831.<sup>172</sup> Although the common view within the press was to be unified behind the British cause, *The Glasgow Observer* was different. It was written for the Irish-Catholic community, and consequently wrote from an Irish perspective about the Games (continuing the trend of the publication that had regular columns such as 'In Ireland, our Irish letter' and 'Irish Outlook'), and upon occasion

was anti-British in its views. David McCrone believes that divisions in Scottish society such as was present in this publication were important for Scotland's identity, 'The image of Scotland as a divided and unhealthy society is a common one in Scottish literature, which has acted as a key carrier of Scottish identity.'<sup>173</sup>

This publication's coverage of the Games was more comparable to the nationalist Irish press than the other Scottish newspapers. It only made reference to Irish athletes, both those in the British and United States teams. An example of a British athlete being referred to came with the publication of the picture of Ralph Rose, who defeated Irishman Denis Horgan, in the shot put. The cartoon was the same that appeared in the Irish newspaper *The Freeman's Journal*, and depicted Rose as 'The man who beat Denis Horgan'<sup>174</sup> and used it in the same manner as it had been by the Irish publication, to demonstrate the quality of athlete required to defeat Horgan.

As within the British and Irish press, the marathon race featured heavily in this publication. Comparable with the nationalist Irish press it focused upon the victory of Irish-American Johnny Hayes. The publication's initial article upon the race preferred not to highlight the success of Hayes, but rather to ask the rhetorical question 'Where was Duncan?'<sup>175</sup> in reference to the leading English hope who did not even finish the race. The indication of the tone in this article was no doubt mocking of the British effort, as notably it is England that is referred to, not Britain (potentially done so not to include Scotland). This was comparable to the tone demonstrated across the Irish nationalist press throughout the Olympics.

The publication's final reference to the 1908 Olympics came within an editorial about the plans of the GAA to send a team to the sporting events that were part of the Pope's Jubilee between 20 September and 1 October 1908. In this article, the sporting freedom of Ireland was very much on the mind of the author:

Thinking its high time for a distinctively Irish turnout in the international athletic contest which are becoming so popular the world over. ... The Association gives the reasons why Ireland was not per se, represented at the London Stadium. Summarised, they are that the English Olympic Committee refused to recognise Ireland as a separate entity, and insisted that the only condition on which Irish athletes could enter for the contests was that they sink their nationality and allow themselves to be exploited under the Union jack. Such a condition was impossible (says the 'Irish News'); and thus,

while Irishmen scooped in most of the trophies, the glory of them went to the countries of their adoption.<sup>176</sup>

This editorial was more of a reflection of the perspective seen in the Irish nationalist press that bemoaned how Ireland had not been represented and blamed the English for this. This editorial is in keeping with the general tone of this publication and demonstrates none of the regularly demonstrated Scottish identity. It is a strong source for analysis because it presents a prime example of the differing identities that were present in Scotland and reveals that Scotland was not entirely unified behind the British cause.

### **Conclusions upon the Scottish identity projected in the press during the 1908 Olympics**

The Scottish press' perspective towards the London Olympics was evidence of the identity that historians writing of the period believe to be true of Scotland. This demonstrates a strong British identity, with little direct reference to the performance of her athletes, but primarily all of the athletes representing Britain.

Apart from the example in the *Glasgow Observer*, there was support for the British athletes, and in general, a British identity portrayed in the coverage of the Olympics. *The Scottish Referee's* comment, regretting the 'insignificant' involvement of Scottish athletes was not a grumble about English domination, but rather a disappointment about how little Scottish athletes had contributed towards the British cause. The same newspaper illustrated its Britishness when it looked towards the future; 'Our systems of training compare badly with the Americans. For instance, we learn that daily an hour or more is spent by their athletes in starting off their marks alone, British training is antiquated and requires reforming.'<sup>177</sup> Yet further indication that the Scottish press thought from a British perspective.

### **Wales and the 1908 Olympic games**

The Industrial Revolution brought prosperity to Wales, but despite the rapid changes and prosperity it enjoyed it remained the least populated and influential nation in Britain. Its size often saw it overlooked and often was seen as an extension of England, summed up by a nineteenth century issue of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that had no separate entry for Wales, advising, 'For Wales, see England.'<sup>178</sup>

The discovery of large quantities of coal in the South Wales Valleys during the Industrial revolution not only changed the region from being an agricultural heartland to an industrial one, but the whole nation. Wales became ‘one of the first truly industrial societies in the world’ and was ‘at the heart of the imperial economy.’<sup>179</sup> Wales was transformed from a nation where just one in five lived in towns at the start of the nineteenth century, to where 80% lived in urban dwellings at its conclusion.<sup>180</sup> Cardiff expanded from having a population of just 10,000 in 1841 to 164,000 in 1901,<sup>181</sup> and one-third of the people in Wales living in a 20 mile radius of it thanks to ‘King Coal.’

By 1911, coal-rich Glamorgan had 46% of the population of Wales living within its borders (a population density of 1,383 per square miles). Combined with Monmouthshire it contained 63% of the total population of Wales,<sup>182</sup> and some of the most urbanized parts of the United Kingdom. Unlike Irishmen, Welshmen did not have to move to England or North America to find prosperity, but they found it on their own doorstep; ‘As an export centre of the British economy, Wales and especially South Wales, actually attracted people during those outward pulses which sent so many British people across the Atlantic.’<sup>183</sup>

Kenneth O Morgan in his book *‘Rebirth of a nation: Wales, 1880–1980,’* entitled his chapter upon this period ‘The Edwardian High Noon’ and described the period from 1905 to 1914 as one ‘when the economic prosperity, national awareness, and political creativity of the Welsh people were most effectively deployed for the benefit of themselves and their neighbours’<sup>184</sup> and remarks there was a ‘golden glow of optimism’ such was the feeling present in Wales.

Glanmor Williams claims industrialisation and internal migration helped to foster a new sense of nationalism, and saved the Welsh language.<sup>185</sup> Another view is that the Welsh language was one of the biggest losers of the Industrial Revolution. At the start of the nineteenth century, about nine out of ten people spoke the language, but this was to change with The Education Act of 1870, which prohibited its use within the classroom, and it:

became stigmatised as the language of the poor and the backward, and when the southern part of the country began to industrialise, it was only in rural areas such as the counties of Gwynedd and Dyfed in the north and west that Welsh managed to survive.<sup>186</sup>

Such a perspective indicated that the national language, an integral part of Welsh identity prior to the industrial revolution was lost to it. Despite

this apparent loss of Welsh identity, other cultural aspects that developed through this period helped to create a new Welsh identity. The eisteddfod, a festival of Welsh literature, music and culture was revived in 1858, the University of Wales was created in 1893, followed by the establishment of the national library and museum in 1907, institutions that were not English, but Welsh. Morgan and Thomas believe the aim of these national institutions was 'to give Welshman all the advantages which Englishmen and Scotsmen then had to get on in the world.'<sup>187</sup> Scotland had its own institutions, as did England (although often they were considered as much Britain's as their own), now Wales had her own establishments:

where the Welsh were looking to create a nation which would contrast with and yet complement England. Within the parameters of a Great Britain, Wales was intent on developing a separate identity out of historical difference, rather than one based upon hostile resistance.<sup>188</sup>

Despite the growth of Welsh institutions, some historians believe that Welsh towns were still nothing more than 'outposts of English influence.'<sup>189</sup> Contrary to this argument is that the concentration of Welshmen in the industrial towns of the South and the expanding market towns of the north and west, allowed Welsh identity to flourish with:

the immense array of new Chapels, the Welsh-language newspaper press, local eisteddfodau and choral festivals. In many ways it was the growth of towns, and the new bourgeoisie that they produced, that made modern Welsh nationalism possible.<sup>190</sup>

Wales influence was also growing within British politics. In 1905 David Lloyd George became President of the Board of Trade, the highest Cabinet position attained by a Welshman for over a century. Smith and Williams describe the position as being hailed by contemporaries as 'the achievement in politics that Welsh attainments in the world of commerce, music and rugby had long promised.'<sup>191</sup> This was not the end to Lloyd-George's rise within British politics, as he became Wales' first and only Prime Minister in February 1916.

The rise of Wales as a nation did not come at the expense of her place within Britain, as the central position she had within Britain and the Empire was a source of immense pride. This sentiment was expressed by a Liberal candidate in Barry on St David's Day in 1900. He confessed to

be ‘proud of being a Welshman,’ but had ‘a greater pride that Wales was part of the British Empire—the largest and best in the world.’<sup>192</sup> There were those that were not as passionate about the Union as the Liberal candidate, with a home rule movement appearing during this period, along with a realisation of a critical division between North and South Wales.<sup>193</sup> The home rule movement did not make any significant progress as the gentry that controlled the nation were committed to British Imperialism,<sup>194</sup> and kept problems that could have been created by this to a minimum.

Comparable with both England and Scotland, the development of sport allowed Wales to create her own sporting identity and practices. Rugby union, in particular became the dominant game in industrial Wales of the late nineteenth century and in the view of Richard Holt it had a ‘central role’<sup>195</sup> in the building of the new Welsh identity. Victory in the sports’ Home Nations Championships (1893, 1900, 1902, 1905, 1906) did much to consolidate this new identity.

Victories in home nation’s championships and in particular games against England did much to establish a belief in Welsh physical superiority and her own identity. This aspect took a further leap after victory over the all-conquering New Zealand tourists in 1905. The match came at the end of a tour where the Colonials had astonished all by winning their first 27 matches, scoring 724 points,<sup>196</sup> including a 15–0 defeat of England at Crystal Palace. Wales won the test match with the only try scored in the match, and the game has become the stuff of folklore. In his essay upon the game, Gareth Williams believed:

that it was far more than a game, but a factor defining national existence ... It was not merely that the Welsh XV – at this time enjoying the Wales whose offspring they were, a Golden Age of enterprise, optimism and confidence—had proved superior to the all-conquering New Zealanders.<sup>197</sup>

The defeats of the clubs, regions and national sides of Britain went to raise tensions about the demise of the British race further. The *Western Mail* believed that the Welsh victory had come ‘to the rescue of the Empire.’<sup>198</sup> The *South Wales Daily News* believed the match had allowed the Welsh nation to emit her own physical superiority:

The men – these heroes of many victories that represented Wales embodied the best manhood of the race. ... We all know the racial

qualities that made Wales supreme on Saturday ... It is admitted she is the most poetic of nations. It is amazing that in the greatest of all popular pastimes she should be equally distinguished ... the great quality of defence and attack in the Welsh race is to be traced to the training of the early period when powerful enemies drove them to their mountain fortresses. There was developed, then, those traits of character that find fruition today. 'Gallant little Wales' has produced sons of strong determination, invincible stamina, resolute, mentally keen, physically sound.<sup>199</sup>

Another comment in the same paper said that Wales was the 'envy and despair of other nations.'<sup>200</sup> The *Western Mail* wrote of 'Celtic physical prowess,' which were said to have the fine attributes of 'pluck and determination.'<sup>201</sup> These comments further indicate that there was a distinct Welsh identity, separate to her British identity.

The 1908 Olympic Games received extensive coverage within the Welsh Press. Here will be examination of these articles, and the descriptions of the British and Welsh athletes who competed. The two primary publications examined from a Welsh perspective at these Olympics and the two future Games are *The South Wales Daily News* and *The Western Mail*. The latter claimed to be the voice of Wales<sup>202</sup>, and included some of the most lengthy and both provide some of the most insightful Olympic commentary from the British press.

The coverage in these publications examined the efforts of British athletes every day in daily Olympic reports, and when Welshmen took the stage, the articles focused upon them. The articles examined give the conclusion that Welsh success was a success for Britain. Other newspapers examined from a Welsh perspective at these Olympics were less extensive, and primarily preferred just to concentrate upon the efforts of Welshmen.

A prime example of the Welsh press concentrating on her own men came in the weekly *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*. Its Olympic comments were infrequent, brief and primarily focused on Wales' entrants. One example appeared during the opening week of athletic competition. The article firstly mentioned the events of the opening ceremony, before concluding with a subsection entitled 'Welsh gymnasts at the Stadium:'

Welsh athletes will watch with interest the doings of the representatives of the Principality in the Olympic Games. The four countries

are considered as one in these championships, and in the gymnastic section Donville, of Cardiff St Saviour's, and Meade, of Abertillery, will do battle for Wales. Both are internationals.<sup>203</sup>

This section does little more than state the facts, but crucially it demonstrates a firm interest in the performance of Welsh competitors at the Games. The statement of how the gymnasts were doing 'battle for Wales' is one not commonly found, as the general preference for Welshmen being proud to represent Britain was the norm in the coverage.

Swansea publication *The South Wales Weekly Post* also concentrated upon the efforts of Welsh athletes in an article headed 'South Walians "out of it" at the Stadium.'<sup>204</sup> This referred to the exit of three men from Swansea, Newport and Cardiff, who had competed at the Olympics for Britain. The preference for concentrating upon the efforts of Welsh athletes continued the following week with a description of the half-mile race. This article referred to Andrews, of Carmarthen and two unnamed British athletes efforts in the event.<sup>205</sup> Both these articles went to separate Wales from Britain through the promotion of Welshmen. This separation is also noticeable in the headline from the marathon race's article, of 'Englishman's poor show.'<sup>206</sup> The article did not offer any further insight into the race as it only included a list of the 27 men that finished the race.

The publication's separation of Wales from Britain was not universal. Its edition of 1 August defended those attacking British physicality and its apparent decline, calling it 'unadulterated balderdash.'<sup>207</sup> It argued that American athletes had only been so successful because of 'superior science, determination and training'<sup>208</sup> and believed the British failure came because 'our crack runners exhausted themselves in the initial ten miles; is a glaring object lesson in the folly of ignoring brain and relying solely upon brawn.' Even within this, there was room to speak from a solely Welsh perspective; distancing Wales from the failures of the English athletes. It stated that 'the Anglo-Celt and Scandinavian races have been easily first; Dorando Pietri has been practically the only Latin to champion effectively the prowess of the Mediterranean race.'<sup>209</sup> This kind of reference had more in common with the coverage of the 1905 Wales versus New Zealand rugby match, with the emphasis upon different identities. The article was also the only time when 'Celtic' is used within the Welsh coverage. It was used for a second time in the article, but relating to the issue of the problems between Britain and the Irish-American contingent:

Mr Hewitt, with his confessed policy of sowing reputation and hatred between the Anglo-Celtic people and that other people who were in



their beginning Anglo-Celtic, is delighted to have the opportunity of representing John Bull as the worst of sportsmen to the millions of whom he has the ear.<sup>210</sup>

The inclusion of the bitterness felt by the Irish-Americans towards the British is not a feature commonly found within British coverage of the 1908 Olympics. The inclusion of this, along other aspects referenced suggests that the Welsh media were not only more open to presenting a general world view and not being totally impartial to the British.

The most comprehensive 1908 Olympic coverage in the Welsh press came in the pages of the *Western Mail*. Its coverage was more comparable to the English dailies than the Welsh publications previously referred to. It included regular articles upon the Games, featuring results and descriptions of the events that emit a pride in the British performance. On 20 July for example, it led with 'British still advancing in points' and in the body of the article proclaimed 'Great Britain and Ireland successively carried off the 5,000 metres cycle, the 200 metre breast stroke, the tug of war.'<sup>211</sup> The publication also included numerous editorials about the Games. One of the most interesting of these is included below. It approached the subject of the spirit in which the Olympics (at least the athletics events) had been played out in:

Olympic contests are very admirable in their way. They are great agencies for promoting international concord. But we wish they could be a little more sportsmanlike. The etiquette of sport differs in different countries, and this may account for more than one unpleasant incident which has marked the progress of the exciting contests in the Stadium. It is no spirit of vanity that we say it, but we think Great Britain can claim to have set before herself a high standard of sportsmanship. Sometimes we may fall short of it: but, with all the shortcomings, it remains a standard that deserves to rule and that other nations would profit by copying.<sup>212</sup>

The tone in this article, comparable with others in this publication features British morals and sense of superiority. Although it is different to English editorials upon the same subject in that it admits to the British falling short upon its own moral standards (presumably referencing the incidents of the 400 metres and tug of war). Despite this feeling, it still indicates that British sportsmen are superior to those of other nations.

The British belief in its superiority took a painful blow during the marathon race, an event that the British believed would demonstrate

their physical supremacy by winning this the most physically demanding event. Here the *Western Mail* presented its loyalty to the cause by writing of the nations' apparent good sportsmanship:

If anything could prevent that it would be the graceful act on the part of Queen Alexandra on Saturday, when she presented the courageous Dorando, who came so near to winning the Marathon Race, with a special cup. In doing so her Majesty gave practical expression to the sporting instincts of the British people. On more than one occasion during the week of the games that the spirit of sportsmanship has made itself felt in the stadium. It reached its highest expression, perhaps, at the close of the great Marathon race, when Britishers cheered every arrival, whether Italian, American, or any other nationality, with splendid impartiality. The spirit of sportsmanship triumphed over the natural feeling of regret that the English representatives were nowhere in the race. With this spontaneous demonstration before them, the detractors of British sportsmanship might have been expected to change their opinions, or, at any rate, their tone. But there is little sign of that yet.<sup>213</sup>

Throughout this article, there are references to apparent positive British sportsmanship, particularly during the final lines. Interestingly it portrays the British athletes in the Marathon race as 'English,' potentially in an attempt to separate Wales from the failure. (There is no evidence that any of the British Marathon Runners were Welshmen. In the qualifying race there was only a solitary Scot and one Irishman alongside 75 Englishmen.)<sup>214</sup>

This editorial was not the sole one in the publication regarding the race to separate 'Britain' from the English failure, as two days previously it had written: 'To Englishmen it is a great disappointment, because, with all the advantages of climate in their favour, the British runners fail miserably, to approach the expectations they inspired.'<sup>215</sup> The separation of English runners as such was also apparent in the publications 'London Letter' (a daily editorial featuring short articles of a Welsh interest from London). It began with the comment; 'the poor display of the English runners in the Marathon Race is due not so much to bad general ship as to the excessive heat.'<sup>216</sup> The fourth line also demonstrates the same sentiment by stating, 'the Englishmen started as though running a sprint. Ten miles in fifty minutes, and under a burning sun! No wonder they fell out and let their opponents pass them.'<sup>217</sup>

These articles demonstrate that although in success Wales emitted a pro-British sentiment in failure it was willing to show a separate identity to that of England. A prime example of the pride felt in Wales for British success was demonstrated in *The South Wales Daily News*:

The superiority of the British athlete is freely and fully admitted; he has the physique and the opportunities for training. This country has shown the way in open-air sports and has revived the spirit of emulation of the classic days of Greece and Rome. The Olympic Games this year have demonstrated that, after all, Great Britain is not, physically at least, on the down grade!<sup>218</sup>

This editorial came under the title of 'the Moral of the Stadium,' and focused primarily upon the international reaction to the Olympics. It began by mentioning the problems of international sport and the belief that 'instead of leading to international friendship it leads to international war,'<sup>219</sup> a sentiment that has been made about Olympics upon numerous occasions about the games.

Aside from the examples above, there was little evidence of negativity within the Welsh press. The only other notable example of negativity came after Alfred Yeumans, the Welsh Champion walker who was unable to compete in London because 'he could not get his expenses paid to compete in the walking matches at the Olympic Games, he would be unable to compete.'<sup>220</sup> No further comment was made about this, but the frustration was apparent, and one comparable to that felt within the sporting press of the North and Midlands of England, whose athletes suffered similar problems.

The efforts of Welsh athletes at the Olympic Games featured strongly within the Welsh press. When her athletes came to the fore, the press changed from a British to a Welsh perspective. For example, *The South Wales Daily News* was the only British newspaper identified that took an interest in the visit of the Prince of Wales to the White City.<sup>221</sup> The paper often made reference to the performances of Welsh athletes in its Olympic Games articles, such as 'Walters of Cardiff, in the Hurdles,'<sup>222</sup> referring to David Walters victory over Lemming in the first round of the 110-metre hurdles. Some notable successes are missed, such as after the gold medal success of rower Albert Gladstone who was part of the 'Eights,'<sup>223</sup> but there is a desire to feature the success of Welshmen within the Welsh press.

The premier Welsh athlete at the 1908 Olympics was Paulo Radmilovic. He had begun his international career at the 1906 Intercalated Games,

and competed at every Olympic Games from 1908 to 1928. He was primarily a member of the British water polo team, but he also competed in the swimming events in London and Stockholm. Across his Olympic career, he won four gold medals, making him the most successful Welsh athlete of all time. Rob Cole, trustee of the Welsh Sports Hall of Fame, has called him ‘arguably Wales greatest ever sportsman.’<sup>224</sup>

Radmilovic was a man who embodied the new Wales of the industrial revolution. His father had moved to Cardiff in the 1860s from Dubrovnik, Croatia and his mother was born in Cardiff to Irish immigrant parentage. Like so many other immigrants, they settled in Tiger Bay in the Cardiff Docklands, and became the landlords of the ‘Glastonbury Arms’ pub in Bute Street.

As an adult, Radmilovic moved from Cardiff and settled in Weston-Super-Mare, where he ran a pub and played for the town’s water polo club. Despite the move to England, he kept his Welsh nationality and annually competed in the Welsh National Swimming Championships and for Wales in international water polo matches. In 1951, he was interviewed by BBC radio, and in this, he proclaimed a pride of being Welsh:

I’m the only man in the world today – not the only Welshman but the only human being in the world today – that ever represented in six Olympic Games. ‘I’m the only man in the world that’s won the sprint and the long distance [Amateur Swimming Association] championship, nobody in the world has ever won a sprint and a long distance, but Radmilovic as a Welshman I did it for Wales.’<sup>225</sup>

The sport of water polo made its third Olympic appearance in 1908 and Radmilovic was the only Welsh member of the British team. He was joined by Scotland’s George Conet, and six Englishmen in the side, which had been selected through a trial match where England took on a combined team from the other British nations.<sup>226</sup>

At the Olympics, the British water polo team only played one match, the final against Belgium. The match was one sided, with the hosts coming out winners by the score of 9–2 of which Radmilovic contributed two goals. His achievement was recognised in *The South Wales Daily News*, which report of the final had a subtitle of ‘Radmilovic scores in water polo,’<sup>227</sup> and described his goals in the article that followed.

The shortage of water polo matches at the Games allowed Radmilovic to take part in the swimming events. In total, he competed in four of these; three individual competitions and the 800-metre freestyle relay,

where he took a gold medal after coming into the team for the final as a late replacement. In contrast to the way that Scottish gold medal winning athlete, Wyndham Hallswelle was portrayed as being English on occasion within his own national press there is no doubt as to Radmilovic's origins within the Welsh press. For example, the *Western Mail's*, 'London Letter' referred to him as a 'Cardiff Man,' who won his race by using a 'trudgeon stroke.'<sup>228</sup>

*The South Wales Daily News* singled out Radmilovic as being the captain of the Welsh water polo team in an article that wrote despite the fact that he had qualified for the second round of the 1,500 metres freestyle, he would not be competing because the Amateur Swimming Association wanted him to be fresh for the 800-metre team race. The article is fittingly headed 'Radmilovic's sacrifice.'<sup>229</sup>

Every time that Radmilovic entered the pool during the Games, he was mentioned within the Olympic article in *The South Wales Daily News*. The first of these appeared on 23 July 1908, after the water polo victory, a triumph that was not only a source of Welsh pride but also British pride, as the 10–2 victory was 'the first time since Saturday the Union Jack was hoisted as the winning flag.'<sup>230</sup> It continued by describing Radmilovic's second half goal. The second article came after Radmilovic had competed in the 800-metre relay, with the fourth paragraph devoted to his achievements:

P Radmilovic (Weston-super-Mare, SC) is the Welsh champion and 100 yards record holder. He is a winner of the long-distance championship, and was placed in almost every national championship last year. He has played for Wales in Water Polo, and a few years ago captain the Cardiff Water Polo Club.<sup>231</sup>

Such a description as this demonstrates the desire of the Welsh media to illustrate Radmilovic as being a Welshman. The identity projected in the Welsh media indicates a mixed identity, although an overriding British identity. There is a proud sense of being Welsh in articles regarding her own athletes, whereas in others it is the British identity that is seen. These two identities do not appear in conflict with each other but exist side by side.

Throughout their coverage of the Games, both the *Western Mail* and *South Wales Daily News* wrote about all the men of Britain when they were competing and demonstrated pride in their victories. Comparable with what was seen in the majority of the British press, those in Wales offered a retrospective upon the Games immediately after their

conclusion, and in this a British perspective was presented. An example of this came in *The South Wales Daily News*; it wrote of ‘Olympic Amenities,’<sup>232</sup> and presented a standpoint frequently seen in the English dailies. It believed that at the Games the British had demonstrated superiority in organisation, abilities and sporting manners.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Welsh presses coverage of the Olympics came in its representations following the marathon defeat, when it spoke of ‘Englishmen’ rather than the ‘British.’ This suggests that the Welsh media did not wish to be associated with the failure. This argument fits into the theme of physical superiority, which was present in Welsh writings before, during and after the Games. Wales, through sport became to believe the nation had a strong physical pedigree; and the poor performance by the English marathon runners would have degraded this, if it had been considered a British, not English failure. Consequently, it appeared as an English failure.

In 1909, an article which appeared in *The South Wales Daily News* once again referred to the traits of Welsh physical superiority and sport making Wales a nation:

Wales is a very small country. The success which has attended her efforts in athletics is therefore a sort of miracle. It has been attained by the exercise of those qualities in which critics of the Welsh declare us to be deficient—hard work, self-control, discipline. The game has been intellectualised by our players. Whatever may happen in the future, Wales is signalised.<sup>233</sup>

Such an article further demonstrated the belief in a Welsh physical superiority. Within the Olympic writings, the preference of the Welsh press was to take the British perspective, such as the *Western Mail* editorial that wrote, ‘Great Britain has every reason to be proud of her achievements in the Stadium, where her victories far exceed in number those of the United States or any other country.’<sup>234</sup> *The South Wales Daily News* also wrote from a similar perspective stating, ‘It may be added that England is holding her own against the world; her champions have won the majority of events: which is some answer to the cry of British degeneracy.’<sup>235</sup> This article adds to the list of numerous Welsh articles that used the terms both British and English, but importantly for this argument, it believed that British degeneracy has been stopped by performances here, very different to the arguments made in the English press.

# 3

## Preparing for the 1912 Olympics

### The 1909 season

British interest in the Olympic movement quickly died away when summer turned to autumn in 1908. The lack of interest was reflected in the coverage of the events of the 'autumn' Games (football, rugby, hockey and cycle polo). It was not until the spring of 1909, and the beginnings of a new season of athletics, that the Games were mentioned once again, although often this was brief and reflective upon the events of 1908.

Significant references to the Olympics came in the reviews of 1909's premier athletics event, Amateur Athletics Association (AAA) Championships. This event provided British athletes with an opportunity to prove themselves against international athletes and demonstrate that their lacklustre performances at the 1908 Olympics were just an anomaly. Charles Otway, chief athletic writer for *The Sporting Life* wrote positively about the British performance at these championships and of the emergence of athletics worldwide:

the manner in which title after title went to new men, in the ordinary sense of the run, suggests that there really is an awakening in the world of athletics – that the lessons of the 1908 Olympic Games are beginning to be realised ... there is plenty of evidence to support the idea that many of the newcomers are men of great possibilities, and may take rank with the best of previous champions. Even in the matter of sprinting there appears to be some improvement in the form of the old country's representatives, and we may hope that with greater attention given to the all-important point of getting away, we may develop some even-times before 1912.<sup>1</sup>

This article writes with the same kind of arrogance present in writings prior to the 1908 Olympics. There was a belief that British athletics was still superior to other nations who had to improve considerably to reach British standards. There did appear to be a realisation that Britain's athletes needed to improve and the importance of the 1912 Olympics.

### **The 1910 season**

Away from the formation of the Amateur Field Events Association (AFEA) (which is examined later in this chapter) there was little progress made towards improving British fortunes during 1910. The weakness of British athletics was the subject of an article by 'Strephon,' in *The Athletic News*. He answered the hypothetical question of how many events would Britain win if the Olympics were held in 1910? In his opinion, the answer was not many. His belief was that South African, R E Walker, was the only chance 'Britain' had in the sprints, and, in field events, the tug-of-war would solitary provide success. He concluded:

Candidly, we are at the present time far worse off than we were prior to the start of the 1908 Olympics, and during the forthcoming winter our athletic authorities will have plenty of opportunities to ponder over the position of affairs, and to decide what can be done to develop our young men between next spring and the Olympic Games of 1912.<sup>2</sup>

Despite such pleas, there was little central organisation done prior to Stockholm to prepare for a better British performance. The concerns about British sporting performance were not just limited to athletics in 1910, as there was an outcry after England's cricketers suffered their first home defeat to South Africa that summer,<sup>3</sup> coming after a home ashes defeat to Australia in 1909. Boxing was another sport that Britain held in high regard, but one that America was dominating, much to the disgruntlement of members of the press who saw the performances as a reflection upon the nation's physique:

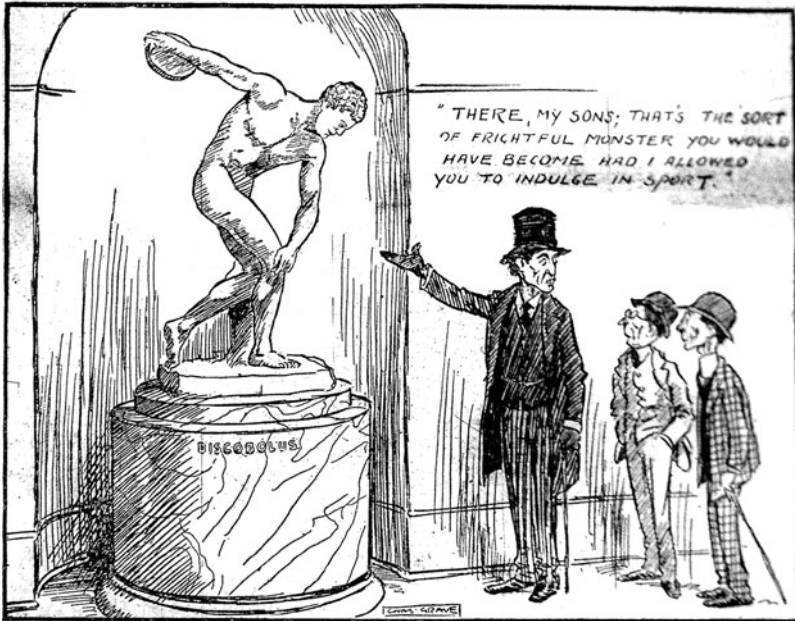
Worries about Britain's waning prestige in the boxing ring were part of a wider concern. Many traditionalists were convinced that the decline in the nation's physique, and hence its capacity to defend the Empire, was due to the popularity of the sybaritic suburban recreations that had swept the country in recent years.<sup>4</sup>



The British sporting press was particularly obsessed by the nation's physical state, demonstrated by *The Sporting Life's* series of articles during the summer of 1910, entitled 'Physical culture for Athletes.'<sup>5</sup> This series wrote of ways in which athletes could improve their physical condition. The publication also depicted the apparent problems in a cartoon that appeared upon its front page.<sup>6</sup>

This cartoon depicted a man showing his two sons the famous Ancient Greek image, 'Discobolous,' which depicted an ancient Olympic scene and a fine physical specimen. The gentleman tells his boys; 'that's the sort of frightful monster you would have become had I allowed you to indulge in sport,'<sup>7</sup> his two sons are by comparison small and not physically healthy looking. The captain below the cartoon stated:

**"A HORRIBLE EXAMPLE."**



Our artist has endeavoured to show in the above sketch the physical degeneracy that would accrue were those misguided people who condemn manly sports of all kinds allowed a free hand in the training of Young England.

Figure 3.1 'A Horrible Example'. *The Sporting Life*, 13th July 1910, P. 1

Our artist has endeavoured to show in the above sketch the physical degeneracy that would accrue were those misguided people who

condemn manly sports of all kinds allowed a free hand in the training of Young England.<sup>8</sup>

This cartoon suggests that the majority of men are not partaking in sports, and that, as a result, the nation is a shadow of its former self. Richard Soloman argues, ‘that the press and public refused to be dissuaded by any evidence disproving that the race was declining.’<sup>9</sup> Britain was becoming a nation convinced that it was physically declining. The belief was that its sporting defeats were not due to technique, training and nations with larger populations and so more men to choose from, but rather a problem with itself linked to a declining physicality.

Some sports, such as water polo were beginning to prepare themselves for the Stockholm Olympics in 1910. The selection of Britain’s ‘International Water Polo Board’ demonstrated the dominance of England in the sport, as it contained just one representative from each of Scotland, Wales and Ireland, but two from England.<sup>10</sup> The meeting determined that it would use the same method for picking the team as for the 1908 Olympics, with a selection match between England and a combined team from the other three nations. The trial match took place in June 1912, ending in a 4–4 draw.<sup>11</sup> The result was that five Englishmen, alongside a solitary Irishmen and two men each from Scotland and Wales were selected to go to Stockholm.

The Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) used a similar method when it began to organise its selection process for the Stockholm Olympics during 1911. Its organising committee also favoured the English who had four members on the seven-person selection committee, with one representative each from the other home nations. The meeting determined that each nation would be responsible for entering their own athletes, ensuring that England, with the best-financed Association would be able to send more contestants.<sup>12</sup>

## **The 1911 season**

The 1911 season was crucial for developing British athletes with the Olympics were just one year away. This season not only featured the annual AAA Championships but also an ‘Inter-Empire Championships,’ held in June to celebrate the coronation of King George V, alongside cultural and industrial events.<sup>13</sup> As well as athletics, there were contests in swimming, wrestling and boxing. The athletics meeting was held on 24 June 2011 at Crystal Palace and won by the Canadian team,<sup>14</sup> who took

Lord Lonsdale's Trophy.<sup>15</sup> During these Championships, there began talk about having a British Empire team at the Olympics, which was believed would ensure 'an increase share of the medals at Stockholm.'<sup>16</sup> Such talk was to become commonplace over the following years.

The summer's AAA Championship proved to be the largest championships in its history to date, with 250 entries from across Europe, North America and Australasia. Such was the quality of athletes that *The Sporting Life* proclaimed the meeting was on par 'with the great Olympic Games.'<sup>17</sup> From judging the performance of the British athletes at the Championships, the outlook for Britain at Stockholm was not promising.

Following the Championships, AAA President, Lord Chief Justice the 1st Viscount Alverstone, claimed, 'never has the prestige of British sport been subjected to a more severe handling than on Saturday afternoon at Stamford Bridge.'<sup>18</sup> *The Athletic News* headline in its championship edition pronounced a 'Black Day for Old England.'<sup>19</sup> In this, author, 'W L S,' remarked of how Britain won just six of the 13 titles (three by an English contestants, one by a Scot, and two field events by Irish), much to his dismay. The performance and result of the 100-yard dash was of particular disappointment. American Fred Ramsdell took the Championship (and the 220 yards), but the focus in the press was on the sub-standard performance of the leading English runner, J G Paul:

I would not like to be positive on the subject, but I would dare swear Paul is the poorest sprinter who have ever run in a championship Hundred. He would not have won off 15 yards, and his entry has been one of the jokes of a serious competition.<sup>20</sup>

This comment portrayed a weakness in British sprinting, as Paul did not reckon in the race, but was without doubt the best the nation had to offer and this failure in a marquee final worried commentators of the weakness in British sprinting. The foreign victories at these Championships witnessed the first coming for many foreign athletes who dominated the 1912 Olympics. In particular, Finn, Hannes Kolehmainen, who won the four-mile race, would go on to take three gold medals in Stockholm.<sup>21</sup>

W W Alexander's view was that the old country had taken a 'hard knock' in the track events. He predicted a gloomy future, stating, 'it is very clear that English athletics will suffer in the World's Championships at Stockholm next summer unless we can unearth new talent to bring us once again into the front rank before the Olympic Games come round.'<sup>22</sup> This editorial also included a quote from AAA President, Lord Alverstone, who pleaded, 'Wake up, England, but always

keep the sport clean. ... Better by far, to lose a hundred times than win by a trick.<sup>23</sup> This suggested there was a desire to keep to the traditional British amateur ethos rather than use any kind of 'professional' type approach in order to improve performance. He concluded by making a reference to the new found importance of athletics as a means of international pride:

Let young England remember this. The growth of athletics is such that our Government will have to follow in the wake of other countries and make an annual grant for the development of the nation if we are to keep our place in the world's games.<sup>24</sup>

Such comment as this exposed the differing attitudes between sport in the British Government and foreign governments. Many countries were receiving funding and assistance from their government to pay for Olympic participation. The British Government by contrast offered no financial assistance. For example, the Foreign Office 'saw it as not having any great diplomatic significance, and they were certainly not pioneering sports diplomacy as a regular part of their work.'<sup>25</sup> This was not the attitude in other countries. For example in Sweden, half the nation's required funding for the 1912 Games was provided by the Government.<sup>26</sup> As hosts for the 1912 Olympics, Sweden is potentially not the best example, but it does illustrate the funding that other nations were receiving.

There is evidence that the British Olympic Association (BOA) attempted to gain governmental funding. They approached Charles Mastermann, financial secretary to the treasury, who told them 'not to hold out any hope of a grant from public funds towards the expenses of the British team.'<sup>27</sup> Llewellyn states that this attitude came as a result of the bitter scenes at the 1908 Olympics, which 'heightened the government's suspicions that the Olympic Games were a harbinger of international discord.'<sup>28</sup> A statement of the rising importance of the Olympics and success in it, came via an *Athletic News* editorial:

In the view of the next Olympiad all this must be changed, and the flower of English manhood, who are ready and willing to pit themselves against all comers in an effort to regain for the Mother Country some of its lost glory, must be nursed and cared for. It will devolve upon someone-presumably, the British Olympic Council (BOC) for the ways and means to enable us to send a representative team to Stockholm in 1912. Such an appeal is inevitable. There is time for the State to do something in its support. Whatever is done,

it should be the result of a whole-hearted effort generally an effort that will be to the lasting credit of Englishmen.<sup>29</sup>

This editorial acted as a rallying call for sponsors potentially able to offer financial support towards the British Olympic cause. The editorial concluded by stating that 'if Britishers do not rouse themselves from their present apathy and interest themselves in it, their conduct will redound to the discredit of the country for years to come.'<sup>30</sup> The editorial's author, 'Ubiquitous' believed that Britain had the athletes 'but they lack the opportunities which so much assist the specialists.' He continued by stating what he believed funding would do for British athletes:

Give them the same facilities for their preparations, as say, the Americans are afforded, relieve them of all business worries for a time, and then we might see that we are not deteriorating, athletically, to the extent that some of the pessimists would have us believe. Between now and next July there is ample time in which our governing body can do a lot to help athletes who possess the ability to represent us at Stockholm.<sup>31</sup>

This article demonstrated an awareness of British failings, and a realisation that the nation was not in decline because of any physical problems, but because the facilities and coaching available in Britain were not up to those that existed in other countries. This article revealed that, despite calls after the London Olympics for improved facilities and coaching for British athletes, very little had changed in the three years since the 1908 Olympics.

With no governmental funding available for the British team, the BOC were forced to try to raise money for British participation. The fund began in 1911 and was organised by British IOC member, Reverend de Courcy Laffan. His efforts raised a meagre £345,<sup>32</sup> convincing the BOC that further appeals would be fruitless. The appeal had attempted to encourage individuals, sporting clubs and businesses to become members of the BOA, but brought just 34 subscribers and three lifetime members from the 17,000 requests sent.

A major problem across England was a disparity in funding, organisation and facilities available. In 1910, W W Alexander wrote from a Midlands perspective that the region required a 'good cinder track'<sup>33</sup> to be laid in order for more top athletes from the region to be produced. In another article, he stated that the disparity in the handicapping system between the Midlands and Northern regions was also holding back athletes. While

athletes in the South faced problems of equality in autonomy, all of these problems harmed England's athletes' chances of success in Stockholm.<sup>34</sup>

At the 1908 Olympics, the press frequently wrote about 'England' and the 'English' athletes, when 'Britain' and 'British' would have been more appropriate terms. In an article written by *The Athletic News*, 'Strephon,' regarding the selection of the Olympic team for the 1912 Olympics, offered a potential explanation as to why these terms were used from an athletics perspective:

With keen interest I have perused the proposals which in various places are being advanced in favour of a serious attempt being made to uphold the honour and glory of the United Kingdom – will my Irish, Scots and Welsh readers pardon me if I use the word English in the general sense during the remainder of this article? – on the track at Stockholm next July.<sup>35</sup>

This article portrays a belief that English athletes were to be the mainstay of the British team. The same article also lambasted the coaching available to athletes, remarking it to be 'insufficient':

By many runners and jumpers of sort of training to develop their best form is never appreciated by themselves, and there are few people who care to supervise their work for the love of the thing, and make such suggestions as will be likely to benefit the active athletes. In short, the system of coaching is not good.<sup>36</sup>

Strephon continued by indicating the apparent attitude of the Oxford team in their recent match (along with Cambridge) against Harvard and Yale, where there was a desire that 'no professional should be employed in the match at all.'<sup>37</sup> This may have been the case at Oxford University, but the American universities had coaches, as did the Cambridge team, who employed Alec Nelson (the AAA's athletic advisor), whom he remarked had a positive impact on the team.

The different attitudes expressed by England's premier universities demonstrated the transitional identity present towards coaching – with an acceptance of it by some, as well as a complete adversity towards it from others. Strephon was undoubtedly a supporter of using professional coaches, as demonstrated by his take on how many athletes prepared for competition, published in another article from the same summer:

Their training has been left to themselves, and has been of the most haphazard nature. By many runners and jumpers of sort of training to

develop their best form is never appreciated by themselves, and there are few people who care to supervise their work for the love of the thing, and make such suggestions as will be likely to benefit the active athletes. In short, the system of coaching is not good.<sup>38</sup>

The indication here was that athletes have little idea of how to prepare, and there are few amateur coaches that could aid them. Significant for athletes preparation was the formation of the 'Athletes' Advisory Club in 1911. The aspiration of the club was 'to discover new athletic talent, and hold meetings for the purpose of discussing diet, technique and training programmes,'<sup>39</sup> also it 'aimed to appoint experienced amateur athletes to act as coaches and advisors since the average athletic club could not afford the permanent employment of a professional coach.'<sup>40</sup> The final part of this statement, with the reference towards finances, indicated why many clubs lacked coaching and training.

### **Formation of the Amateur Field Events Association, 1910–1912**

The 6 May 1910 witnessed the beginning of an organisation dedicated to improving British athletic performance, with the formation of the Amateur Field Events Association (AFEA). This association was formed because of the English weakness in field events and a desire to change this. Its formation heralding the beginnings of a major change in British sporting identity, as her athletics began to move away from the ideals of 'effortless superiority' to organised coaching and training.

The AFEA's inaugural meeting saw an advisory board formed of field events specialists, past and present with a mandate to ensure proper techniques were demonstrated, so that athletes were successful.<sup>41</sup> Field events had suffered from neglect at English athletic meetings, as often they were not included and, when they were, they were nothing more than sideshows to the running and walking events. The desire was not only to amend this attitude, but also to ensure that current athletes knew when events were taking place. Charles Otway had high hopes for the new association, stating, 'I am sure that any association which will do something to remove from Great Britain the reproach of neglecting field athletics will not only deserve but also receive the support of the general body of athletic clubs.'<sup>42</sup>

The spur for an organisation to promote field athletics came after the disappointment of the 1908 Olympics. Here the United States had dominated the athletic meeting at the Games, particularly the field events, where she took nine of the 14 titles and Britain took just two of the

remaining five contests. British attitude towards athletics was ignorant of field events, an identity that had to be amended if the nation was to become a successful Olympic athletic nation.

The cry of nationalism and the desire to beat the United States in particular was apparent in press articles depicting the formation of the Association. *The Sporting Life* stated that ‘in the Olympic Games, we found that Englishmen were left behind by Americans and Swedes, and it was only when an Irishman came along that the British got a show.’<sup>43</sup> Irishmen had been the main contributors to British field event medals (winning four of the five British medals in field events), and Scotsmen had provided some of the more successful performances (alas no medals), making the AFEA an association dedicated to transforming English performances and attitudes.

Harmony between the AFEA and the BOA was insured by BOC member, G S Robertson, a noted field event enthusiast,<sup>44</sup> chairing the inaugural meeting. The meeting also had notable figures present such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, who became President, and Frederick Annesley Michael (FAM) Webster, who took up the position of honorary secretary. Webster was a fanatical javelin thrower and a coaching enthusiast, and, over the course of his life, he published over 20 books on athletic coaching.<sup>45</sup> He desired to end the ‘lack of opportunity’<sup>46</sup> that had plagued the development of field events. He set to tackle this by encouraging clubs to include field events within their meetings and for the AFEA to hold its own championships.

The AFEA hoped that it could improve performance for the 1912 Olympics. The belief was that this was most likely to occur in the jumping events, which already had some grounding within British athletic culture. Such were the shortcomings in other events, such as the discus and javelin (that were without such grounding), that the belief was that an improvement might not be evident until the 1920 Olympics.<sup>47</sup>

Those clubs and athletes that were willing to partake in field events faced many problems. The equipment and facilities required for some events were a particular problem, as these were expensive to purchase. The AAA had attempted to tackle this issue shortly before the formation of the AFEA, by allowing clubs to loan equipment free of charge for meetings. The problem for the AAA was that it did not have enough equipment to go around and its own financial shortcomings prevented it from buying more.<sup>48</sup>

Another problem was finding judges to officiate at contests. This was demonstrated in a *Times* editorial from July 1910 that complained about a shortage of judges and stated that many of the regular judges



were 'incompetent.'<sup>49</sup> It demanded that the AFEA find and train new judges, an action that it believed would encourage participants.

The indication in *The Sporting Life* was that a new attitude towards field events across England had commenced before the formation of the AFEA. It reported on 4 May that the North and Midland Associations had decided to add 'jumping, weight, or hammer at their meetings.'<sup>50</sup> In the Midlands, the Midland County Amateur Athletic Association (MCAAA) attempted to promote field events by holding specific field event meetings across the region,<sup>51</sup> with the winners receiving a gold medal.<sup>52</sup> In Yorkshire, a county AFEA was established by Mr H Jennings of Bradford, with the support of a number of clubs within the county.<sup>53</sup>

The situation in the South was not as positive, with the 'split' between the AAA and National Cycling Union (NCU) was holding back any potential development.<sup>54</sup> This situation was rectified in 1911 and subsequently a Southern association was established. Ian Tempest remarks that, from 1911 onwards, it was the Southern section that was most active,<sup>55</sup> and in 1912, it promoted the 'new' events of discus, javelin and pole vault, through its championships, although no entries for the latter event could be found.

The initial progress of the new association in the summer of 1910 was not quick enough for some commentators. Charles Otway of *The Sporting Life* was critical of the AFEA, claiming that his newspaper did more in promoting events than the Association. He claimed the daily sporting newspaper had advertised 20 events that week alone compared to just a solitary event in Leeds that the AFEA had promoted.<sup>56</sup> In another article, Otway criticised the AFEA for failing upon its promise of holding its own Championships in 1910.<sup>57</sup>

The need for top-class competitions for British field event athletes to develop was evident at the 1910 AAA Championships. The Championship review in *The Athletic News* painted a gloomy picture, explaining how Irish veteran Denis Horgan had 'retained the honours of the Weight-putting with the poorest effort he has shown since 1894; but really he had nobody to beat.'<sup>58</sup> Horgan's victory, his twelfth at the age of 39 years, an age when sportsmen are generally considered to be past their best, was a tribute to his ability, but also illustrated the lack of new upcoming talent in Britain.

The review was less complimentary about the other field events held at the Championships. Regarding the hammer competition it believed the quality of entrants 'was shambolic', concluding that 'not since the days of the wooden handled hammer has a poorer throw won.'<sup>59</sup>

It noted that the high jump was won by ‘an even poorer jump than that of last year, but then the turf at the takeoff was slippery,’ perhaps a potential reason for the low height of the winning jump. The long jump did provide some British success, as the runner-up was former Cambridge student, E E P Tomlinson.

The 1911 season witnessed a change in attitude from the AAA, as, for the first time, it organised meetings for events included within its Championship.<sup>60</sup> Peter Lovesey states that this was part of the AAA’s efforts to ‘rehabilitate British athletics before the next Olympics.’<sup>61</sup> The summer also witnessed the inaugural holding of the AFEA Championships. Although they were small both in public and media interest, they presented an opportunity for field events athletes to compete in a national championships for the first time. Increased competition did reap a reward in standards, demonstrated by the winning throw by Walter Henderson in the discus. In 1911, he won the AFEA Championship with a throw of 32.56 metres and the following year his victory came with a significantly longer throw of 39.13 metres, which became a long-standing British record.

Despite the work of the AFEA, approval of its work was not universal, and there were still those who were critical of it. One critic was WW Alexander, of Birmingham’s *The Sporting Mail*. His criticism focused upon the standard of field events at the summer’s MCAA Championships. He stated a belief that the AFEA should be doing more to aid the events development:

What are they doing? Up to now I can trace nothing to their assistance, and what little has been done comes from the harrier section. When our clubs realise the value of inter-club contests and all-round competition we shall do better in field games; until then, we shall go on in the old slip-shod style.<sup>62</sup>

This comment came after some field events appeared to go backwards in performance at the AAA Championships, if distances alone are considered as a marker of success. At these championships, both the number of entries and winning distances were down from the previous year, factors that indicated that progress in field events would not come easily.

The Stockholm Olympics represented the first marker of the AFEA’s progress. The slow advancement of the previous two years ensured that expectations were low, particularly in the events that Britain had no real interest in before 1910. However, there was some hope for medals in the events in which Britain had more pedigree.

An appointment of Fred Parker as the first 'Chief Athletic Advisor' to the AAA had positive implications for field events. His role is more deeply examined in another part of this chapter, but his primary job was the help improve the fortunes of both Britain's track and field events athletes.<sup>63</sup> Parker quickly found that despite the improvements made by the AFEA, field athletes were still experiencing the most basic of problems, as outlined in a letter from March 1912:

Field events candidates appear to have many grievances. There are numerous complaints as to lack of implements – discus, javelin, hammer, weight, jumping standards, and – more particularly – 'pits' for high and pole jumps, shot-putting, hop-step-and-jump, etc. I have had to point to many that such events as the hammer, javelin and discus require a separate ground, and that is unreasonable to expect that learners should be permitted to practise these events at random within the arena of any ordinary track.<sup>64</sup>

Parker's analysis of the facilities was supported by a report from the summer's Olympic trials, also held at Stamford Bridge. It described the stadium as 'by no means an ideal ground for events which need a grass circle or run up.'<sup>65</sup> The lack of adequate facilities for field events at Stamford Bridge, the home of English athletics is evidence of further apathy towards field events. The Stadium had been refurbished in 1905, but there had been no provision of facilities required for field events in the planning.

Prior to the Stockholm Olympics, British IOC member, Reverend Courcy Laffan, gave an interview on athletic training in Britain. One of the points he raised regarded field events, particularly the problems for people who organised the events. He believed that promoting field events 'will not be an easy thing, because the average British spectator does not care two straws about them. I think we shall have to subsidise those sports in some way or other, so as to make them independent of a "gate."<sup>66</sup> This comment further exposed the British public's perception of field events and problems the AFEA faced in amending British identity.

The 1912 Olympic trials presented an opportunity for Britain's hopeful Olympic field event representatives to book themselves a place at the Stockholm Games. Table 3.1 reveals the distances made, none of which would have given British athletes a chance of contesting for a medal in Stockholm. Notably missing from the table are the results of the pole vault competition, this is because there were no entries for the event, a further demonstration of the lack of British interest in this event.

Table 3.1 Field events results for the English Olympic trials, May 1912

	Club	Distance	Position
<b>Throwing the hammer</b>			
A E Flaxman	LAC and SLH	134 ft 8 1.5 in	1
P F Ryan	Dublin	130 ft 8 1.5 in	2
H A C Goodwin	CUAC and LAC	118 ft. 9 in	3
J D Porteous	London Scottish	110 ft 10.5 in	4
H J Bower	LAC and CUAC	109 ft 6.5 in	5
<b>Putting the weight</b>			
P Quinn	Dublin	41 ft 0.5 in	1
P F Ryan	Dublin	39 ft 11.5 in	2
E Barrett	City Police and Poly H	37 ft 5 in	3
<b>Throwing the discus</b>			
W E B Henderson	LAC and OUAC	124 ft 3.5 in	1
P Quinn	Dublin	114 ft 9.5 in	2
A E Flaxman	LAC and SLH	109 ft 5 in	3
E Barrett	City Police and Poly H	105 ft 5.75 in	4
P F Ryan	Dublin	102 ft 5 in	5
I I A Lecke	CUAC and LAC	99 ft 0.25 in	6
<b>Throwing the javelin</b>			
O Pirow	LAC	137 ft 2 in	1
F O Kitching	LAC	121 ft 11.5 in	2
C R Dugmore	SLH and LAC	119 ft 10.75 in	3
<b>Running broad jump</b>			
S Abrahams	CUAC and LAC	22 ft 4.75 in	1
W Leach	Reading AC	21 ft 8 in	2
C R Dugmore	SLH and LAC	20 ft 5.5 in	3
C Dunne	Faugh-a-Ballagh	20 ft 0.33 in	4
P Markham	Poly H	19 ft 8 in	5
E Foley	Faugh-a-Ballagh	18 ft 8 in	6
<b>Standing Broad jump</b>			
T C S Huss	Lynn AC, Cardiff	9 ft 6 in	1
F O Kitching	LAC	9 ft 4 in	2
C R Dugmore	SLH and LAC	9 ft 2.5 in	3
<b>Running high jump</b>			
R H Baker	Liverpool H and AC	5 ft 11 in	1
T O'Donohoe	Waterloo H and AC	5 ft 11 in	2
C W Taylor	Poly H	5 ft 9 in	3

Note: AC – Athletics Club; CUAC – ; ft – foot/feet (1 ft = 30 cm); in – inch (1 in = 5 cm); LAC – OUAC; ; SLH –.

Source: 'English trials, full details of the events', *The Sporting Life*, 20 May 1912, p 8.

Despite the dreams of developing British field event athletes that could defeat their American rivals and bring home glory from Stockholm, the pioneers who formed the AFEA were looking longer-term than the 1912 Olympics. The Association did make any notable steps forward in the two years up to Stockholm. It gave field events that previously had no grounding within British athletics some standing, although there was a long way to go before the events could be considered established within British athletic circles.

Perhaps its most notable contribution of the AFEA in this period was the progress it made in changing the athletic identity of England towards coaching. Prior to the Association's formation, there had been no organised coaching for athletes and no body concerned with improving performance. The conservative nature of British sport made the progress slow and often difficult, but there were foundations for a change in British sporting identity put in place within two and a half years of the formation of the AFEA.

### **Final British preparations for Stockholm in 1912**

From the beginning of 1912, there was noticeably more British interest in the Stockholm Olympics. References in the press became more commonplace and the various sporting associations began to contemplate how they would select and organise their athletes. The failure of the 1908 Olympics was still painful, with the relative disappointing performance by Britain's representatives in the intervening years between 1908 and 1912, combined with slow preparation prior to Stockholm led to some journalists worrying that British performance would only further decline.

Sporting decline was not the only British concern, as in the spring of 1912 two events raised longstanding concern about the demise of its civilisation. In March, Captain Scott and his team who had attempted to become the first men to the South Pole were defeated. Upon arrival, they discovered that their Norwegian rivals had arrived 33 days before. On the return journey, all six members of Scott's team perished in the cold and the news reached Britain in late March.

Then on 14 April 1912, the Belfast constructed luxury liner, the 'Titanic' sank on its maiden voyage. Exploration and shipbuilding were areas of immense British pride, and these events were another crippling blow to the British world.<sup>67</sup> The Olympic Games presented an opportunity for Britain to prove herself on the world stage in sporting competition, but with concerns about her sporting decline longstanding, further failure at this event could potentially create more

anxiety about Britain's position in the world. Mark Dyreson explains the British concerns prior to Stockholm; 'The British, troubled by comparisons of English and American athletic prowess, would mount a strong effort to assuage the nagging fear that the empire might indeed be on the decline. What would another British failure on the Olympic green indicate?'<sup>68</sup>

Despite the reports of improving the preparations for the British team in the aftermath of the London Games, few changes had been made during the intervening period. *The Times* blamed the BOC for this, bemoaning that the council had been caught up in 'internal dissension.' It believed these problems created an 'uneasy apprehension for some time in the minds of the sporting public.'<sup>69</sup> Such an opinion indicated that British Olympic apathy could be linked towards an aversion of the BOC.

These comments appeared in *The Times*, coming after a BOC meeting on 16 January 1912, which revealed that the BOA had just £4500 available to send British athletes to Stockholm. This would leave the Association with just £1000 in surplus, an insufficient amount for it to continue until the 1916 Olympics. One of the outcomes of the meeting was a proposal to ensure a better means of fundraising or potentially ending British interest in the Games:

as soon after the Olympic Games of 1912 as possible, to issue an appeal setting plainly before the public the alternative-either to follow the United Kingdom to drop out of the Olympic Games altogether, in which case the Association would be wound up and the information and experience acquired during the work of the past seven years would cease to be available- or to provide funds sufficient to carry on the work in an efficient manner.<sup>70</sup>

This was one of the first occasions that the proposal of Britain dropping out of the Games altogether was mentioned (this would become more prevalent during and after the Stockholm Olympics). Funding was a major problem for the British Olympic cause (other competing nations, such as Sweden, funded their team by governmental support),<sup>71</sup> and the apparent poor organisation of the BOC created further problems.

In a desire to ensure proper athletic representation in Stockholm, the AAA brought together representatives from the Northern Counties AAA (NCAAA), MCAAA and Southern AAA in August 1911 to establish an Olympic sub-committee. This sub-committee's remit was to organise regional Olympic trials that would help establish elite athletes from each region who could be brought for national trials to compete in

Sweden.<sup>72</sup> This proposal failed owing to a lack of organisation and funding. The only athletic trials for the British Olympic team took place in London and without many of the top performers from the regions of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.<sup>73</sup>

Failure to organise a representative British trials happened because of the disorganisation of the regional associations in preparing their athletes. Birmingham-based sports journalist, W W Alexander criticised the slow progress made in the second city, a factor he owed to a lack of leadership.<sup>74</sup> He also berated the MCAAA's 'Board on Control,' which he believed to be powerful, but lethargic. He illustrated the poor organisation of the board by stating that it had not allocated the duties to the two trainers that the AAA had appointed for Birmingham. This disorganisation was to the detriment of the regions' athletes who either were not ready for the trials or competed despite not being in prime form.<sup>75</sup>

In an editorial, Alexander wrote the week after, he included what he saw as the discrepancies between the regions. He said that, 'London is much favoured by the powers, for not only has the metropolis all the AAA Championships allotted to it, but the Olympic Trials and the Varsity and School Championships, etc., are all held there.'<sup>76</sup> He believed that this bias made it difficult for Midlands' men to compete in the major championships because of the distance and expense involved. Northern athletes faced similar problems, but one the NCAAA countered by paying their athletes entrance and railway expenses, and so consequently 'the men have the encouragement from their developing athletes of the championship class.'<sup>77</sup> Midlands' athletes by contrast had to find their own money, because most Midlands clubs were in a poor financial position.<sup>78</sup>

The problems faced here (admittedly shown from a potentially biased Midlands perspective), demonstrated the disparity between the differing regions of England and a lack of unity towards the national cause. Disharmony across England was cited as a reason for the disappointing performance at the 1908 Olympics, but one that had not been rectified by 1912, and appeared to be detrimental to British chances in Stockholm.

## **The appointments of Fred Parker and Alec Nelson**

The AAA's Olympic organisation took a major leap forward in January 1912, after it created the 'General Olympic Committee.' This Committee was comprised of officials from the universities and leading athletic clubs with the remit to ensure a better standard of coaching for Britain's athletes. Matthew Llewellyn believes its formation was 'a powerful

signal that the AAA had finally grasped the importance of investing in coaching as a vital means for achieving international success.<sup>179</sup>

One of the first practical steps the committee made was creation of the position 'Chief Athletic Advisor.' Fred Parker from the London Athletic Club was appointed to this role in January 1912 for an 'honorarium of £50.'<sup>80</sup> Upon his appointment, the press stated his duties were to 'visit all the principal training centres in England and will advise athletes in their preparation.'<sup>81</sup> This appointment represented a practical step towards ensuring organised training and coaching for British athletes.

Parker reported back to the Committee on his findings in March, when he stated he had visited the indoor training of the Polytechnic Institute, and planned to visit other clubs' training centres. He also commented upon the large number of applications for trainers' positions, proposing that Alec Nelson become the chief trainer, based at Stamford Bridge, and recommended other coaches for the centres across the London area. The AAA's response was to advise:

the North and Midlands to make similar arrangements for subsidiary trainers in their own districts until the trials. It was suggested that £5 be paid to each trainer, with seven men employed in the North, seven in the south, and five in the midlands.<sup>82</sup>

In an interview to *The New York Times* Parker believed that paying for these men was not feasible because '£2,500 would be sunk at once'<sup>83</sup> (i.e. used up rapidly), money that he believed the AAA did not have. In the same interview, he commented on responses to an AAA survey on the training of athletes, which made him aware of the issues created by a lack of coaches and the general poor knowledge of athletes. He commented that the survey revealed that few athletes were aware of what he perceived to be basic practices, his hope was that his group of trainers would rectify this issue.

The employment of more coaches to help Parker was necessary to ensure progress in some events. Bob Philips argues that Parker would be unable to improve 'those jumping events where careful technical preparation was needed,'<sup>84</sup> because he 'lacked the resources.'<sup>85</sup> In *The New York Times*, Parker revealed his thoughts on the Olympic Games as a 'national struggle,' underlining reasons why he felt the Olympics were deserving of Government funding:

What is wanted is a Government appropriation or some fund raised to put on the level with other countries. In all the talk and discussion



upon the Olympic Games they were looked upon as a national undertaking; any success thereat was considered a national success, and the national credit was reckoned to be at stake. Therefore the nation ought to contribute toward the cost of preparing for the games as did other countries.<sup>86</sup>

Such a comment indicated the importance of international sporting success to those in British sport. With other countries receiving Government financing, it left Britain somewhat behind in terms of being able to provide for their athletes. Alec Nelson was appointed as Chief AAA Coach for the Olympic team in April 1912, but due to his own workload he was unable to take up the position until 1 June 1912. This was an appointment that was well received in the press; W W Alexander believed that he was a 'fine man' and 'British interests could not rest in better hands.'<sup>87</sup> In a *Sporting Life* interview, Nelson stated his appointment had come 'very late,'<sup>88</sup> but this would not stop him doing his utmost 'to make a good fight for England with the material at my disposal.' He indicated a desire to aid all of Britain's athletes, but in particular he expressed a wish to 'see the Irish jumpers taken in hand and given a real chance.'<sup>89</sup> Such a comment suggested that Ireland still had interest in field athletics and quality athletes to represent her.

Nelson was based at Stamford Bridge, and was one of eight men that formed the Metropolitan District coaching team for the Olympic trials and Games.<sup>90</sup> With eight coaches at its disposal, it appeared that London was well catered for, although according to *The Sporting Life* this was not the case across the country. It grumbled that some major cities, such as Bristol and Brighton (mentioned here by name) still required a coach.<sup>91</sup> Other cities and regions remained without coaches, owing to the shortage of finances.

The British Athletic Olympic trials took place in London on 18 May 1912. These were organised by the AAA, who included all Olympic athletic events within the programme. There was unhappiness with the meeting's organisation, as there were many athletes that believed that only those who had received an invitation could partake, exposed in a letter by Fred Parker to *The Sporting Life*. In this, he stated that 'any man that feels his abilities are up to genuine pretensions to "Olympic" form could enter,'<sup>92</sup> and urged anyone believing that they were in such form to do so. This letter further exposed the poor organisation and communication present in British athletics.

For Britain's athletes, the Olympic trials represented their solitary chance to book a place on the boat to Stockholm. Otway was not

impressed by this decision, believing that there should have been a series of earlier competitions, not only in the current season, but in the previous one's that allowed athletes 'an opportunity of disclosing their merit.'<sup>93</sup> As stated previously, it had been the desire of the authorities to organise such events, but they had failed to take place, owing to poor organisation.

The press reports from the trials did not indicate a belief that future Olympic Champions had been found. *The Times* believed the trials had been an 'occasion of a pleasant day's sport for the ordinary club athlete,'<sup>94</sup> a statement that did not indicate Britain would be successful on the Olympic stage. *The Sporting Mail* argued that 'our athletes will not be so badly beaten as some would have us believe.'<sup>95</sup> *The Sporting Life* was more positive. It believed that Britain was in a better position than she was in 1908. It stated the level of performance at the trials was good, and there was 'promise for the future,'<sup>96</sup> a sentiment echoed by Fred Parker. His opinion was that Britain would fare better than she had four years prior, although he held no hopes in any of the events up to the 1,500 metres.<sup>97</sup>

*The Sporting Life* excused Britain's athletes from any potential blame for any failure stating; 'if we do not send a far better all-round team to Stockholm than that which competed at the Stadium four years ago, the failure will not lie with the athletes of the country.'<sup>98</sup> Other articles provided similar opinions: 'if we do acquit ourselves creditably or even brilliantly in the Games, it will not be due to the Selection Committee's efforts. Rather the credit will be due to the indomitable pluck inherent in every Britisher, which causes us to accomplish wonder when we have our backs up'<sup>99</sup> and 'The British Lion will have to fight for its life to win second laurels!'<sup>100</sup> These comments gave the indication that opinion to how Britain would fare was mixed.

On 4 June 1912, the names of the athletes that would compete in Stockholm were announced after a meeting of representatives from all the British nations in Manchester.<sup>101</sup> *The Sporting Life* pronounced this was the team to represent 'England, Ireland and Scotland'<sup>102</sup> – although for some reason not Wales. The squad was of 100 men, with a full quota of 12 athletes in 100, 200, 400, 800, 1,500 and 5,000 metre races, although notably 'no selections' in the javelin or pole jump.

In the other field events, four men were selected in putting the weight, the hammer and discus, and all of them came from Scotland and Ireland. Three of these men (J Flanagan, P Flanagan and D Horgan) would drop out shortly after.<sup>103</sup> This selection demonstrated that in its first two years of existence the AFEA had little impact on ensuring more English field event athletes were competing for Britain at Olympic level. The meagre finances of the AAA and BOA ensured that clubs were forced to raise money in

order to send their men to Stockholm. Otway's belief was it should not be allowed or even necessary, rather it was the role of the Associations to pay for it; 'These athletes are going out to uphold the honour of their country, and they deserve to be treated generously, and the AAA has ample funds to do it.'<sup>104</sup> Otway's comment was yet another expression of the Olympics as an event of national importance and a demonstration of the mixed British thoughts towards Olympic competition.

The selections of the British team did not impress *The Sporting Mail's* W W Alexander. Prior to selection he expected only the regions cross-country athletes to make the squad, but he was disappointed when only one of his regions' athletes was selected;

J. Barker and C. Davenport fairly won a position in the Trials, and only Baker is sure of his place, Davenport being placed on reserve. Hibbens and Greenway, first and second in the National race last March, also had strong claims to inclusion in the Cross Country team, yet Hibbens alone is picked, and Greenway makes way for men who were the proverbial street behind him in our greatest cross country contest of the year.<sup>105</sup>

In another article, he lamented that the selection committee had ignored the good season-long performances of these athletes, believing this should have granted them a place in the team.<sup>106</sup> Alexander's fury was not only directed at the British selectors, but also at the organisation of the MCAAAA, as he felt they had not given the Midlands' athletes the best opportunity to be at the top of their form. He bemoaned not only a lack of local competition, which there had been little of since the Whitsuntide holidays, but also he argued that 'if Midland Olympic Trials had been held a week before the London games, I feel convinced that we should not have heard the cry of a Midland failure.'<sup>107</sup> (No Midlands trials had been held.) He spoke positively about the training the athletes had in the weeks before the London trial, believing they had proved their 'value,' but wished that if it had 'started only a few weeks earlier, our runners would have given a decidedly better display in the games in London last month.'<sup>108</sup> His bitterness was further exemplified in June, when he stated he felt the British squad did not 'have not one sure winner amongst the lot!'<sup>109</sup>

The selection of the British cycling team also brought dissatisfaction in the press. Bolton published *Football and Cricket Field*, indicated a belief in a strong London bias; 'So much for the Londoners, all of whom are well chosen and fit and proper persons to represent their hand and the greatest city therein.'<sup>110</sup> The article then referred to J W Kirk, Charles

Moss and A J Stokes, men it believed to be the quickest in the country, but ominously not selected and noted not to be from London.

After the initial cycling team had been selected, the National Cycling Union (NCU) was forced to remove some of these men from the team because of limited finances. The shortage saw them instruct the Scottish and Irish Cycling Associations that they would be only able to send four of their men, and any additional entrants would be done at their own cost. The ASA demonstrated a more-prepared approach to selection. In April 1911, it formed the 'National District Sub-Committee,' which had the purpose of supervising the training of swimmers and it also held preliminary trials. This divided England into five areas (Midlands, North, North-East, South, West), with three men in charge of each region. Three of these 15 men then formed the 'International Olympic Selection Committee,' along with representatives from the other three home nations to produce the Olympic swimming team.<sup>111</sup>

One of the responsibilities of the committee was to appoint the team's trainers. It appointed Walter Brickett, who had enjoyed success in the role in 1908 to the male role.<sup>112</sup> While Mrs Clara Jarvis, from the East Midlands, and Mrs Elizabeth Holmes of Birmingham were selected to look after the female members. After the Games, the Committee commented that all three had completed their duties 'in the most capable manner.'<sup>113</sup> The organisation of ASA indicated that the Association considered the Olympics an important event to be involved in. This was further indicated in a statement made at its 1912 Annual General Meeting:

in view of the world-wide importance attached to the Olympic Games, and to ensure your Association being efficiently represented, your Committee is of opinion that every possible facility for training should be given all swimmers who are likely to be selected for these events.<sup>114</sup>

Such a statement was a clear indication of its support for the Olympic Games, a facet sometimes not present in the AAA's preparations, judging by their actions and the opinions of Britain's leading sports journalists.

The last athletic event prior to the Olympics were the AAA Championships, with all of the events but one, won by British athletes. The performances here gave Charles Otway some hope, and he even posed the question 'Are the lean years of athletics over?'<sup>115</sup> The only foreign victory went to German Hanns Braun in the 880 yards, although notably many continental and American athletes were not in attendance because of their preparations for the Olympics.

The performances at these Championships did give British athletes some hope when they sailed to Stockholm between 27 and 29 June 1912. The shortage of finances from the Olympic appeal delayed the British team's arrival in Stockholm prior to the Games.<sup>116</sup> Alec Nelson had desired for the team to be in Sweden for two weeks before the commencement, but he was granted just two days, and those athletes that competed in events towards the end of competition were forced to travel to Stockholm even later.

## **Conclusions on the period 1909–1912**

The period between 1909 and prior to the 1912 Olympics gave indications of the further decline of British athletes upon the international stage. Commentators continually wrote of how British men were defeated by foreign athletes and their own men were being held back by a lack of training facilities and coaches.

Despite awareness of these problems, Britain was slow to change its attitudes, owing to organisational problems, financial limitations and the desire to keep to the traditional values of amateurism. To some administrators and athletes 'practicing too much undermined natural grace and talent' as Holt describes. He continued by explaining the British amateur thought process; 'amateurs above all were gentlemen, and gentleman were not supposed to toil and sweat.'<sup>117</sup> He cited amateur footballer, G O Smith as an example of this: 'The Corinthian of my day never trained,' remarked Smith, 'and I can safely say the need of it was never felt.' This was an attitude mirrored by those in amateur athletics, and demonstrated why many athletes did little to push for change in the period in methods between the London and Stockholm Olympics.

Despite the limitations, notable change had appeared during this period, significantly through the formation of the AFEA, but also across athletics and swimming. Dave Day argues 'the tendency has been to view the 1912 Games as an important turning point in attitudes to coaching and training in Britain,'<sup>118</sup> but in fact he believes 'the experiences of men such as Nelson and Brickett suggest that the 1912 games was less of a watershed in attitudes to British coaching and more of an acceleration in an already existing trend.'<sup>119</sup> The evidence exhibited throughout this chapter demonstrates this. British sporting identity in the period between the London and Stockholm Olympics had changed, particularly in the months before the Olympics, but as will be demonstrated this did little to bring pride to Britain at the Olympic Games.

# 4

## The Stockholm 1912 Olympics

The 1912 Olympics continued the growth of the Games after the success of the London Games. In total, the fifth Olympiad witnessed 28 nations competing, across 102 events in 15 sports. Among these nations were seven making their Olympic debuts (Chile, Egypt, Iceland, Japan, Luxembourg, Portugal and Serbia), bringing the total number of athletes competing up to a new record of 2,380.<sup>1</sup> Fifty-seven of these athletes were women, primarily in Stockholm to compete in the swimming and diving events that were allowing women to partake for the first time. These Games have been dubbed 'the arrival of the Olympic Games as the world's premier international event,'<sup>2</sup> such was their success.

The Olympics began in earnest on 6 May 1912, with the covered court tennis competition and concluded on 22 July 1912 after yacht racing. As in London, the Stockholm Olympics were not officially opened until the start of the stadium events, and the opening ceremony took place on 6 July 1912. On that date, before a packed house of 25,000 spectators, King Gustav declared that the Games had begun. In total 327,288 spectators attended the Games.

The fifth Olympiad was the first to feature art competitions and Olympic founder, Pierre de Coubertin entered two pieces of literature under false names. One of these entitled 'ode to sports' won the literature competition, under the pseudonym of 'Georges Hohrod.'<sup>3</sup> Other notable firsts in Stockholm were innovations in electronic times, and cameras positioned on the finish lines in athletic events.<sup>4</sup>

The Games witnessed the first holding of 'demonstration sports,' which were to feature in almost all Olympic Games until 1992. As would be the trend over the next 80 years, indigenous sports were the primary games played, along with those seeking to become future Olympic sports. In Stockholm, the Scandinavian sports of *glima*, *kasta*

varpa and stangstornning were demonstrated, as was the American sport of baseball, which made its Olympic debut.

The stars of the Games were the Finn, Hannes Kolehmainen, and American Jim Thorpe. Thorpe won both the pentathlon and decathlon events, and was told he was 'the greatest athlete in the world,'<sup>5</sup> by King Gustav during his medal presentation. His success was short lived as his amateur status was revoked in 1913, after claims were made that he had played professional baseball. After admitting to this was true, he was stripped of his medals and only in 1982, nearly 30 years after his death did the International Olympic Committee (IOC) reinstate them.

Kolehmainen took home three gold medals and a silver. His first gold came in the 10,000 metres, in which he stormed in a world record time of 31:20:8, his second gold came in the 5,000 metres, where he broke yet another world record, and his third gold came in the individual cross-country. Finally, he helped Finland to silver in the team cross-country event. The 'Flying Finn' became a watchword for 'athletic excellence'<sup>6</sup> during these Olympics.

Whereas it had been Ireland that provided the political tension in London, it was Finland that provided it in Stockholm. As Allen Guttmann explains, 'The Finns were not happy with the Russian domination of their country and they persuaded the IOC to let them march under their own flag.'<sup>7</sup> Russia was neither a major political nor sporting nation that the IOC feared to defy and the Finns used their status to great effect, finishing in fourth place in the unofficial medals table.

Continuing the trend of dominating the events that they entered, the United States took most of the gold medals at the Games with 25, and 63 medals in total, which was good enough for the top spot in the medals table. Second was Sweden, with 24 gold medals and 65 medals in total, partly owing to the fact that they entered 400 athletes, more than any other nation. As at the 1908 Olympics, the United States concentrated its entries upon athletics and was consistently dominant, such as in the 100-metre final where it contributed six out of the seven finalists, and all of the medals. An editorial in British periodical *The Outlook* summed up America's athletic dominance well. It stated that American athletes had achieved so many podium positions that her athletes had scored only two points less than the athletes of all other countries combined, and more than three times as many points as the British.<sup>8</sup>

The Great Britain and Ireland team won 41 medals during the Olympics, of which ten were gold.<sup>9</sup> This was good enough for third place in the medals table, a long way behind second placed Sweden

and ahead of fourth placed Finland by only one gold medal. The British were far from satisfied with this outcome, and a lengthy post-mortem followed.

For Britain, the athletic contests in particular were a disaster, with just two gold medals (one silver and five bronze), in sports that the British prided itself on. Arnold Jackson did win the 1500 metres, extending the British belief that she was the home of middle-distance running. Britain's other athletic victory came via the four by 100-metre relay race, an event they were fortunate to make the final, as in the semi-final they were 'well beaten'<sup>10</sup> by the United States, but were admitted to the final after the disqualification of the Americans.

In athletics alone, Britain finished in fourth position (behind the United States, Sweden and Finland). The response from the British press was to add the Empire's points to Britain's, which drew her level with Sweden in the final athletic standings and into second place.<sup>11</sup> American commentators were quick to mock the British performance, with *The New York Times*, stating that Britain was 'no longer masters of the playground. The saying "Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton" was once a boast, and is now a bitter prophecy (Table 4.1).'<sup>12</sup>

Historian Matthew Llewellyn entitles his paper on Britain and the 1912 Olympics 'A Tale of National Disaster,'<sup>13</sup> and this appears to be an apt title after the showing. Unlike at London, when the poor performance upon the athletics track was covered up by successes in other sports, this was not the case in Stockholm, as Britain failed to enter some events. Other sports, such as hockey and rugby, which originated in Britain, were not included in the Games. Boxing, 'which Britain had pioneered as an amateur sport, was not even permitted under Swedish law.'<sup>14</sup>

*Table 4.1* 1912 Olympic Medal table

Nation	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
United States	25	19	19	63
Sweden	24	24	17	65
Great Britain	10	15	16	41
Finland	9	8	9	26
France	7	4	3	14
Germany	5	13	7	25

Source: David Miller, *The official history of the Olympic Games and the IOC: Athens to Beijing 1894–2008*. (Frome, Mainstream Publishing, 2008), p. 538.



## Outlining the British failures

At the 1908 Olympics, performing well in athletics events was of primary importance to the British, and prior to the commencement of these events at the 1912 Olympics the indication was that this would be the case again. *The Times* believed that Britain attached 'larger importance'<sup>15</sup> to the events of 'pure athletics than any of the Continental peoples.' It continued by stating, 'it is a victory in one of these, from the 100-metre dash to the "Marathon" race, which is the most coveted honour.'<sup>16</sup> After Britain's athletes won just two events in Stockholm, an outcry followed from the nation's press. The performance sparked further concerns of British decline, with calls for the nation's sporting philosophy to be changed and a desire to drop out from the Olympic movement altogether. British sporting disappointment was not just confined to this sphere of Olympic competition, as revealed in *The Sporting Life*:

It is not only athletics that the United Kingdom has gone under. We failed in wrestling, fencing, gymnastics; were but moderately successful in swimming and shooting; were not represented in hard court tennis or yachting; failed again in horse-riding and the modern pentathlon.<sup>17</sup>

Despite British success in events such as football, rowing and indoor tennis, the outlook was bleak according to the press, for which they blamed the British sporting associations, who had an apparent 'lack of enthusiasm'<sup>18</sup> for the Olympics. Such a statement, and others made by the press during this period, was a realisation of a long-standing concern from some commentators that Britain was not going to be prepared for Stockholm.

'Old Blue,' a columnist in *The Sporting Life* believed the defeat signalled the 'end of an era' for British sport. He argued, 'the long lead that this country took about the middle of last century in almost all branches of sport has, as we all know, been woefully diminished to-day.'<sup>19</sup> *The Observer* described the British performance a 'national disaster'<sup>20</sup> in one editorial; and in another declared that, 'in practically every branch, our predominance is in jeopardy, and the Olympic Games have brought the truth home very forcibly that despite one or two successes on our behalf, the Continental sportsmen are going along by leaps and bounds.'<sup>21</sup> Such a comment indicated an acceptance of British decline. *The Daily Mail* mournfully remarked, 'our position in the world of sport is not only challenged, it is practically usurped.'<sup>22</sup>

Post Olympics, the press blamed all concerned for the Stockholm disaster. One example of this appeared in *The Times*, but its perspective was comparable with articles that appeared across the press.<sup>23</sup> This held athletes, trainers, the athletic authorities and even the British public responsible. It imparted the failure on two causes, 'first, because our national ideal of sport is not the Olympic ideal; and, secondly, because we were compelled through executive incompetence and mismanagement to compete at a disadvantage.'<sup>24</sup> It continued by criticising the British public, 'the real fault lies in public apathy, for without an intelligent support from the general public the Council cannot be expected to secure the influence which it needs for a very complex task.'<sup>25</sup> Despite this initial defence of the British Olympic Council (BOC), it was made culpable, and was described as being 'more concerned with internal quarrels,<sup>26</sup> than 'ensuring first-class preparations for Stockholm.' The article concluded with the belief that, if all of these groups had been more focused on ensuring solid preparations, Britain would have been more adequately prepared to compete well. It stated in order to avoid a repeat, 'it will be necessary to reconsider our whole attitude towards the Games.'<sup>27</sup>

Lord Desborough defended the BOC in an article he wrote for the September 1912 edition of *The Field*. He argued that the British failure owed to the attitude of the athletes and the public:

Failure of the general public of the United Kingdom to take the Olympic Games seriously – a failure which necessarily reacted to the enthusiasm of individual competitors – and, secondly, to the lack of adequate opportunities for training under the direction of trainers acquainted with the best scientific methods.<sup>28</sup>

He continued to distance the Council from the failure, arguing that it was the public's choice if Britain's preparations for future Olympics were improved because the money needed would have to come from a public appeal. He reasoned that if the public were not willing to provide the money, the BOC 'must decline to be responsible for sending out a team.'<sup>29</sup>

The apathy of athletes mentioned by Desborough was further indicated by British Olympic athletic coach, Fred Parker. He claimed that athletes treated the Olympics 'as if it were an ordinary fixture, and not one which should have been the principal effort of their career.'<sup>30</sup> This perspective was written regarding Britain's track and field competitors, but the apathy of other athletes was demonstrated via their absence. For example, her yachtsmen and tennis players chose to compete in Cowes week and the All-England Championships, respectively, instead of the

Olympics. Matthew Llewellyn believes that this decision reaffirmed 'the British preference for its own prestigious national sporting events.'<sup>31</sup> Other athletes, such as hammer thrower Thomas Nicolson, were unable to partake because of their business commitments.

A general apathy towards the Games was illustrated in articles such as that in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which was headed 'Tepid interest.' This remarked, 'In England interest in the games has been tepid beyond belief; even the advertised fact of British incompetence has not stirred the pulse.'<sup>32</sup> The editorial believed that despite the damage the performance did to the nation's reputation abroad, it was felt that many in Britain were not interested in the sporting festival and preferred domestic sporting events.

Two people not held liable by the press were the nation's athletic coaches, Fred Parker and Alec Nelson. The *Western Mail* stated the poor performance 'is no reflection on the zeal of English trainers,'<sup>33</sup> its preference was to criticise the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) and BOC for poor financial and organisational support. W W Alexander, of *The Sporting Mail*, echoed this sentiment. He believed that the trainers had not been given enough time or money to instigate meaningful changes to the athletic teams' preparations:

They have had little chance to improve the team, for at no time have they had all the men together, and not even in the Trial Games in London last May did they see the full strength of the team selected by the AAA Committee. It would have been better had they taken a firm stand and refused to have anything to do with England's team unless they were given a free hand with full control of the men for at least three months prior to the games.<sup>34</sup>

Alexander continued by stating that the coaches had no freedom to carry out their job. He believed that Nelson had, 'been heavily handicapped, and has had all sorts of difficulties to contend with, besides which it is obviously ridiculous to place a team in a trainer's hands with insufficient time to dust up their form.'<sup>35</sup> He concluded that, 'altogether England's generalship of her team has been such as to make us a laughing stock of other countries.'

Charles Otway, Chief athletic writer of *The Sporting Life*, also criticised the AAA. He wrote that it had not done enough to improve its organisation after the 1908 Olympics, 'every year that is wasted will make it the more difficult to regain our lost supremacy in athletics ... if the AAA cannot get moving in 1912, it better go out of business.'<sup>36</sup>

In his opinion improvement would not come through adopting American ‘professional’ attitudes, but rather through better organisation and more meaningful competitions to aid athletes’ development.<sup>37</sup>

Echoing the sentiment of the 1908 Olympics, British commentators in Stockholm blamed the professional practices of other nations for the demise in British performance.<sup>38</sup> C W L Bulpett of the Oxford and Cambridge Club offered a different perspective, remonstrating that it was Britain’s own professional athletics circuit that had caused the damage:

Professionalism has invaded our amateur athletics. As an inevitable consequence, the public have withdrawn their interest and support from athletic doings. To this, more than to anything else, is due our recent want of success. Where public support and enthusiasm are absent victory will also be absent. Make the game clean and purely amateur, with the true ideal of sport as the aim; then the public interest will revive.<sup>39</sup>

He continued by writing that he considered trained athletes as being like ‘a racer from the stable,’ yet more negative comment regarding organising training. Bulpett’s desire was for Britain to keep her own sporting practices, which he described as ‘our high ideal,’ believing:

The rest of the world will come round to our view when they have learned what true sport is. At present they are beginners, and have hitherto shown themselves very slow learners. Teach them that while it is good to win, it is still better to be a good sport, and that no good sportsman will win by the help of anything approaching to trickery. That, the true aim of sport should be destroyed is unthinkable.<sup>40</sup>

Arguments such as this expose the problem for those wishing to change British methods of preparation for future Olympics. The British public school attitude towards athletics had been engrained for a long period, and it was described as an ‘obsession’<sup>41</sup> in Victorian athletics circles by John Lowerson. The evidence from the 1912 Olympic Games indicated this attitude would not be easily amended.

## **Supremacy and decline**

Constantly throughout the twentieth century, British pride in her sporting prowess had taken constant blows, and the 1912 Olympics was another negative to the notion of British sporting supremacy. Even

before the end of the Games, members of the press declared Sweden as the world's 'greatest athletic nation,'<sup>42</sup> a title the British had believed for a long time was theirs. The Amateur Field Events Association (AFEA) secretary, and athletic coaching enthusiast, F A M Webster deemed that Britain had fallen so 'low as to be beaten by even the lesser European nations, who for generations past have been our pupils in all sporting pastimes.'<sup>43</sup>

In *The Observer*, Sydney Brookes believed that it was a 'myth' that Britain had once been the world's premier sporting nation. He believed that Britain had been dominant because 'we were first to play games on a large scale,' and in the early years of international sport 'we were second-raters and they were fifth-raters.'<sup>44</sup> His view was that the relative size of Britain made it impossible for her to keep up with her foreign rivals, who were more numerous in population. This argument is one used by historians in spheres such as steel production to describe why it was impossible for Britain to keep up with such countries as the United States of America and Germany. In particular,<sup>45</sup> in areas such as steel production for example.<sup>46</sup> Brookes concluded:

If the Olympic Games were decided by hundreds instead of by twos or threes we should probably win with ease. For, however much we fail in quality, in quantity we are still immeasurably supreme; our best is not so good as other people's best, but our average is far above theirs.<sup>47</sup>

Britain's size was a contributory factor to the demise of her sport, but it did not explain all of her woes. In Stockholm, she had been outperformed by the larger United States but also in athletics by Finland, and across the board by hosts Sweden, two nations with significantly smaller populations than Britain.

Along with these theories, came others, such as that Britain had become 'physically degenerate,' a theory that had been present in the British press throughout the early years of the twentieth century. One example appeared in the form of a poem published in *The Daily Mail*, entitled 'Poor old England.'<sup>48</sup> It opened, 'Aunt Jane (who reads the *Daily Mail*) ... "Grows weekly more depressed and pale ... To note how English athletes fail ... In Stockholm at the Stadium,"' and ends with 'Poor Old England's on the wane!... "The Empire's doomed!" Says dear Aunt Jane.' The second stanza wrote how Americans could throw a discus further and a Swede can run quicker than any Briton, and ended with the line 'Degenerates! snorts dear Aunt Jane.'<sup>49</sup>

Other authors wrote about the same subject. Various editorials believed that there was no hope for future success such was the degeneracy, and the question was asked, 'was Britain a decadent race or just decadent at sport?' Some articles made no connection, such as that by Sydney Brookes, who believed that the 'non-success'<sup>50</sup> of the Olympic team made 'no intelligent and reasonable person to believe that we are on the "down-grade."<sup>51</sup> This argument appeared in an editorial entitled 'Are we decadent at sport?' beginning with the heading 'England's failures,' announcing that apart from recent victories over Australia in cricket, Harold Hilton's win in the American Amateur golf championship and the Varsities' victory over their American counterparts 'we have been unmercifully thrashed in pretty nearly every branch of sport.'<sup>52</sup>

Brookes' editorial described the defeats by using sporting analogies, believing that Britain's condition was such that she was 'unable to keep up his wicket' or 'to defend his goal.' He reasoned that England's failures were because of the reluctance Britain had towards using innovations such as 'the new seat in the saddle, the new swerve in the high jump, the new start in the sprints.'<sup>53</sup> Such a comment indicated a preference for conservatism in British sport, spouted as an identity that needed changing after the 1908 Olympics, but one that had not been amended. Notwithstanding, other writers believed that the Stockholm Olympics said much about the condition of Britain.

*Blackwood's Magazine* stated the performance 'proved neither the decadence of English courage nor the supremacy of American wisdom.'<sup>54</sup> Its preference was to state the argument that the Olympics were 'a triumph of professionalism and professionalism alone.' This argument was also made in a *Scotsman* editorial, that argued the failure was 'expected,'<sup>55</sup> but this was not because, 'so much to deterioration in British physique as to the special preparation which is given to American athletes.'<sup>56</sup> Its view was that if the British gave 'time and money' to preparations such as America did they would be a match for them. *The Observer* echoed this sentiment, stating the notable differences between the British and American approaches to sport:

They regard sport as something more, as a business, as a profession. They specialised, had professional trainers, spent more money most lavishly. We went to the Olympic Games as a team of sportsmen to whom the games were games and nothing more.<sup>57</sup>

This represents an attitude more reminiscent of that expressed after the 1908 Olympics, when American athletes were accused of being

'professionals.'<sup>58</sup> More commonly after the 1912 Games, American methods were seen as what Britain should be attempting to replicate, rather than belittle. Another editorial from the same newspaper did express this more commonly seen perspective, stating that Britain 'must either fall into line with those other countries especially the United States, whose runners have practically "swept the boards" – which see that their men are "trained to win", or else retire from the contest altogether.'<sup>59</sup> The suggestion of retiring from the Games was one that became more prevalent in the period after these Olympics.

The poor British performance at the Olympics presented some journalists with the opportunity to present their concerns about the decay of the British nation. During the athletic contests, *The Edinburgh Evening News* included an editorial that stated how Britain had 'picked up a plume here and there, which is something to be thankful for in these days of national decadence.'<sup>60</sup> It believed that the British were becoming soft and lazy, stating, 'the trouble is, there are too many tea and pastry shops nowadays.'

As was commonplace in the coverage of the 1908 Olympics, amateurism was a feature in the British coverage from Stockholm. The manner by which other nations defined amateurism was constantly referred to in *The Sporting Life*. It wrote that Britain's 'leading officials' were 'inclined to attribute our defeat at Stockholm to the laxity of other nations in the matter of amateurism.'<sup>61</sup> Amateurism was a principle that had developed alongside modern British sport, and with sport, it had spread to other nations who had developed their own versions of amateurism. These were perfectly acceptable within the ideals as set out by Coubertin and the IOC but generally differed to the British model. As Hart Cantelon states, 'Amateurism is a free-floating concept that every person, regardless of class, gender, race, age, wealth, national origin, in fact any social category, can understand and, if so desired, aspire to.'<sup>62</sup> The evidence presented here suggests that many in Britain were stubborn of their vision of amateurism, and only willing to accept their own approach.

British bitterness of other nation's vision of amateurism was expressed in a *Scotsman* article about the final of the 200 metres. The event had witnessed an American one-two, with Britain's Willie Applegarth in third place. The article described the triumph as 'another victory for American training.'<sup>63</sup> It wrote of the American team that, 'every man is sent to the starting point in tip-top condition, his muscles and nerves brought up to such a pitch of perfection and tense concentration.'<sup>64</sup> Such an observation was in direct comparison to how the British perceived their sportsmen. The British outlook on American attitudes was summarised by Mark

Dyreson, 'They disliked American methods of financing teams, accused American athletes of being victory-programmed automatons who twisted the true meaning of sport, and condemned the team as a menagerie of immigrant mercenaries.'<sup>65</sup> This was not a universal attitude, and in comparison to 1908, there was some defence of American methods. One came from Charles Otway who argued that American athletes were not professionals and had not been in training camps for weeks prior to their leaving home shores.<sup>66</sup> He stated that the majority came from the public schools and colleagues, and assembled just the day before they sailed to Europe, and just trained for seven days in two locations in Europe on arrival (necessary after the lengthy journey).

Along with press articles decrying American methods as 'professional,' others presented the opposing view, believing they were 'amateur' and Britain should abandon 'our own ideas of what sport had better be, and take over America's ideas instead.'<sup>67</sup> This attitude became more commonplace after the Stockholm Olympics, and the potential for a major change in British sporting identity became more of a reality.

Post-Stockholm, Britain began to move away from the ideology of 'effortless superiority,' a philosophy that was based upon a 'classical ideal in which well-formed and efficient organs were encased in a symmetrically developed body that conformed to accepted standards of height and weight.'<sup>68</sup> The preference came from an approach partially based on America, consequently Britain became a nation that stopped making sporting philosophies and began to follow others approaches.

In athletics, Britain looked towards the United States for her own improvement, but in rowing, the methods developed by Britain were those that other nations should be using, according to the British press. The Olympic regatta witnessed four events and three of these had British finalists, including both crews in the final of the prestigious 'eights' (with crews from Leander Club and Oxford University). Rowing correspondent of *The Sporting Life*, 'Old Blue' wrote an editorial in which he stated that the British method, 'the orthodox' was the superior technique on display at the Olympics:

It was demonstrated anew at Stockholm that, given a crew properly prepared and coached on the true Eton model, exponents of the orthodox style can still hold their own with all the nations. And so far, so good. It is hardly likely to undergo modification after events in Sweden, although-as I said last week-it is possible that a blend of some of the many other styles might produce surprising results. Per contra, it looks like as though some nations are still groping for an ideal style, while devotees of our orthodox style have it at hand.<sup>69</sup>



He urged Britain not to rest on its laurels (i.e. to stop trying) and continue to develop its techniques in 'the new national sport.'<sup>70</sup> This was because it was the only sport in which the 'old Country' excelled. British success owed to the quality of coaching in universities and top clubs and that provided the crews, but something lacking elsewhere in the country. 'Old Blue' proposed that regional training centres should be established to ensure that this knowledge was spread to the rest of the nation, 'the lack of good coaching rather than lack of material or time that makes Metropolitan rowing such a negligible quantity at Henley.'<sup>71</sup> He then described what he saw as the 'disparity' between the top clubs and the rest of the nation:

In the provinces it is even worse. There seems to be as many style of rowing in vogue to-day as there are clubs, or nearly so. Up North you get a capital style of its kind, but hardly what would be called orthodox. In the Midlands it is the same. And if you go West the style most in vogue is certainly a 'get-there' one, but as far removed from the orthodox as chalk from cheese. Why should this disparity exist? To my mind, it is a great big shame that some scheme of universal coaching by the governing body has not been devised long since.<sup>72</sup>

As with athletics, there is evidence of a disparity in facilities and coaching available across Britain. Rowing coaches that were employed universally 'belonged to a similar class and who shared common objectives.'<sup>73</sup> A prime example of this was the man that 'led' the British rowing effort at Stockholm, Harcourt Gilbey Gold. He was a former Eton and Oxford rower, and a previous President of the Oxford Rowing Club. The argument presented here indicated there was a gulf in standards across the nation, felt by those outside of England's premier educational institutions and the upper class clubs. The indication here was this was a gulf that needed to be breached.

Despite acceptances that there was a need to change some British sporting practices, there was still a belief that her sporting manner was supreme. An intrinsic part of British sporting identity was the manner in which sport had to be played, and this was one area that the press believed she was still superior after Stockholm:

Whatever else comes, no one will for a moment doubt that it must always be Great Britain's part to set the world an example of clean sportsmanship. It is, by the position which we have held so long in the world of sport, our simply duty. But we cannot set that example

of clean sportsmanship. It is, by the position which we have held so long in the world of sport, our simple duty. But we cannot set that example by being 'slackers.' Let us by all means be generous in competitions, and lose, when we must lose, cheerfully.<sup>74</sup>

Britain's actions during the 1908 Olympics in the marathon, 400 metres and tug-of-war in London and Stockholm (where the British team had been disqualified) created doubts about the nation's sportsmanship. In this editorial, there is emphasis upon 'clean sportsmanship' as a British identity, and a 'duty' of the nation to uphold, something questionable after the events of the London and Stockholm Olympics.

In contrast, *The Pall Mall Gazette* declared the performance at the 1912 Olympics as nothing more than a 'blip,' reasoning that Britain did not need to improve. It stated, 'by spring 1916 ... we shall have a company of athletes ready for Berlin, or anywhere, and capable of proving to Europe that England is still the most sporting nation in the world.'<sup>75</sup> This article, as well as giving further indication that there was a belief that Britain was still supreme, is itself a 'blip.' It represents one of the only suggestions that Britain did not need to make any changes to its sporting outlook before the 1916 Berlin Olympics.

The consensus from many people was that amending Britain's sporting ethos regarding training and coaching was the only way by which the British performance could be improved. The problem for reformers was that values of 'effortless superiority' were an intrinsic part of Britain's sporting identity, particularly to those of the establishment that ruled amateur sport.

Post-Olympics presented the British athletic trainers for Stockholm, Alec Nelson and Fred Parker, an opportunity to present their views upon the training via an article in *The Times*. In this, they indicated the potential problems that people desiring to change British attitudes faced:

One of our University runners told me that from the day when he was asked to come to Stockholm no single individual has said one word to him, by way of advice, on the subject of training. He added that he would probably have been extremely annoyed if anyone had presumed to do so.<sup>76</sup>

This quote from an unnamed athlete demonstrates not only the lack of work the team of professional coaches had been able to carry out, but also the problem they faced when they did get the opportunity to work with athletes. Athletes wishing to obtain coaching had many

other problems in receiving it. Writing in *The Sporting Life*, columnist 'Veteran' compared attitudes in Britain and America. He believed that coaching had generally improved British performance, 'but what they lacked was the organisation and scientific training methods adopted by America and other nations.'<sup>77</sup> He continued:

To take men whose only training consists of snatching a little pistol practice and a few hard spins in the evening, after having been engaged all day in an often enough badly ventilated office or workshop, and expect them to compete with any chance of success against other who have been kept and trained on the most up-to-date principles for weeks, is unreasonable.<sup>78</sup>

This quote suggests that, in the opinion of some authors, the ability of American athletes to be able to train all day was an indication that they were professional. This also demonstrates the problems for those seeking to amend British training practices, as, in general, the opportunities for athletes to train were limited. One *Daily Mail* editorial noted how the British athlete 'practices in his spare time,'<sup>79</sup> and approached 'his sport in a more light-hearted fashion,' with the belief that 'his entire thoughts are not given to perfecting himself.'

*The Times* wrote that the British were amateurs and 'they ran by the light of nature, and they did it for the run of the thing; nor was it their fault, or any sign of physical decadence in England, that they won no more than they did.'<sup>80</sup> British athletic culture had many restrictions on it, and this presented a major problem to anyone who desired to amend the philosophy.

## **The rise in the desire to pull out of the Olympic Games**

In the aftermath of the Stockholm Olympics, calls for Britain to drop out of the Olympics were voiced. These murmurs began during the Games, with a desire for Britain to drop out the Olympics either immediately or after the 1916 Olympics. The arguments presented here demonstrate the level of apathy towards the Olympic Games in Britain. Historian Neil Wigglesworth believes that the Olympic Games were, 'fuelling feelings that sport had gone too far in pursuit of excellence and that it all reflected a horrible decadence in English society.'<sup>81</sup> The only recourse was that Britain must change her practices, primarily with more training for her athletes, a notion that went against what many in control of British athletics desired.

The desire to pull out of the Olympics came from two major factors. The first came from dismay about how other nations were approaching the Games, explained previously here and categorised as a ‘professional’ approach, based upon specialised training and coaching. The second was that if the only way Britain could improve her performance was by adopting such practices, she was better off not competing. This was the argument of the *Morning Post*. It ‘demanded that either the nation uphold its amateur ideals or, alternatively, retire from the Olympic Games.’<sup>82</sup> Conversely, E W Cox wrote in Birmingham’s *Sporting Mail*, that ‘Britain must invest in what appears to be a biggish enterprise’ or if not ‘we should retire from the affair altogether, and admit that the men and money cannot be found for the occasion.’<sup>83</sup> Such statements indicate that Britain had to make one of two choices, to either invest or drop out of the Olympics.

Cox’s argument relates to the primary reason why many believed that Britain should drop out of the Games; that the Olympic performance had done damage to the nations ‘prestige.’ Sport had become a way to ‘measure of Britain’s industrial and political authority on the world stage and an instrument with which to maintain its superiority.’<sup>84</sup> This was a concept that had taken a serious blow during the early years of the twentieth century, and did so once again in Sweden. For some the only way to prevent further damage was not to change British philosophies, but stop competing in the Olympic Games altogether.

As will be explored when examining the period after 1912, the BOC were determined to see Britain continue competing at the Olympic Games. Along with the craving to continue to compete, came an amendment in sporting Britishness. Many commentators believed that the only way Britain could compete upon the Olympic stage was to ensure better preparations for her athletes, and this was shared among members of the Council, and ways to improve British performance were sought. Alongside the debate regarding Britain dropping out of the Olympic Games, there was another proposal being spoke of. This was for Britain joining forces with the Dominions of Empire (South Africa, Australia and Canada) to create a British Empire team for the 1916 Olympics. In the opinion of some commentators, this was to be the way by which British performance could be improved and gathered momentum after a letter from Arthur Conan Doyle to *The Times*:

We have four years in which to set our house in order before the Berlin Olympic Games. Might I suggest that the most pressing change of all is that we should send in a British Empire team instead of merely a

British team? The Americans very wisely and properly send Red Indians, negroes, and even a Hawaiian amongst their representatives. We, on the contrary, acquiesce in our white fellow subjects under separate headings. I am sure that if they were approached with tact they would willingly surrender the occasional local honours they may gain in order to form one united team in which Africans, Australians, and Canadians would do their share with men from the Mother Country under one flag and the same insignia ... Such a movement would, I think, be of the highest political importance, for there could not be a finer object lesson of the unity of the Empire than such a team all striving for victory under the same flag.<sup>85</sup>

Conan Doyle believed that combining the men of Empire should 'be of the highest political importance, for there could not be a fine object lesson of the unity of the Empire than such a team all striving for the victory of the same flag.'<sup>86</sup> This presented an opportunity for the 'imagined' sense of imperial nationalism to be realised upon the sporting stage, seen culturally via the celebrating of 'Empire Day' across the Empire on 24 May, firstly in 1905.

*The Daily Mail* supported the claim that the Olympics were 'a test of national virility and energy,'<sup>87</sup> and the scheme, could 'prove to foreign people that the British Empire is far from being in a state of decay but very much alive.' This notion continued to be discussed for many months. Ian Jobling concluded that the desire was, 'promulgated at a time when the role of significance of success in sport was used as a weapon in the political, economic, and cultural rivalry for supremacy between Great Britain and the United States.'<sup>88</sup> The hope was that a combined Empire team would increase the British medal count and put her on a similar level to the United States.

## Conclusions on the 1912 Olympics

The poor British performance in the Stockholm Olympics came during a bad year for Britain's international reputation. The Olympics added to the woes from the sinking of the Titanic along with the defeat and death of Captain Scott. Historian John Lowerson linked the three events, believing that 'all three resulted partly from over-optimism, arrogance and a singular level of amateurishness in which assumptions of national, racial and class superiority were shown to rest on the thinly masked incompetence and inefficiency.'<sup>89</sup> From examining the Olympics alone, this quote appears correct. Britain's Olympic

participation suffered from poor organisation, which could be described as ‘amateurish,’ and the efforts to improve this were partly held back by a level of arrogance and belief in British superiority. This, along with the conservative practices of the British, contributed to her athletes being unprepared for the Olympic Games of 1912.

Despite hosting the Olympics, many people in Britain were still apathetic towards the Games, preferring sporting events run and hosted in the Isles. The Olympics was a venture that, despite the reforms made by the British, was still controlled by others. The lack of influence and control that the British had was detrimental to the nation’s Olympic enthusiasm.

Blame for the people involved with Britain’s Olympic effort was widespread post-Olympics. Despite the changes in British sporting identity in the intervening period between Olympics, the strength of the sporting identity, which held the amateur ideals, closely prevented any significant change to it. Important alterations had been made to British sporting identity, but the coaches employed to aid Britain’s Olympians came too late to make a significant impact.

### **British performance in field events at the 1912 Olympics**

Those who predicted that despite the formation of the AFEA, British field event athletes would struggle at the Stockholm Olympics were proved correct. Britain took nine men to compete in these events (plus eight men for the tug-of-war team), and none finished on the podium.<sup>90</sup> The performances received harsh criticism; W Beach-Thomas claimed that Britain’s athletes ‘could not jump either broad or high; we could not throw the javelin.’<sup>91</sup> In the javelin, literally Britain could not throw the spear, because she had no representative,<sup>92</sup> nor did she have any in the pole vault, or shot put. There were high hopes for Irishman Denis Carey in the hammer, but he finished a ‘disappointing’ sixth place, owing to the use of ‘an absurd guard board’ at the front of the throwing circle that did not help his style.<sup>93</sup>

On paper, Britain appeared to have good prospects of a medal in the hammer with her entrants, Denis Carey and Scotsman Tom Nicolson. The latter was thought to have a realistic chance of a medal after his victories in both the Scottish and English AAA Championships after throws of 48.23 metres and 49.43 metres, respectively. If he could have repeated his latter throw in Stockholm he would have taken a silver medal, but, due to his business commitments on his farm, he was unable to make the Games.<sup>94</sup>

Nicolson's distances were not the longest thrown by a British hammer thrower in 1912, as Irishman John Flanagan threw 50.50 in the annual Ireland versus Scotland match.<sup>95</sup> The case of Flanagan competing for Ireland in this match and Britain in the Olympics is a curious one, as he competed for the United States at the London Olympics. After competing in the match against Scotland he consequently refuted claims that he would compete for Britain in a letter to the New York based 'Gaelic American.'<sup>96</sup>

Benjamin Howard Baker, in the high jump, represented another British medal prospect. He won the 1912 AAA Championships with a jump of 1.83 metres,<sup>97</sup> but was unable to repeat this in Stockholm, only reaching 1.75 metres to finish in a disappointing tenth position. Hopes of a medal proved a long way off the mark, as his Championship winning distance would have only seen him record eighth position in Stockholm.

As Table 4.2 illustrates, British performances in field events at the Stockholm Olympics were consistently a long way from reaching the podium. These performances were those anticipated by the AFEA, who were realistic about the prospect of producing medallists for Stockholm. At the 1912 Olympics, it was still Irishmen that provided Britain's best field event performances (although potentially if Scotsman Nicolson had competed he might have provided Britain's best field event performance).

At the conclusion of the Olympics, when criticism of British sporting organisations was rife, the work of the AFEA came under fire in a *Times* article entitled 'British Athletics and the Olympic Games: the need for organization, hidden and undeveloped talent.'<sup>98</sup> This editorial, believed that not enough had been done to promote field events in Britain. It claimed the nation had a 'mass of material,' and men 'who are never given a chance to prove themselves, in undeveloped champion weight-putters and throwers, jumpers, and long distance runners.'<sup>99</sup> A *Daily Mail* editorial echoed those articles that appeared in the aftermath of the London Olympics, and called for field events to be given more help in order to aid the British desire to be supreme (Table 4.2):

Before the Olympic Games are held in Berlin in 1916 it is essential that British athletes, if they intend to restore the prestige of Great Britain, should apply themselves assiduously to these field events. It is true that most of them do not figure in the programmes of athletic meetings held in Great Britain, but with the Olympic championship in view and the importance of obtaining every point clearly demonstrated by our defeat at Stockholm, there should be every incentive for specialisation in them.<sup>100</sup>

Table 4.2 British field events performances in the Stockholm 1912 Olympics

Event	British entrant	Position	Distance (m)	Winning distance (m)
Standing long jump	Sidney Abrahams	19/19	6.71	7.61
Standing high jump	Timothy Caroll	16/18	12.56	14.76
Shot put	Patrick Quinn	8/22	12.53	15.34
Discus	Walter Henderson	32/41	33.61	45.21
Hammer	Denis Carey	6/14	43.78	54.74
Javelin	No entry	N/A	N/A	60.64
Two-handed shot put	No entry	N/A	N/A	27.7
Two-handed discus	No entry	N/A	N/A	82.86
Two-handed javelin	No entry	N/A	N/A	109.42
High jump	Timothy Caroll	9/37	1.8	1.93
	Benjamin Howard Baker	11/37	1.75	–
	Thomas O'Donahue	23/37	1.7	–
Long jump	Henry Ashington	10/30	6.78	7.6
	Sidney Abrahams	12/30	6.74	–
	Philip Kingsford	15/30	6.65	–
Triple jump	Timothy Caroll	19/20	12.56	14.76
Pole vault	No entry	N/A	N/A	3.95

Note: N/A: not applicable.

This article underlined the problem facing the field events athletes; that their events were largely ignored by athletic meetings. The AFEA had given field events athletes more opportunity to compete, but more work was required in order to change English sporting attitudes and identity.

AFEA Secretary F A M Webster believed that it was field events that were to blame for Britain's poor Olympic athletic meeting. He wrote in *The Daily Mail*, 'Our chances of success at the next Olympic Games at Berlin in 1916 will be greatly enhanced by paying more attention to this branch of athletics.'<sup>101</sup> Blaming field events for the poor performance was a bold statement on the part of Webster, but one that could have drawn more attention to the problems these sports faced.

In the same article, Webster wrote of the improvement of interest that the AFEA had created. He wrote of two meetings in the coming



week that encouraged field events, including 24 entries for a shot put competition at Crystal Palace. In Webster's mind, this proved that:

athletes are willing enough to avail themselves of opportunities when such are forthcoming. They are keen enough, but the opportunities of competing are few. Much, in future, will depend on how the public support these two meetings at which unusual field events have been specially included.<sup>102</sup>

Despite this, the feeling in both *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* was that there were not enough competitions for field event athletes and when the events did take place they were not exciting enough to interest the British male. The latter publication remarked 'it cannot make the same vivid appeal to the emotions as is made by a desperate finish on the track,<sup>103</sup> believing that despite how exciting the throws looked, they 'do not send 20,000 people in hysterics, as did the finish in some of the running events.'<sup>104</sup> The former publication noted that Britain had no men in the shot putting, javelin and discus, believing this occurred because 'a young man in England would find it rather dull and lonely to spend much of his spare time in putting weights and throwing javelins – there is not enough competition to make these occupations sociable.'<sup>105</sup>

This comment indicates once again, that field events were considered 'dull' and 'lonely' an image that was not likely to promote them amongst the athletic communities of England. Another *Times* article spoke more positively, writing that 'the mass of material which we possess, in men who are never given a chance to prove themselves, in undeveloped champion weight-putters and throwers, jumpers, and long distance runners,<sup>106</sup> indicating a belief that not enough had been done to improve field events. Britain's IOC member, Courcy Laffan also added to the field events apathy, writing that, 'the average British spectator does not care two straws about them.'<sup>107</sup> All of these arguments resemble those noted in 1908; demonstrating that, despite the work of the AFEA, the culture of British athletics towards field events had changed little in three years.

### **British perceptions regarding Germany in 1912 Olympic coverage**

The growth of German military prowess influenced British politics in the intervening period between the London and Stockholm Olympics; resulting in comment, concern and quarrel about what to do, or not

to do, about Germany.<sup>108</sup> In 1909 for example, the British government made an extra £900,000 available to build eight new battleships in order to stay ahead of the ever-growing German fleet.<sup>109</sup> A consequence of the political interest was that more articles appeared in the nation's press, articles that were based on fact, theory and mere conjecture. In some instances, these articles created panic; for example, one article that appeared in a Bath newspaper stated that 50,000 rifles were being stored just a quarter of a mile from Charing Cross, ready for an invasion.<sup>110</sup>

July 1912 witnessed many of the events of the Stockholm Olympics taking place, and this was a significant month for the rivalry between Britain and Germany. One House of Commons debate exclusively debated the German navy, and Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, made an informal agreement with Germany that linked Britain and Germany's naval building referred to as 'a tit-for-tat strategy.'<sup>111</sup>

An editorial from *South Wales Daily News* spoke of 'Germany's striking power,' continuing that, 'it is time the nation awakened to the fact that our naval supremacy is being challenged by a rival more dangerous and formidable than this country has ever known.'<sup>112</sup> Britain worried about Germany and what its industry was producing. Evidence of this was displayed in the pages of the *Western Mail* during late July 1912 in a cartoon depicting a British and German workshop, and the apparent different aspects of industry the two nations had been concentrating upon (Figure 4.1).

The sporting press did not have the same interest in Germany, but there was still occasional interesting comment, such as the regular column that appeared in *The Sporting Life* during the summer of 1910.<sup>113</sup> These articles focused on sport in Germany and featured reports on sporting events, and, where possible, comparisons in performance between the two nations. Sport was an important dimension of British society, Colin Veitch believes that because of this, it was used as a means by which to distinguish between Britain and Germany in this period:

Sport played an important part in this theorizing, for it allowed an athletic distinction to be drawn between two nations who shared the same racial and linguistic heritage, and who had both been placed at the summit of the civilised world by the 19th century evolutionary anthropologists. Sports and games were, therefore, convenient agents of cultural diffusion which could be manipulated to enhance the Englishman's national character and simultaneously account for the German nation's lapse in military barbarism.<sup>114</sup>



A CONTRAST.

Whilst some people have been engaged in tinkering during the past six years, The Germans have been busy building ships of war!

Figure 4.1 'A contrast', *Western Mail*, 25 July 1912, p 5.

Source: 'A contrast', *Western Mail*, 25 July 1912, p 5.

The British press, as has been demonstrated, were quick to draw comparisons between the two nations during the 1908 Olympics, often this went to belittle Germany and demonstrate British superiority. Germany had no interest in rugby and cricket, and with football being new to the nation (in 1909 English amateurs defeated their German counterparts 9–0 in Oxford, although in 1911 they improved to gain a 2–2 draw in Berlin), the Olympic Games represented Britain's chance to exhibit her sporting superiority over Germany.

Martin Polley comments that from the 1908 Olympics onwards, 'media coverage of the Olympics from this time, and the political patronage that surrounded them, certainly fed into a discourse in which nations were deemed to be representing themselves through their sportsmen and women.'<sup>115</sup> An example of this came from *The Athletic News* review of the 1911 AAA Championships, which had a sub-section entitled 'The coming of the Germans.'<sup>116</sup> The section began with the statement 'by the Germans we are being eclipsed in the athletic sense' and continued:

Their men are keen, well-trained, clever performers, and athletics in the German Empire are only in their infancy. Men of German blood have done great things in the United States; at home they are going to prove great rivals to the American even. They have learned the secrets of the Field Events, of half-mile running; they will have us properly beaten in walking and sprinting one of these days.<sup>117</sup>

This article is reflective of portions of the press that believed Germany had become physically superior to Britain. The indication here is that Britain is lesser than Germany in field events, something not surprising considering British apathy towards them. The half-mile event at the Championships had been won by Hanns Braun (a London Olympic medallist<sup>118</sup>), a man who had previously won the same championship in 1909, and would win for the third time in 1912. His victory represented a major blow to the British belief in its superiority in middle distance running.

This article also wrote of the double success of German Robert Paseman, who won the pole vault and the high jump championships. Britain was unable to find an entrant for the former event, but the latter was one of the few field events in which Britain had long-standing interest. To a journalist of *The Athletic News* Paseman's victory was 'too awful to contemplate.'<sup>119</sup> Such a loss, along with others that day, severely damaged the British belief in her sporting superiority.

Coverage of German Olympic fortunes in the British press at Stockholm was not as comprehensive as it had been in London. This is to be expected, as the coverage across the board was not as substantial as it had been for the London Olympics. There was still comment about the actions of German athletes at the Games, beginning with a half column article in *The Sporting Life* that wrote about the German Olympic team, which had been selected after trials in Leipzig.<sup>120</sup> This article is only small, making brief comment and only mentioning Braun and Pasemann by name, but significant as only the Colonial teams and world's premier Olympic nation, the United States received the same attention from the publication.

German performance at Stockholm was notably improved from London. She won five gold medals<sup>121</sup> and provided 99 more male athletes at Stockholm (180 from 81), and took 25 medals in total. This upturn is the opposite of the British performance, giving Britain much to contemplate before the next Games that were due to be held in Berlin.

The performances of German athletes received little mention in the British press. There was a reference to the nation after the victory of the German coxed fours, leaving the British crew in second place. This

loss was dismissed by the British, claiming that, 'the eights were what mattered.'<sup>122</sup> In the eights, the Leander crew, representing Britain came up against their counterparts from Germany in the semi-final, a contest that the British crew won. *The Times* described the Germans as 'an ugly but very powerful crew,'<sup>123</sup> a comment that suggested there was no desire within the British press to compliment German performances. There was also disappointment for the German team, particularly in athletics. Hanns Braun, did win silver in the 400 metres, but only finished sixth in his favoured 800 metres. Hans Liesche's silver in the high jump proved the only other athletic medal for Germany.

Former international sportsman C B Fry, who published his own unspoken views of the 1908 Games through an editorial of a magazine bearing his name, did the same in 1912. In one editorial, he wrote of German cyclists, and how German authorities had persuaded the Swedish authorities to include cycling, after the hosts saw the sport as 'unolympic.' Fry, ever the patriot, used the opportunity to demonstrate the differences between British and German cycling, and ultimately British superiority:

It appears that the Germans do not yet appreciate what genuine unpaced cycle racing is or should be. In the principal road race in Germany the competitors are followed by 'supporters' with spare gear and machines, food, and every other possible means of assistance. Nor does the German idea of sportsmanship in cycle-racing quite conform to ours. The German rules are enforced with the greatest difficulty; they differ considerably from ours.

In any case it appears that the rules of the Olympic Cycling will be probably inspired by German authorities. I understand that unless the interests of English cycling are looked after, such methods as we are accustomed to in England will not prevail.<sup>124</sup>

As argued by Veitch earlier in this chapter, there was a desire to represent the German people as unsporting and barbarians.<sup>125</sup> Here Fry writes of German sportsmanship and rules not being up to British standards. The reference to 'supporters' is an indication that German cyclists prefer a professional approach, not seen in British cycling, or by the ideology of Fry, who was himself a gentleman amateur sportsman.

During the 1912 Olympics, the British press was not full of observations relating to Germany. The articles utilized here demonstrate a British interest in German fortunes, and attempts to mock Germany wherever possible, but compared to the wealth of articles that featured

the United States or the Empire, they were in small number. Only when the future was looked towards did the press make more regular comment about Germany. The next Olympics, scheduled to take place in 1916 were to be hosted by Germany, with her performance on the rise and looking likely to be further boosted by a home Games, and with Britain apparently in decline, the concern was that in 1916 Britain would be overtaken in the medal count by her primary military rival. This is emphasised in *The Daily Mail*, in an editorial that linked national prestige and the Olympics, and reasons why Britain must improve for the next Olympics, with direct reference to Germany:

However some people may disparage athletics it should not be forgotten that there is a tendency on the Continent to judge the fitness and capacity of nations by the figure which their competitors put in Olympic Games and by the position which they take. As the next contest will held in Berlin the Empire would do well to demonstrate its virility and efficiency by sweeping the field.<sup>126</sup>

*The Sporting Mail's* principal athletic writer W W Alexander, also wrote on using a similar tone, believing the fact that the next Olympics were being held in Berlin was enough motivation for Britain to improve, 'let the clubs now set to work and put matters right ere the sixth Olympiad comes round. This is to be held in Berlin in 1916, and the fact that it takes place in Germany ought to be sufficient to put us on our mettle.'<sup>127</sup> Britain's desire to improve her Olympic performance in view of defeating Germany would become evident in future months.

# 5

## The Perspective of the 1912 Olympics in the Nations of Britain

### Ireland and the 1912 Olympics

The 1908 Olympics had seen victories for both Irishmen competing for the Great Britain and Ireland team, and those competing for other countries, primarily the United States. These successes allowed the Irish nationalist press to emit an Irish sporting identity of superiority and make further calls for widespread Irish independence. Four years later, the situation was very different, with a diminished number of Irish athletes making the Olympic team, consequently there was less success and fewer opportunities to make statements of Irish nationalism.

Irish interest in athletics had been shrinking prior to the London Olympics, and the effect of this was even more evident in Stockholm than it had been in London. This occurred because of the preference for Irish sportsman was now for the 'Gaelic' sports of hurling and Gaelic football, which were both organised by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). Derek Birley describes that in this period:

the GAA had been making real headway in their promulgation of native Irish sports. The number of clubs and club members continued to grow, and equally significant, so did the number of spectators. In 1912, 18,000 saw the All-Ireland Gaelic Football Final, ... a record that was to be broken two weeks later when 20,000 watched the Hurling final.<sup>1</sup>

Along with the growing interest in Gaelic sports, the smaller British team limited the opportunity for Irish athletes to compete. The embarrassment of America by Irish-Americans at the London Olympics saw many of these men excluded from the Stockholm team, and those

that did compete did so under tighter constraints to ensure a repeat was avoided.<sup>2</sup> Kevin McCarthy refers to the 1908 Olympics as a ‘high point,’<sup>3</sup> from an Irish perspective and, since 1908, Ireland has only won 28 Olympic medals.

As had occurred prior to the London Games, before the Stockholm Olympics there were demands from the Irish Associations for a separate Irish team. In April 1911, the British Olympic Council (BOC) received a letter from the unionist controlled Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA),<sup>4</sup> for not just an individual Irish team, but also for teams that represented England and Scotland.<sup>5</sup> The BOC’s response was to reiterate the International Olympic Committee (IOC)’s constitution; that only a team of the United Kingdom would be recognised. Matthew Llewellyn believes this response was ‘hardly surprising,’ as the BOC was a ‘conservative, pro-establishment world view, its overwhelmingly Anglocentric composition and its staunch opposition to previous Irish appeals.’<sup>6</sup> Ireland’s cyclists did enjoy some autonomy at the Olympics, as they were permitted their own team for the road cycling competition, although they were known as ‘Great Britain and Ireland,’ but they did wear the shamrock on their cycling kit.

The issue of an Irish team in the Olympics was parallel to the desire for an independent Ireland. In 1911, the dominant Liberal Party supported Irish home rule, which alienated their support among Northern Unionists. For nationalists even Home Rule was not enough and their desire was for independence. George O’Brien considers that during this period ‘the controversy of the Home Rule Bill was raging and the seeds of armed resistance to the English ... were being shown in the north and the in the South of Ireland.’<sup>7</sup>

The opportunity for Irish athletes to compete in Stockholm was hindered by a squabble between the IAAA and the GAA. This began after the GAA refused to allow its athletes to compete in IAAA meetings, and, if they did, they were threatened with exclusion from all future GAA events. In response, the IAAA banned its members from competing in GAA meetings, an action that split Irish athletics in two. The effect of this dispute was that it limited the number of eligible Irish athletes that could compete in the Olympics as the IAAA was the only association to have links with the BOA (the GAA had previously refused this). The IAAA’s preference for meetings in the Dublin area, rather than across Ireland hampered many athletes capable of gaining selection for the Olympic team from doing so because of travel issues.<sup>8</sup>

The number of Irish athletes in the British team was hindered by the retirement and emigration of many Irish athletes that had performed



with success in 1908. Kiely and O'Connor retired, and Denis Horgan declined his position in the team, despite victory in the Hammer at the summer's Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) Championships (perhaps due to the fact that he was now 42 years old). Timothy Ahearne, gold medallist in the hop, step and jump in 1908, had emigrated along with his brother Dan from County Limerick to the United States shortly after the London Games. Dan potentially should have competed for his adopted homeland in Stockholm, after winning the (American) Amateur Athletic Union Championships in both 1910 and 1911, but was not selected for the team. Bobby Kerr, the Irish-born Canadian (whose family had moved to Canada when he was five years old), chose not to compete for his adopted homeland in 1912 because of business commitments.<sup>9</sup>

Other athletes, such as John Flanagan did not compete for Britain because of their opposition to all things British. After competing for Ireland in the annual match versus Scotland, there had been suggestions in the press that he would compete for Britain in Stockholm. In a letter to the *Gaelic American*, he vehemently suggested otherwise, 'I saw where it was reported that I was to compete for England at the Olympic Games. Never!'<sup>10</sup> He stated he was willing to compete for his adopted home, the United States as he had in 1908. Although not all Irish athletes were as objectionable to Britain, Tim Carroll from Cork competed in the high jump and finished ninth. His allegiance appeared to be towards Britain, demonstrated by his membership of the Royal Irish Constabulary and the London based Polytechnic Harriers Athletic Club.

Llewellyn believes the allowance of Ireland (Scotland and England) to have their own teams for the cycling competition demonstrated 'the BOA's selectivity typifies how Britain's Olympic officials chose to reward politically reliable Celtic sporting bodies and how it asserted its influence within the IOC by arbitrarily insisting upon various national combinations.'<sup>11</sup> In the team competition, the Irishmen finished in eleventh position, and in the individual, the first Irish cyclist home was Michael Walker, in sixty-seventh position.<sup>12</sup> This performance did not impress a *Gaelic American* editorial, which criticised the British organisation:

Why in selecting Irish representatives did they approach the Association which controls hardly a twentieth part of Irish trackmen, and why did they entirely ignore the body which governs the other nineteen twentieths? If the representation on the other side of the channel was thorough as that on this side to be said for the incompetence theory.<sup>13</sup>

Such a comment further demonstrated the impact of Ireland's political divisions upon sport, as the GAA governed the majority of Irish cyclists. A source of pride to nationalist publication *Sinn Fein* were the machines on which the Irish athletes competed upon, which they believed to be superior:

One remarkable record comes to Ireland. In the Long distance cycle race, the only team all of whose members was the Irish team. Two thirds of its members were mounted on Lucania bicycles—bicycles completely manufactured in Dublin. The rides of the Lucania raced on them for twelve hours in competition with the world ... In the case of every other team most of the riders had to change bicycles during the progress of the race. The Irish Lucania bicycle had thus made a world's record. And still in the city in which it is manufactured twenty foreign and inferior machines are purchased to every one of the Irish machines which beat the world at Stockholm. What slaves and what fools to our own interests we continued to be.<sup>14</sup>

Another *Sinn Fein* editorial bemoaned that, 'Irishmen continued to be victorious but only as representatives of foreign states'<sup>15</sup> and that Finland was officially represented at the Games, while Ireland was not.<sup>16</sup> These arguments were comparable to those from the 1908 Olympics and were typical of the type of comments that were made within the Irish nationalist press. These were typically anti-British and constantly attempted to emphasise Irish independence.

Comment regarding the Olympics within the Irish press was less substantial than it had been in London, mirroring the general trend in the British press. McCarthy notes that, 'the decline in the fortunes of Irish athletics, even in the four years since London, is mirrored in the decreased coverage of the Olympics by the Irish media.'<sup>17</sup> The expense of sending journalists and the diminished chance of success were other factors to this.

The victory of Johnny Hayes, an American of Irish parentage in the marathon race at the London Games proved a source of great pride to the Irish press. Four years later an Irish born athlete, competing for South Africa was victorious. Ken McArthur was born in Dervock, County Antrim in 1881 and moved to South Africa at the age of 20. Despite his birthplace, and his Irish upbringing, this victory received little attention within the Irish nationalist press. Many references to it were short,

and one extensive article projected a very different perspective than the articles from four years prior:

The pastime, which we trust will never be included in the curriculum of National Games, is the long distance Marathon race. The reports to hand from Stockholm, describing the Olympic Marathon there, furnish very painful reading, recording as they do a terrible story of human sufferings. The first man home, an ex-Antrim man representing South Africa, reached the tape in a dazed condition, immediately collapsed, and with several others had to be removed to hospital. Others became delirious en-route, the protracted strain causing their minds to become temporarily unhinged. But worst of all, a fatality is reported, a Portuguese competitor having succumbed in hospital from heart failure. Surely it is time this inhuman form of competition ceased to masquerade under the name of sport. We should make certain, at all events, that it is never permitted to rank as a Gaelic sport.<sup>18</sup>

The victory of Hayes in the London marathon race was the source for the press to write of the apparent superiority of Irish physicality, portraying the event as a great Irish victory. McArthur's victory did not promote the same feelings within the press, with it being described in a negative manner. This race was fought out in extremely hot conditions, resulting in the only death in Olympic marathon history (Portugal's Francisco Lazaro), and 33 of the 68 competitors failed to finish the race. The man in question was not 'Irish' but considering a man of Irish origins as Irish had been commonplace in 1908, this was evident in other articles in the press, although not with the same gusto as after Hayes victory in London.

As had been expressed at the London Games, there was a real pride in the performance of Irishmen competing for other nations, both those that had emigrated from Ireland or were foreign born to Irish parentage. This was still apparent in the coverage of the Stockholm Games, perhaps partly due to the lack of success of Irishmen competing in the British and Irish team.

A successful Irish-born athlete competing for the United States was Matt McGrath, who was victorious in the hammer competition. Born in Nenagh, he visited Ireland after the Olympics, and spoke to *Sport* of the belief that if an Irish team competed in future Olympic Games it would be successful:

McGrath told me that if all the Irishmen from all over the world combined and formed a team of their own they would at least be second in the Olympic Games. He spoke enthusiastically of McArthur, of Co Antrim, who won the Marathon race for South Africa, and of other Irishmen who were representing other countries.<sup>19</sup>

The failure of Britain at the Games provided the nationalist press with some satisfaction. This was expressed in a *Gaelic Athlete* editorial, which stated, 'Great Britain's representatives have bitten the dust time and again'<sup>20</sup> (in Stockholm). It continued by belittling the British suggestion of an 'Empire Team,' and the belief that it would bring success in four years' time:

But, alas! The published list of the combined points gained by England, Canada, Australia, and South Africa shows that the Britishers would still occupy third place on the list. We also notice that the points scored by the Irish-American Club of New York alone is greater than those obtained by all of England's athletes.<sup>21</sup>

Such an editorial also demonstrated the pride in Irishmen that competed for the United States, comparable with coverage from 1908. In addition, commonplace in the coverage from both Games was the desire for team from Ireland, as stated by the *Gaelic Athlete*:

That the Irish are a vigorous and healthy race goes without saying, but that we can claim a foremost place in the world's athletic achievements is very improbable under present conditions. That we could, if properly organised, assert and prove our physical superiority is un-doubted.<sup>22</sup>

This statement comparable to those made in 1908, emphasising Irish physical superiority, but called for proper organisation if Ireland was to compete, undoubtedly a reference towards the organisational crisis that Britain was facing. References regarding the Olympic Games within the nationalist press 1912 were symbolic of its desire for an Ireland separate from Britain. Little interest was made through reports or results of the performances at the Games, but rather the focus of coverage came through editorials that stated its desire for a separate Irish team. A prime example of this came in the *Gaelic Athlete*. This article compared the fortunes of Finland to Ireland:

The dignified and patriotic stand of Finland has set a precedent which we in Ireland could follow with beneficial results. Four years

of a progressive and an aggressive policy on the part of the GAA should enable Ireland to be creditably represented at Berlin in 1916. A series of championships, tournaments, with this object in view, would develop the material which we undoubtedly possess, and a claim put forward by the premier athletic organisation of Ireland, with the case of Finland as a precedent, would in all probability be upheld by the Olympic Committee, provided however that Ireland's claim be presented, not as a petition, but as a national demand. In that event, England must either recognise our claim or appear in her true colours as a tyrant and a hypocrite.<sup>23</sup>

Such a view demonstrated the desire for an independent Irish team at future Olympics. One that politically was still a long way off, but demonstrated the feelings that existed within Ireland.

### **Scotland and the 1912 Olympics**

Apart from the performance of Wyndham Hallswelle, the belief of the Scottish press was that her athletes had made little influence upon the 1908 Olympics. One Scottish editorial described the performance of its countrymen as 'insignificant.'<sup>24</sup> Four years later, her athletes repeated the number of medals she won in London with nine, but with British medals fewer her contribution was more significant, with 21.9% of the countries medals, in comparison to just 6.1% in London.

From the articles within the Scottish press during 1908 Olympics, it appeared that a strong British identity was present. The Scottish press took pride in the fact that Scottish athletes had helped towards the British cause, and in all of the British victories. This attitude was a reflection of Scotland's position within the Union. In the intervening period between the 1908 and 1912 Olympics things did change for Scotland, particularly through the rise of sectarian feelings that came about as a consequence of Irish unrest in 1910, although this did not change her British identity. David McCrone summarises the political situation in Scotland at this time:

There was no room for a Scottish nationalist politics in this period, largely because the two main repertoires of Scottish politics squeezed out. On the one hand, the political right was able to mobilise a powerful ideological nexus, welding Unionism and Protestantism together through a strong sense of British national (and imperial) identity. This version of Scottishness was not at odds with Conservative rhetoric about being British, fostered as it was by a powerful strand of militarism which ran through Scottish society.<sup>25</sup>

At the London Olympics, a feature of the articles that focused upon Scottish athletes and in particular Hallswelle, was the branding them not as Scottish or British, but English. In 1912, there was the indication that this was not just limited to Scotland's athletes. During the 1912 Olympics Scottish Member of Parliament Mr Watt, from Glasgow commented after a statement in Parliament by Secretary of the Admiralty, Dr Macnamara, who spoke of the launching of warships, 'with a specific patriotic mention of England.' According to the *Western Mail* this had 'got Mr Watt's blood up,' as he believed that Britain would have been a more appropriate term, concluding that, 'the grievance, of course, is an old one of the part of Scotland.'<sup>26</sup> Despite such annoyances, items that were Scottish and British continued to be deemed to be English and England's throughout the period of this work, a further indication of England's dominance within Britain.

As stated, Scotland's representatives enjoyed a successful Olympics in comparison to the representatives from the other British nations. Prior to the Games, the nation's hopes of success were dampened by the decision of her premier mile runner, D F Nicol (who had won the national championships with a 'brilliant victory'<sup>27</sup>), not to go to Stockholm because of his business commitments.<sup>28</sup> *The Sporting Life* believed that he was Scotland's only chance of winning a medal in Stockholm. Such a prediction proved to be far off the mark as Scottish athletes returned with seven gold medals, one silver and one bronze.<sup>29</sup> The seven gold medals came via three in rowing,<sup>30</sup> water polo<sup>31</sup> and four by 100-metre relay team on the track along the winner of the small bore shooting competition.<sup>32</sup> Swimmer, Isabella Moore, a member of the 4 × 100-metre relay team became the first ever Scottish female Olympic gold medallist.

Scotland, along with England and Ireland, had been permitted their own teams in the road cycling competition, although all competed under the British name. Despite the fact that Scotland's representatives enjoyed no success in the individual time trial, they did finish a creditable fourth in the team competition.<sup>33</sup> Britain had also planned to enter three teams in the football competition, but only one team, comprised solely of English players competed in Stockholm.<sup>34</sup>

The closeness of Scotland to the Union was reflected in its press Olympic coverage, as their attention focused upon the efforts of Britain, rather than singling out the performance of Scottish athletes. This can be partly explained by the fact that majority of articles that appeared in the Scottish press came from eugenic Press Association reports, written for a general British audience, rather than to highlight local interests. These reports were also heavy in results and lacking in words,

although even those articles that appeared to be written by individual publications did not include any unique Scottish interest.

An interesting source for analysis is *The Edinburgh Evening News*, which included its own editorials on the Games alongside more eugenic reports. Prior to the Games its preview stated that it felt that Britain might have to fight for second place in the final medals table,<sup>35</sup> a prophecy that proved to be true. Throughout its coverage, there was no reference towards Scottish athletes, although there was reference to Glover and Scott of Sheffield, being English<sup>36</sup> in one article.

Despite the relative success of Scottish athletes, the general disappointing performance of the British contingent was felt, such as indicated in the *Glasgow News*. Its Olympic coverage focused exclusively on Britain, notably different to its regular sporting coverage, which solely focused on giving Scottish results. This was different to the majority of Scottish publications that also included football and cricket scores from England.

Its reflection upon the 200 metres was entitled 'Britain and Sport'<sup>37</sup> with the article beginning, 'The British competitors at the Olympic Games gave a little – a very little – more encouragement to their supporters yesterday.'<sup>38</sup> It continued stating that ten of the 12 British athletes had made it through the first round of the competition, but only two 'survived the second,' and concluded, 'in the present state of things even a small success is something to be thankful for.' Its disappointment was also evident when commenting on Jackson's victory in the 1,500 metres, 'This little gleam of sunshine, however, can hardly be said to compensate in great measure for our general disappointment.'<sup>39</sup>

The performances, prowess and success of American athletes featured heavily across the coverage of the Scottish press. One example of the feeling felt towards American athletes appeared on 8 July after the 100 metres, when all of the medals went to American athletes:

The names of these men are hardly known to anyone in this country, but Americans have a method of sprinting surprises of that kind on the world. There seems to be an inexhaustible supply of athletes across the Atlantic, specialisation being particularly effective. A notable success was scored for Britain in the 200 mile cycling race, but otherwise, considering that Britain is really the home of sport, the results were very disappointing for the old country.<sup>40</sup>

Such an editorial indicated the further demise of Britain as a sporting nation and demonstrated the number of quality athletes that America

was producing. This perspective was identical to that which appeared within the English press.

Another editorial continued this sentiment, stating, ‘America was first, the others also ran.’<sup>41</sup> The disqualification of the British tug-of-war team featured in an *Edinburgh Evening News* editorial, enabling this publication the opportunity to discharge a British sense of superiority over the Americans. It stated, ‘If that athletic crime had been committed by Yankees, a wave of protest would have surged over the land calculated to keep moving until the next Olympic Games.’<sup>42</sup> It continued by lamenting the British disqualification, commenting:

Englishmen have not been crowning themselves with glory, so far (in fact, they could hardly have fared worse, so mediocre have been their performance), but if we can’t win international honours by fair means let us not attempt to do so by foul.<sup>43</sup>

This article is comparable to some written by the Welsh press in 1908 that referred to the demise of British sporting values. Such a perspective represented one of the few expressions found in the Scottish press not also within the English press.

Comment about America was also a strong theme in *The Scotsman*. On 17 July, it described the victory in the 200 metres as ‘a testimonial to American athletes and American training methods.’<sup>44</sup> Throughout its Olympic coverage, this publication attacked American methods, while largely defending the British approach. It did on occasion state a wish for the British team to be more inclusive of all men of any social class. This was another expression absent from English newspapers, and is evidence of a unique Scottish identity towards the British approach.

The same editorial reflected that the United States had, ‘taken the Olympic Games very seriously,’<sup>45</sup> describing its preparations as ‘business-like.’ It continued by describing how the American system of choosing athletes on talent alone is what Britain needed to adopt:

if Great Britain had followed the American plan of sweeping her possessions from sea to sea in search of winners, irrespective of colleges, universities, races, and colours, and accepted everybody worth having, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, you would have made just as good a showing as the United States.<sup>46</sup>

This article represented a major attack on those organising British sport. It bemoaned the British preference for selected university-educated



men, which ultimately meant the upper-classes, limiting the British selection pool. It desired for a more open selection policy with opportunity for men of potential from the lower and working classes who were perceived to have been placed at a disadvantage for selection by comparison to those from the universities.

The realisation that Britain needed to have a more inclusive selection policy regarding the inclusion of men of all social classes presented a major step towards amending its identity. Throughout the period of research, it was apparent that the journalists from the North and Midlands of England in particular felt that their men, men often from the working classes were denied selection in preference to those from the gentlemen of the South. This article believed that this needed to be changed if Britain was to be successful at the Olympic Games. Aside from this perspective, this editorial should be considered to be *pro-British* with a stated desire for Britain to continue her Olympic interest. Within the Scottish press, there were few articles that desired for Britain to drop out of the Olympics, as was the case within the English press.

One of the more insightful articles in *The Scotsman* believed that the only way British performance for the next Olympics could be improved was by 'send(ing) her best trainer to America for a year to learn his business.'<sup>47</sup> This was one of the first references in the Scottish press of the need to change Britain's athletic identity, an aspect that became a feature of the Scottish press' coverage of the Games. *The Edinburgh Evening News* echoed the perspective of *The Scotsman*, and those across Britain who believed the methods of training needed to amended:

it is the methods of organization, and, above all, the lack of money and not so much of men that is responsible for the decline of the British star. Money, and plenty of it, opens the way for the ordinary man to put in a long spell of training.<sup>48</sup>

The article continued by comparing the British and American athletic identities:

The average British athlete has little fancy for specialisation. He likes to participate in a number of games, and does not seem possessed of the inclination to devote all his energies to one. And variety in athletics is not the soul of life but the death of international success. If races are to be won, against specialist nations, Britishers will have to make running a serious business and not a relaxation. Only by doing so will they retrieve at Berlin four years hence the honours they have this week lost at Stockholm.<sup>49</sup>

As in *The Scotsman*, within *The Edinburgh Evening News* there was a desire to amend fundamental British identity to ensure success. Here it was the lack of specialisation from British athletes that is approached, with the desire for the needs of athletes to be taken serious to ensure success. A *Glasgow News* editorial believed that Britain must change its athletic identity and adopt modern methods of athletic training, or it should pull out of the Games:

Either we have to make up our minds to adopt the most modern methods of athletic training, in which case we have no reason to fear any rivals, or we ought to withdraw entirely from competitions in which our representatives are almost hopelessly handicapped. It believed the nation must improve by adopting what are practically the methods of professionalism.<sup>50</sup>

The editorial concluded by stating that ‘British sporting tradition’<sup>51</sup> was against those desiring any modification. As shown in the cycle between the 1908 and 1912 Olympics, British sporting identity was slow to change, and this editorial was aware that this significant change might not come quickly.

The English media believed that the poor performance of the British team was an indication of the nation’s physical decadence, but within the Scottish press, there was no evidence of such a perspective. A *Scotsman* editorial of 19 July defended British physicality. It began by asking ‘but what, after all was to be expected?’<sup>52</sup> (of the performance). Its belief was that the difference between the past and present day was not because of the deterioration in British physique, as to the special preparation which was given to American athletes and been adopted by rival nations. After the Games, the *Glasgow News* found a positive in the sub-standard British performance. It stated:

This result, at first sight, appears not a little disappointing, and one cannot help regretting that ‘the home of sport’ should fare so badly in competitions where our traditions and our training have taught us to expect better things. But as Dickens says, ‘there is a reason for everything.’<sup>53</sup>

Such an article further demonstrated the thought of Britain, rather than England as the home of sport. The above article and its presentation of British identity is an excellent example of British identity

demonstrated throughout the Scottish press' coverage of the Games. The lack of reference towards the success of Scottish athletes represents further evidence of a British rather than Scottish identity, a factor that could owe to the preference for Press Association reports in some publications. The large number of Olympic-related editorials, written specifically in each newspaper, also failed to mention the performances of Scottish athletes.

The performances of American athletes are prominent within the coverage, both from the perspective of reporting upon the events in Stockholm and making comparisons with British attitudes. The general standpoint of the Scottish press was different when compared to the English press. Within the Scottish press, there was no evidence of a desire to pull out of the Olympics, or apparent British physical decay, but the preference was for focusing what changes the country needed to make to ensure an improvement in its performance. This discussion was not prevalent in other parts of the British press. Throughout these articles, there is an awareness and respect for the traditions of British sport, and the strength of these identities, but a realisation that this identity needed to be amended for Britain to become successful at future Olympics.

## **Wales and the 1912 Olympics**

Between 1908 and 1912, coal, the lifeblood of the Welsh nation continued to prosper, directly employing a quarter of a million men.<sup>54</sup> Despite the success, the intervening period was of 'social conflict,' with sabotage and strikes<sup>55</sup> occurring within the industry. The most prominent example of this turmoil came in 1910, with riots in Tonypandy/Rhondda. The period's unrest was an indication that 'the new Welsh identity was flawed,' in the view of Martin Johnes. He observes that this identity was, 'too reliant on symbolism and unrepresentative of the material interests and concerns of the people of Wales.' He went on to state that the dominant Liberal Party was concentrating on issues such:

as temperance, disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales, land reform and the establishment of national educational establishments. To an industrial working class, living in cramped and unhealthy conditions and working in dangerous conditions for wage levels constantly under threat, such issues were hardly a priority. It was thus no surprise that trade unionism was on the increase and the Labour Party was establishing a political base.<sup>56</sup>

A lack of identification was a contributory factor in the creation of a new nationalist movement, based on attaining home rule for Wales. Denbighshire East Member of Parliament, E T John led the movement, along with Beriah Gwynfe Evans. The movement fell apart in 1914, after the first reading of a Home Rule Bill in Parliament failed. Kenneth Morgan argues that the movement gained little widespread support because the Welsh nationalist movement was more concerned about gaining equality with England, rather than home rule.<sup>57</sup> Primarily, Wales felt ignored, and desired recognition. Jenkins argues that the 'national question' had at least been posed but it 'was certainly not the only issue in late Victorian and Edwardian Wales. Far more important were some very traditional problems: tithes and the land question, debates on religion and disestablishment, and on education.'<sup>58</sup>

The sport of rugby which previously had been an instrumental device in this period for defining Welsh identity continued to do so. Gareth Williams argued that, '(since 1900) As a vehicle for promoting national unity and social consensus it was increasingly taken up by editorialists, politicians, cartoonists and entertainers.'<sup>59</sup> An article from the *South Wales Daily News* in 1909 stated:

Wales is a very small country. The success which has attended her efforts in athletics is therefore a sort of miracle. It has been attained by the exercise of those qualities in which critics of the Welsh declare us to be deficient-hard work, self-control, discipline. The game has been intellectualised by our players. Whatever may happen in the future, Wales is signalised.<sup>60</sup>

The period between the 1908 and 1912 Olympics did see challenges to the Welsh sporting identity, coming through the introduction of professional rugby, via the northern union. This form of the game thrived in Northern England, an area not dissimilar to South Wales in social status. Despite the attempts to create clubs in South Wales the game failed to take prominence in Wales. This happened because the Game of rugby union enabled Wales 'to proclaim her equality with the rest of the United Kingdom.'<sup>61</sup> Williams argues, 'if rugby in Wales went professional it would be consigned to being a proletarian game enjoying no more than a regional status.'<sup>62</sup>

Rugby gave Wales an identity of its own, but other sportsmen displayed a more British identity, such as Cardiff's featherweight boxer, James Driscoll, a British and Commonwealth champion. Born in Cardiff

to Welsh-Irish Catholic patronage, he earned the title of 'The Prince of Wales.' Birley describes him as, 'a natural stylist with the courage of a lion and fiercely British.'<sup>63</sup>

At the 1908 Olympics, the Welsh press had presented a balanced view, looking at both the fortunes of Welsh and British athletes. This continued at the 1912 Games. In keeping with the rest of the British press, there were fewer column inches dedicated to the Olympics than there had been in 1908, and at times, the coverage found was inconsistent and quite minimal.

The coverage in the *Western Mail* began on the day of the opening ceremony. It included an article previewing British hopes for the Games, which failed to mention the prospects of Welshmen. The article believed that Britain would struggle to 'win' the Games, and third place might be all her athletes could hope to achieve.<sup>64</sup> The trend of writing from a British rather than Welsh perspective continued on the 9 July, when it reported, 'The only time the Union Jack was hoisted was in connection with the tug-of-war competition. The disqualification of the Americans in the relay race was, without doubt, fortunate for Great Britain, as her men were well beaten.'<sup>65</sup> Articles writing from this perspective were present throughout the Olympics in this publication.

Paulo Radmilovic had been the focus of the Welsh interest at the 1908 London Olympics, winning gold medals in both swimming and water polo. His Stockholm Olympics began on 6 July with the 100 metres freestyle, when he qualified in second place from his heat. Later he went onto finish in last place in his quarter final.

Britain's first water polo match came in the quarter final against Sweden. The *Western Mail* noted that Radmilovic had scored three goals in its daily Olympic article sub-heading. The body of the article described the 6-3 victory and Radmilovic's birth in Cardiff.<sup>66</sup> By comparison, this match was only given the briefest of mentions in *The Times*, and this was to describe it as a 'rowdy match.'<sup>67</sup>

Despite the prowess of Radmilovic in the final against Austria (in which he scored four goals), the match surprisingly received little attention from the Welsh press. The *Western Mail's* brief description referred to the team as being English; 'Water Polo Final-England 8 goals; Austria 0. The Englishmen were too much for the Austrians in speed and tactics, and Radmilovic's back-hander shots were invincible. Of the eight goals Radmilovic scored four.'<sup>68</sup>

The *South Wales Daily News* was even less interested in the achievement of its countryman, only referring to the victory in the final line

of its half page Olympic article. It blandly wrote, 'on Saturday England defeated Austria by 8 goals to nil in the final water polo match.'<sup>69</sup> Both of these descriptions are not in keeping with the context of other articles they write, as in general their coverage of the Games generally wrote of all Welsh success. The descriptions presented here appear to have a tone more comparable to bland Press Association reports, than the angle of their regular coverage.

Welsh aquatic success at Stockholm was not just confined to Radmilovic. For the first time women competed in swimming competitions, and Wales' own Irene Steer competed. A *South Wales Daily News* article wrote in its subheading, 'Cardiff lady in 100 metres swim.' Interestingly in its results section below, Steer is listed from being from her home city, in comparison to the other British representative, stated as being from 'Britain':

Third heat-1, Wilhelmina Wylie Australia, 1m 26 4–5sec; 2, Mary Langford Britain.

Fourth heat-1, Fanny Durack, Australia, 1m 19 4–5sec; 2 Irene Steer, Cardiff.<sup>70</sup>

This result yet again presented another example of the Welsh press emphasising the achievements of their athletes, making the descriptions of the water polo final even more bizarre. As was exhibited during the 1908 Olympics, the Welsh press took a British perspective towards the Olympics, but also made reference to the performance of Welsh athletes when they competed. The preference for referring to athletes as Welsh, rather than British was seen in articles, but never previously had a Welsh athlete been stated as 'Welsh' in the results section as was the case here.

The perspective of the Welsh press in the aftermath of the shambolic British performance at Stockholm was to call for a change in British methods. There was no reference to apparent concerns of physical decline, and by comparison to the English press, the Welsh press presented a more balanced view on proceedings. On 13 July, the *Western Mail* included the views of Paul Pilgrim, a member of the American coaching staff and a former Olympic gold medallist in middle distance events. He deemed there was:

no real decadence in the standard of British sport. It was the method which was at fault. British competitors were reluctant to take advice

from those who knew the game. The American system of employing professional coaches was by far the best.<sup>71</sup>

This quote was just one of several articles in the Welsh press that believed improving British performance would come via coaching. An editorial from the same date believed, 'it is the methods of organisation, and, above all, lack of money, not so much of men, that is responsible for the decline of the British star.'<sup>72</sup> This was a sentiment echoed in *South Wales Daily News*; it wrote that the Games revealed a 'weakness in their methods of training and organisation.'<sup>73</sup> It did defend the nations' stock, stating, 'those who cry out about our physical decadence need not be heeded,' and 'the national stamina is almost as good as ever ... but it is useless to expect that our athletes can triumph over American and Continental rivals without following their example of more earnest and serious preparation for big events.'<sup>74</sup> The editorial concluded, that if there was support for 'such a scheme, promptly and liberally. Then the result of the next Olympic Games may be anticipated with perfect confidence that Britain will come out on top.'<sup>75</sup> Such a comment indicates a British belief in her superiority as a sporting nation.

The previous quote was one that defended the nations' physicality and one that Wales had done much to protect during the first decade of the twentieth century through sport. Questioning of a unique Welsh physicality appeared during the Games via an editorial upon a national athletic festival in Prague. It compared it to the Welsh national festival, the 'Eisteddfod':

In Wales, though the national festival is devoted mainly to the encouragement of art and letters, athletic pastimes are of extensive vogue though lacking in variety, while the proportion of participants to the whole population is small. Much more might be done in Wales towards the encouragement of physical culture in the interests of the manhood of the nation.<sup>76</sup>

This opinion indicated a belief in a separate Welsh physical identity to that of Britain. Despite the general of the strength of this identity, there were still wider concerns about the general physicality of the nation. Although there is no evidence of concern about the physicality of Welshmen within the Olympic or other coverage found. As had been the case at the 1908 Olympics, Welsh reflections of Stockholm were always in support of Britain, but there was still room to state

the presence and identity of Welshmen and women competing in the Games. When this was stated, it was not in conflict with Britain, but to add further to a sense of a unique Welsh identity.

Welsh support for Britain was further demonstrated by the 280,000 Welshmen that served the British forces during The Great War, a proportionally higher number than those that come from England or Scotland.<sup>77</sup> The outbreak of War in Wales was celebrated by cheering crowds in Welsh streets, as the nation joined the rest of Britain in standing as a people united against a foreign aggressor.<sup>78</sup> Wales was proud of its position within Britain.



# 6

## Preparing for the 1916 Olympic Games

### Reactions to the 'National Disaster'

This chapter examines the British approach to the 1916 Olympics, beginning with the fallout from the Stockholm Olympics. Although the outbreak of war ensured that the 1916 Games were not to take place, the period between the Stockholm Games and August 1914 was a defining one for British attitudes towards the Olympic Games with notable changes to her identity occurring.

The Duke of Westminster branded Britain's performance at Stockholm a 'national disaster'<sup>1</sup> in a letter to *The Times*. He wondered, 'Is England to do nothing to recover her ancient supremacy as the mother of sport?,' continuing, 'we are in honour bound to go forward and to do our level best to restore the lost prestige of a great sporting nation. But victory means efficient organization and training, and both cost money.'<sup>2</sup> Reactions to this letter, and others like it, illustrated the difference in opinion towards the Olympics post-Stockholm.

A letter by 'Nowell Smith,' presented a fine example of British indifference to the Olympics. His hope was that once the 'Olympic dust' had died down, 'gentle showers of common sense' would prevail. He deliberated:

When language such as that which speaks of our losing 30 athletes events to other nations as 'a national disaster' is felt to be appropriate it is evident that we are no longer talking of 'sport' at all, but of matters of life and death like naval, military, and commercial rivalry.<sup>3</sup>

As ever during this period, the importance of the Olympic Games as an event of national pride was mixed.

Despite critics' desires that the nation drop out of the Games, those in charge of the nation's entry wanted her to continue and ensure that the 'disaster' of Stockholm was not repeated. The fact that the next Olympics were to be held in Berlin, capital of the rival German Empire only 'reinforced desire for an improved British performance,'<sup>4</sup> in the opinion of Matthew Llewellyn. This opinion was very similar to that stated in *The Boys' Realm* in late 1912. It declared that going forward the British wanted to get 'a bit of our own back that wrested honours from us in the Stadiums of Shepherd's Bush and Stockholm.'<sup>5</sup>

Debate about Britain not continuing forwards to the next Olympics was rife, and one stated in the British Olympic Council (BOC)'s official report upon the Stockholm Olympics. It wrote 'The Council would suggest that this country should cease to be represented at future Olympic Games unless that representation is worthy not merely of the athletes themselves, but of the nation in whose name they will compete.'<sup>6</sup> The indication from the BOC was this would be a more organised preparation for Britain's athletes, with improved coaching and facilities at the forefront of this.

To ensure that such schemes would be possible, money had to be raised, largely coming from public donations. Arthur Conan Doyle stressed the need to raise money, arguing that 'liberal funds' were required, enough to be 'a good war chest,' although he failed to indicate the amount he envisaged. A *Daily Mail* editorial proposed that £5,000 was needed each year between 1913 and 1915, and £10,000 for 1916.<sup>7</sup> It stated the money was required to ensure 'representation is worthy not merely of the athletes themselves, but of the nation in whose name they will compete.'<sup>8</sup> It desired the employment of trainers, comparable to the five professionals that Sweden had employed for the 1912 Olympics. It concluded that the much vaunted 'Empire Team' was an 'excellent idea.'<sup>9</sup>

The sporting press examined at length what they believed needed to be done to ensure an improved British performance in Berlin. *The Sporting Life* included an interview with the Reverend R S de Courcy Laffan, who called for a 'radical change' in the British outlook:

If the United Kingdom is to make a show at Berlin in 1916 commensurate with its past traditions in sport, there must be a radical change in our methods. Our organisation is deficient in several important particulars, and our methods of training for track and field events are not suitable to present-day requirements.<sup>10</sup>

Laffan continued by stating a desire for a director of athletics, with men across the country at his disposal. His wish was for the application of

'scientific methods'<sup>11</sup> who carefully 'studied the human frame, its muscles, and its anatomy.' He concluded by stating 'a considerable amount of money'<sup>12</sup> was required, money he said would ensure that the 'necessary' work could be done.

The hope of sporting publication *The Sportsman* was for a 'revival' in athletics. It alleged that currently Britain's sportsmen were not on 'cinder paths,' but 'playing cricket or golf or lawn tennis.'<sup>13</sup> Its belief was that more must be done to keep athletes competing in athletics, as many were being lost to other sports.

It pleaded that athletics, 'must be made popular at the schools, and they must be made sufficiently interesting, to keep the boy keen on his running or his jumping after he has left school and after he has left his 'varsity', when he goes to one.'<sup>14</sup> The problem of keeping top varsity athletes competing in athletics after university was one raised after the 1908 Olympics, and with seemingly nothing done to change this, it was raised again four years later. All of these opinions demonstrated the problems facing Britain's athletic administrators and the work that was required to turn around her fortunes.

### 1913: a year of action

The Berlin Olympic Stadium was opened by Kaiser Wilhelm in the summer of 1913 as part of the celebrations to mark his 25 years as head of the German Reich.<sup>15</sup> In Britain, the BOC received the first replies to its letter that had asked how the various sporting associations believed their performance for the next Olympics could be improved. The council's April meeting declared that preparation schemes had been received from Amateur Athletic Association (AAA), Scottish Amateur Athletic Association (SAAA), Clay Bird Shooting Association, Amateur Fencing Association, National Wrestling Association and the Amateur Gymnastic Association.<sup>16</sup>

Other bodies responded later, such as the Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA), who devised a preparation programme noted by Kevin McCarthy as being 'particularly thorough.'<sup>17</sup> Their desire was for 'an "Irish school" championships, the establishment of a training headquarters, appointment of trainers, and the creation of a register of approved athletes who were to receive special training and advice.'<sup>18</sup> McCarthy considered that this plan was expensive; almost three and a half times as costly as the equivalent scheme proposed by the SAAA.<sup>19</sup> In cycling, the attitude was different, and the British national associations combined their forces to set out plans for a series of trials that would determine the British team.<sup>20</sup>

The AAA submitted its preparation plans in August 1913 (of which a full copy can be found in Appendix at the end of the book). Its proposal centred around holding regular championships, scratch races in preference to handicap races and promoting field events. At junior level, it made plans for new championships at school, county and international levels.<sup>21</sup>

All of these schemes demonstrated a monumental change in British attitudes towards planning for the next Olympics. If fulfilled, these schemes would make for complete change in the nation's sporting identity, as explained by Llewellyn:

Britain's governing bodies supported the move towards athletic specialisation, requesting the approval of professional trainers, the establishment of regional training facilities, the increased availability of modern athletic equipment and the introduction of both local and county events to promote the discovery and encouragement of new talent.<sup>22</sup>

The first practical step towards encouraging new talent was via the creation of 'Olympic proficiency badges' by the BOC. Not only was the hope these badges would help find the Olympic champions of the future, but encourage athletic participation during a period where there were concerns about the decline of the sport and the nation's physical health. A sub-committee from the BOC was formed to manage the awards and upon their release the Council stated, 'It is recognised that outdoor sports of all kinds tend to breed strong healthy "manly" charactered men, and, in an attempting to mould youngsters into such men.'<sup>23</sup>

In March 1913, the BOC continued its preparation plans by forming the 'Special Committee for the Olympic Games of Berlin,' a group that it hoped would be the basis for Britain's Olympic preparations for the next three years. The committee was separate from the BOC, but reported to it, with the purgative to 'investigate and find out what steps would be needed to enable Great Britain to make a worthy showing at Berlin, and what would be the expense of carrying out those steps.'<sup>24</sup>

The 'Special Committee' was made up of 11 men, chaired by former cricketer, and Polytechnic Chairman, J E K Studd. Other prominent members were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Theodore Andrea Cook, men who had previously involved with Britain's Olympic organisation.<sup>25</sup> The delegation of responsibilities by the BOC to another committee can be seen as an acceptance of public apathy towards them, with this committee being formed in the hope of gaining more public interest in the work of the association.<sup>26</sup> A major problem for the BOC in securing

public support was that it was formed of men primarily of the upper classes, seen not to be in touch with the majority of the population. This new committee was little different, and was formed of men from the 'influential upper middle-class'<sup>27</sup> and the 'exclusively elite.' Despite these men's social class and their previous involvement with amateur sport,<sup>28</sup> upon the formation of the committee there were concerns these men would 'infringe the purity of amateur sport,' and create the much vaunted team of professionals. This was a further indication of the concerns about Britain's athletes becoming apparent professionals.

An early finding of the new committee was that the much discussed British Empire team for the 1916 Games was determined not to be feasible. It stated that, 'indifference to the scheme in the dominions, combined with the impossibility of converting the IOC [International Olympic Committee] to the prospect of a new national combination,'<sup>29</sup> made it impossible. Support in Australia, where the British Empire team for the 1916 Olympics had first been proposed had 'dwindled'<sup>30</sup> by the summer of 1913.

In July 1913, the new committee reported what the first wave of fundraising had been spent on.<sup>31</sup> The largest percentage of the money was the £1,200 given to the AAA, of which £700 went to assist clubs in providing prizes and to ensure scratch races across metric distances, while the remaining £500 was to establish 'Olympic novice trials.' These trials to be for athletes over the age of 17 years, with no formal athletic wins at club level, with a total of 150 events planned across England, with 50 each in Scotland and Ireland over the following two years.<sup>32</sup> Despite these plans, a slowdown in fundraising prevented such events from taking place. Other money was given to the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) to organise trials in its five districts, while the National Cycling Union (NCU) received money to send young cyclists to compete at the 1914 World Championship.

The sum that the committee desired to raise was a greatly debated figure, and amounts between £50,000 and £100,000 were all mentioned. Arthur Conan-Doyle felt that £10,000 was an achievable target. Sadly for him, he was unable to influence the final amount indicated to the press as he was on holiday when the decision was made.<sup>33</sup> The committee decided to appeal for £100,000, of which it wanted £20,000 to be raised by January 1914. Along with this staggering amount of money came a three-point plan, the 'Objects of the fund:'

1. To enable Britain to play her proper part in the Olympic Games at Berlin in 1916 and to regain the prestige lost at Stockholm in 1912.

2. To encourage amateur sports and athletics
3. To raise the standard of physical efficiency of the youth of the nation<sup>34</sup>

Further articles promoting the need for such a fund wrote of the failure of Stockholm, and how this advertised the British people as 'degenerate' to the world. *The Times* stated, 'other nations (which have no Henley, Lord's, Wimbledon, Hurlingham, and so forth) think much more highly of the Games than we; and the British failure at Stockholm was interpreted by them more seriously than we at home believe that it deserved.'<sup>35</sup> Such a comment indicates Olympic apathy was based on preference for sporting events held in Britain.

Critics felt the amount was too much and stated to be 'unachievable,' and money that would be used to turn Britain's Olympians into 'professionals.' One opponent to the amount was former amateur athlete Frederic Harrison; he wrote, 'the whole affair stinks of gate-money and of professional pot-hunting.' He further elaborated that:

But what does £100,000 to be spent in three years mean? It means that an army of professional coaches are to be hired to go about and pick out men having a special turn of speed or some knack in leaping a bar .... The average youth who can run or leap well cannot afford to give up his life for three years to be treated as a racehorse, and also to meet the inevitable expenses of trainers, practice grounds, hygienic regime, trials, and all the machinery of a crack racing stable. The loss of time, money, and opportunity for any practical career must be made good in mal or in malt. It seems as if each British candidate at Berlin will cost £1,000 in some form. He has to be nursed, maintained, kept in racing condition by public money—in fact, to be hired. How does this differ from being a 'professional' performer in a kind of international circus? And how is an amateur to be defined unless it be one who plays a game for 'love,' himself and his fellow-players finding any incidental expenses?<sup>36</sup>

Such a comment demonstrated the fear of professionalism that was present within British amateur sport, yet further proving the strength of the amateur ethos. Others argued that the amount was not such a 'large sum' as compared to the money being spent by Germany, which was apparently 'spending very much more.'<sup>37</sup> Despite Conan-Doyle's reservations about the amount of money, which he felt was 'absurd,'<sup>38</sup> he defended the need to raise such a sum in a personal

letter to *The Times* on 11 September 1913. In this, he posed the question to those against the fund, 'Are you prepared to stand down from the Berlin Games altogether?' He asked critics to bear three points in mind; 'that we were defeated at the last Games, that the Games are in Berlin, and that all the chief nations have already announced their intention of seriously competing.' He believed this gave Britain no option, and asked if the nation was continue 'then what is that they want to do?'<sup>39</sup>

By autumn, the pace of the appeal was slow, and Studd admitted that there was little hope of raising £100,000.<sup>40</sup> He believed that the lack of monetary support came from a widespread public Olympic apathy, but in a letter to *The Times*, he attempted to calm the critics. The fund, he argued, would not be used 'to secure a team of gladiators,' but to ensure a strong team that would keep within the traditional ethos of British sport.<sup>41</sup> Improvement would be secured via aiding the amateur sporting associations to become better organised and more 'scientific,' not by making them full-time professional athletes. He pleaded to the public by stating the national importance of the Olympics:

Whatever opinion one may personally hold of the value or evil of modern Olympic Games, other nations-our competitors in the world's business-have adopted them, and are displaying them to the world as a test of national efficiency. It is too late to find fault with Olympic Games and conditions. They have been imposed on us, and we must act accordingly. Were it possible to start *de novo* much that opponents to the appeal have urged would have great weight. But now we are not in the fortunate position of being able to choose our path. Had the British cause been adequately represented at Stockholm the nation might conceivably have withdrawn from future contests, but now such a course is not open to us.<sup>42</sup>

Such a statement indicated the growing thought of the Olympics as a 'national struggle,' a phrase more commonly used regarding the Games outside of Britain at this time. For example, in Germany, Carl Diem, the Secretary General of the Berlin Games, wrote, 'The Games of 1916 will be and are supposed to be a medium to convince the people of our worldwide importance.'<sup>43</sup> The German Imperial Chancellor also regarded success in 'the Olympic Games as an important national task, and that it was absolutely necessary that Germany should uphold her honour.'<sup>44</sup> These were two statements illustrated the growing importance Germany was placing upon success at the Olympic Games.

Apathy to Britain's new fundraising effort came not only in the press, but also from the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA), an organisation that would have benefitted from the fund. The ARA had always upheld the strictest of amateur policies having been previously openly 'hostile' towards the Stockholm appeal, and, in the wake of the new appeal, 'felt obliged to repeat its earlier warning about the moral dangers of raising funds by the public subscription.'<sup>45</sup> This response went to demonstrate further the difference in opinion towards the application of the amateur ethos and the protectionism of the upper classes.

A response to this attitude came via *The Times* 'Special correspondent' from the 1912 Olympics. He wrote how well prepared the British crews at the Games from Leander and New College were. He believed that if the other British sporting teams had been so well trained 'there would have been another tale to tell.'<sup>46</sup> Before continuing by explaining the quality of coaching received by those in elite rowing clubs and the universities:

It seems particularly ungracious for any rowing men to oppose the proposed large schemes of training, for if he was an Oxford or Cambridge oar he is the one man received in the highest degree all those advantages of which it is now desired to extend some part to athletes in other lines. If anything which is now proposed would make 'professionals' of our amateurs, then must every University oar be fifty times professional. It cannot be hoped to give to our swimmers, our bicyclists, our runners and jumpers, and other athletes all over the country, anything like the care and lavish facilities which the Universities and individuals colleges, through the boat clubs, give to all their men.<sup>47</sup>

Such comment illustrates the reasons behind the success of British rowing at Stockholm, and the problems facing those attempting to improve the plight of British sport. Britain's rowing crews, as written about in an article by 'Old Blue,' after the 1912 Olympics,<sup>48</sup> had quality coaching at its disposal, a key factor in Britain's supremacy during the Olympics in this sport. Despite this, those ruling the sport were ignorant to these practices and believed that if similar methods were applied to other sports, athletes would be considered 'professional.'

The 'Special Committee' targeted GBP 20,000 to be raised by January 1914, but this target was not reached, and a little under GBP 11,000 was raised by this time.<sup>49</sup> The Committee held itself personally responsible for this apparent failure, and resigned.<sup>50</sup> Although this was a long



way short of the desired amount by this point, in comparison to the fundraising for the previous Olympics this was a substantial amount of money.

The before stepping down, the Special Committee allocated the money that had been raised with £3,850 going towards 'training purposes.'<sup>51</sup> Conan Doyle wrote to *The Sporting Life*, where he argued that appeal had failed because 'it was crabbed and hindered in every possible way by the majority of sporting journalists-and certainly not least by Mr Otway himself.'<sup>52</sup> Charles Otway, a man never shy to express his opinion responded, 'one does not need to be a Sherlock Holmes to discover the reason for that failure,' believing it had been unsuccessful because it 'failed to unite.' He bemoaned that the 'press and public alike were ignored, and instead of letting the public know in advance what it was going to obtain for its money, an appeal for the tremendously disproportionate sum of £100,000 was launched without vouchsafing any particulars of the schemes, which it was intended to finance.'<sup>53</sup> In his memoir, Conan-Doyle reflected on his time on the committee as 'the most barren thing that I ever touched .... [N]othing came of it, and I cannot trace that I ever received a word of thanks from any human being.'<sup>54</sup> This exchanged explained why he might have felt this way.

Disappointment about the failure of the committee and the slowness of the appeal was not universal. A *Times* editorial argued that Britain's representatives 'should be amateurs,' and the lack of money would ensure this in Berlin. It stated, 'our methods should also be amateur – to use the word in a different sense – is wrong. For that only means that they will be feeble and haphazard.'<sup>55</sup> The slowness in the appeal, and the shortage of available money ensured that Britain's athletes would still be amateur according to the British ideology, but guarantee the team was better organised.

The end of the special committee left the BOC back where it had started. A new committee that came to be known as the 'ways and means committee' under the leadership of the Right Honourable W. Hayes Fisher,<sup>56</sup> and direct BOC control, was formed after the mass resignation of the Special Committee. Upon his appointment, Hayes Fisher made the following statement to Parliament:

It is to me unthinkable that the United Kingdom should withdraw. Why, the idea of withdrawing because we fear defeat must be simply repellent to every sportsman and to every patriot. Perhaps we do not sufficiently realise how the foreign nations honour us and look up to us for our ideals of sport. They frankly admit that they have based

their own ideals upon ours, and what skunks they would think we were if we withdrew now, because we may get beaten.<sup>57</sup>

The 'Special Committee for Berlin' had been a failure. The BOC was once again in direct charge of reviving Britain's Olympic funding. It continued slowly to gather money together until the outbreak of war in August 1914.

### **The appointment of Walter Knox**

Illustrious coach, Sam Mussabini, who most famously took Harold Abrahams to a gold medal in the 1924 Olympics, 'identified a lack of competent coaching'<sup>58</sup> as the principle reason for Britain's declining competitiveness at the Stockholm Olympics. Despite the shortfall in fundraising, one of the moves the BOC had been able to make was the appointment of a full time coach in 1914, along with part-time coaches in Ireland, Scotland, North, Midlands, South and West of England to work alongside the new national coach for 26 weeks of the year.<sup>59</sup> These men were remunerated £5 a week for their efforts, which Charles Otway felt in 1919 gave these men 'a little more than pocket-money,' and did little for the development of athletes as 'they looked after their own men as they did before the appointment, and had little time to do anything else.'<sup>60</sup> It is unclear if this opinion was correct but, their appointment was a major organisational step-forward for British athletics.

Walter Knox, a Canadian from Scottish descent was appointed to the position of full-time coach. Knox was himself a fine athlete, having previously won the 1913 Professional All-Round Athletic World Championship after victory in seven of the ten events, a feat he repeated in 1914. In 1912, *The Sporting Life* noted him to be 'perhaps the best all-round athlete in the world'<sup>61</sup> and his foremost prior coaching experience was as the Canadian coach for Stockholm. Significantly for the development of field events, he was a specialist in these sports, principally in the pole vault and shot put, sports that Britain was particularly weak in.<sup>62</sup>

The selection of Knox was supported by the BOC, who commented, 'that they would have great difficulty in finding another man of his ability wherever they sought.'<sup>63</sup> Upon his appointment, Knox explained why he believed that America had been dominant in athletics; 'whether specialist or not, everything they accomplished was done properly. Whether they ran, or jumped, or put the shot, they were taught in the first instance how to run, jump, or put in the right manner.'<sup>64</sup> His

intention was to improve Britain's athletes by giving 'practical demonstrations of the methods he wants athletes to adopt.'<sup>65</sup> Such a comment indicates a weakness in being coached in the correct terms as a reason for Britain's athletic failures.

The outbreak of The Great War midway through Knox's first year resulted in him being released from his contract after just seven months.<sup>66</sup> Despite this, in the view of Peter Lovesey the work he undertook allowed for significant developments within British athletics:

Britain fell short in these events, he concluded, because there were not enough competitions; most sports meetings were confined to running and walking. So he began touring the country giving demonstrations of jumping and throwing, in an effort to persuade meeting organizers to introduce field events, and athletes to support them. At 36 he was still a better pole Vaulter and shot putter than anyone in England.<sup>67</sup>

Lovesey also stated that Knox felt 'confident that if the matters referred to can be adjusted, very great and permanent improvement will be shown, in not only track Athletics but also Field Athletics.'<sup>68</sup> An example of the work he did was changing British champion high jumper, Howard Baker, from using the 'schoolboyish' scissors style to the cut-off technique. The consequence of this was that he set a new English record of English record of six feet five inches (1.95 m) in 1914.<sup>69</sup>

There are no criticisms to be found in the press of Knox's appointment, but the lack of regional coaches did create disapproval. Voight wrote in *The Athletic News* that there were not enough coaches, and that Knox spent too much of his time in London. He wrote, 'the disposition of the various local coaches is most inadequate,' continuing:

There are 53 counties in England and Wales. I question whether there is even one county, with the exception of Middlesex, that is being properly worked. Take as an instance the case of the Lancashire and Cheshire coach. The operations of this local coach are practically confined to the Manchester AC grounds at Fallowfield. Apparently no instructions have been given to any other districts in Lancashire and Cheshire, and we may take it for granted that no travelling expenses have been offered.<sup>70</sup>

This article indicates the concerns of a London bias, particularly as Knox was to be based in the capital himself. In Birmingham, the

disorganisation was such that it took until August for Frank Wright and W Cross to be appointed and were said to have come ‘too late in the season.’<sup>71</sup> As ever, it appeared the regions (in particular the Midlands) lagged behind London in organisation.

### **The continued work of the Amateur Field Events Association**

As revealed, British performances in field events at the 1912 Olympics had been poor, but a result partly expected by the ‘Amateur Field Events Association’ (AFEA). In 1913, along with other associations, the AFEA submitted plans to the BOC on how it believed it could improve its events performance for Berlin.<sup>72</sup> Its plans were based around improving the number of athletes competing and the competitions available to them.

As ever, finances were a problem for the implantation of this plan. The only initial specialist coach the AFEA was able to hire was A E Flaxman, who joined on a voluntary basis and worked with clubs in Southern England. Individual clubs attempted to promote field events by organising more competitions within their events and independent athletic body, the ‘Athletes Advisory Club,’ sought to find and train extra coaches in order to help promote field events.<sup>73</sup> However, what was really needed was some central organisation.

The AAA sought to aid field events in its 1913 plans to the BOC and included two points relating to providing equipment and the holding of regular field events.<sup>74</sup> Even with this renewed support, the AFEA faced many problems, highlighted in an article from the *Montreal Gazette*. The Canadian publication wrote that the association had ‘poor’ support and had ‘many talkers,’ but few actual ‘real workers.’ It placed the blame upon the sporting public for its lack of progress:

Had the sporting public given the support one naturally expected, the organizations named might have accomplished much by now. As it is, they struggle alone under difficulties, the work and money being forthcoming from a small band of enthusiasts.<sup>75</sup>

This article underlines the struggles of the AFEA, and illustrates the apathy present towards field events. Despite a lack of support, the AFEA continued its work by hosting an ‘Olympic sports meeting’ at Crystal Palace. This included ‘abnormal’ field events of discus and javelin.<sup>76</sup> The organisation of such an event demonstrates that progress was being

made, but their description of two of the events as 'abnormal' indicated the thinking still present towards some field events within Britain.

Charles Otway bemoaned that the only way Britain would find field event athletes was through 'competition.' He argued, 'while opportunities are absent we shall lack champions at the game.'<sup>77</sup> In 1914, the AAA aided field events inclusion in Britain by including all Olympic field events in their championships for the first time. This move would have undoubtedly impacted upon other meetings that would have sought to replicate England's premier athletics championship, and remedy why Knox believed that athletes chose not to take up the events 'because there was so few opportunities to gain distinction as could the running men.'<sup>78</sup>

The AAA also aided field events via financial contributions in 1914. In July, it donated £500 towards them via the 'Ways and Means Committee,' as stated in a letter from Mr P L Fisher. It asked the money to go towards 'the position of Impedimenta and also for expenses of Assistant trainers in travelling, and should any balance be available it should be expended in the promotion of Field Athletics.'<sup>79</sup> The letter also exposed the problems that current athletes faced. It alleged, 'promising novices have had to borrow some from others more fortunately situated.'<sup>80</sup> The short supply of equipment did little to encourage novices, and those unable to buy their own equipment from competing in events. The shortage was described in a *The Athletic News* article from 13 July; 'Northern and Midland counties ... there is not a discus or a javelin in the whole of these counties.'<sup>81</sup> Article author Emil Voight blamed an apparent 'laissez-faire' attitude of the AAA for the problem, which 'does not yet seem to have awakened to the fact that field events count just as many points in the Olympic Games as running events.'<sup>82</sup> He continued by arguing that the 'cultivation of field events' would help Britain 'regain lost laurels' at future Olympic Games.

The issue of finding athletes that desired to compete in field events competition was exposed in a draft letter, found in the AAA archives. It is dated 9 July, not signed but addressed to 'Mr Studd.' Within the letter, it illustrates the concerns of the new national coach; Walter Knox for field events, 'another difficulty is that of providing contests in field events. The chief coach is very emphatic that we have the material if opportunities could only be provided for many competitors in Olympic Field Events.'<sup>83</sup> Knox's personal interest aided this plea, and it was believed that athletes' apathy towards them was owed to 'the scarcity of competitions; athletes refused to devote their attention to this branch of the sport because there was so few opportunities to gain distinction as could the running men.'<sup>84</sup>

The renewed attitude towards field events did not reap any rewards in the 1914. This was evident in England's first involvement in the 'International Match,' which had previously only been contested between Scotland and Ireland. The only English field event victory was recorded by Kingsford in the long jump,<sup>85</sup> and then at the AAA Championships none of the new field events titles went to British athletes.<sup>86</sup> To Charles Otway, this was an indication that the nation would never compete strongly in field events:

We may get an occasional champion like Tom Nicolson, but it is no accident that more than one of our great hammer throwers has been a farmer, and so in a position to practise on his own ground. Candidly, I don't think it reasonable to expect facilities for throwing the discus, javelin, or hammer on an ordinary sports ground, and, moreover, these are not the events that anybody would urge schools to adopt.<sup>87</sup>

Otway also commented that in field events where speed was an asset, British athletes were 'slow compared with the foreigners,' judging that only Flaxman effectively applied his available speed. He also complained about the technique applied by British athletes:

In the long jump there was no method in the run up of most of the men, who did not use the dash needful for a great effort, and it certainly appeared to me that the superior speed of Oler was the main factor in getting him over at the height which Baker had failed to clear, concluding It is the dash that counts.<sup>88</sup>

In the view of Otway, Britain had a long way to go before it became competitive in international field event competitions. The general perspective from 1914 was that it would have been unlikely that any British athletes would have expected to win medals at the Olympics in 1916, but this short period in British Olympic history does mark several monumental steps forwards for field events. The AAA in particular had attempted to aid the development of field events, providing the AFEA with funding and space for all Olympic field events at the AAA Championships. The appointment of Walter Knox along with the inclusion of field events in 'Olympic proficiency badges,' were all major steps by the BOC to help develop them. Despite these efforts, success was not immediate, but such were the British weaknesses in these events that ambitions were generally long term.

## The outbreak of war

After the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Britain and the rest of Europe became involved in war and Britain's Olympic organisers stopped looking towards defeating Germany in sporting contests, but rather upon the battlefield. The commencement of war saw sportsmen joining up in huge numbers as demonstrated in *The Athletics News* article 'Athletes to the front':

Athletes by the score have been called by their country ... Enthusiasm and love of the Right are everywhere manifested. Enthusiasm and fair play are the first principles in the sports of this country, and it is only natural after all that the love of these things in mimic competitions should inspire our athletes to fight in time of war ... There must have been Germans who knew not the ethics of sportsmanship and simply fair play who propounded that scheme-Germans who knew not their England.<sup>89</sup>

Such an article emphasises the apparent sentiment of fair play within Britain, a principle so dear to all that takes place in this period. The decline of Britain's athletes at the Olympics during this period partly occurred due to the poor quality of the nation's coaching and facilities. There are those that believe Britain's fortunes had gone downhill because of foreign nation's failure 'to adhere to strict Corinthianism.'<sup>90</sup> According to *The Sporting Life*, 'other nations, which formerly flirted with games, now go in for them in deadly seriousness.'<sup>91</sup> Some commentators in Britain believed that the nation would lose her own sporting identity if it attempted to improve via applying other nation's methods. Peter Beck summarised by stating, 'public controversy, frequently triggered by Olympic incidents, focused on the appropriate balance between playing the game for its own sake and the political imperative of sporting success as proof of national dynamism.'<sup>92</sup> The British were torn between changing direction and staying for the same for fear of losing her own sporting ideology and identity.

Despite reservations Britain did amend her sporting identity during this period, but it largely kept the same identity, and the radical change towards a 'professional' British team that was feared by some did not occur. The limitation in fundraising potentially stopped any apparent 'professional' practices from occurring.

# 7

## The Attitude of Britain towards the Olympic Games in 1919

Former British Olympians were just some of the many thousands of British service personnel who lost their lives during The Great War. Among the most prominent Olympic-related deaths were those of promising javelin thrower, Frederick Kitching, long jumper, Henry Ashington and 1908 400-metre Champion Wyndham Hallswelle. These losses, along with the countless other deaths of British sports people, had a deep impact upon British sport in the period after the end of hostilities. In rowing for example, leading Leander Club believed that it had lost 150 members.<sup>1</sup> Other sporting clubs suffered a similar fate<sup>2</sup> and sport, like other occupations, felt a deep sense of loss at the end of the war.

Not only did sports people suffer as a result of the war, but also the facilities they used. Many of these had been largely neglected throughout hostilities and consequently the period immediately after the war was one of reconstruction. From an athletic perspective, *The Sporting Life* put pressure on the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) to do more reconstruction, arguing that, 'Athletics is now fully recognised as a national necessity.'<sup>3</sup> It encouraged the Association to stop 'merely controlling' athletics, but begin to 'encourage and promote it.' It also urged the government to do more to ensure facilities were available:

One result of the war is that millions who before 1914 did not take more than a passing interest in outdoor sport are now keen supporters of it, and they have returned to this country with the determination to follow it up. What do they find? That there are no grounds for them to play upon, that railway travelling costs nearly three times what it did when they donned khaki, and there are other disadvantages the direct outcome of the war.<sup>4</sup>



The lack of facilities referred to here was certainly not the 'land fit for heroes' that was spoken about after the war. The indication was that all sports needed a period of 'reconstruction,' both of sports facilities and athletes to ensure they were returned to former glories. Some facilities were lost either temporarily or permanently due to wartime requirements, or because they were taken over by the 'extensive building programme' of the time.<sup>5</sup> In Birmingham for example, it was reported that there was 'not one pitch, but some hundreds are wanted. Many clubs have disbanded because they have nowhere to play.'<sup>6</sup> Facilities were an issue for both recreational and top-class athletes in Birmingham, not aided by Villa Park disposing of its cycling and footpath track because they were both 'decidedly poor,' and the venue became used by association football only.

In Manchester, there was a complete shortage of facilities, and one editorial reported that; 'training tracks are in a very deplorable state in the district, and runners are to be seen in the evenings doing their training on the highways and byways.'<sup>7</sup> The issue of the national shortage of playing fields was addressed at a joint conference of the national bodies of sport. This resulted in suggestions to the Government, based upon 'The Crown' purchasing new fields that could host sports.<sup>8</sup>

The AAA was prompt in launching a reconstruction programme to aid its athletes and clubs in February 1919. Called 'The AAA Scheme,' its intention was to encourage Britain's youth to participate in athletics, with the target of producing quality young athletes within two or three years.<sup>9</sup> Support for the scheme was not unanimous; 'Ubiquitous,' of *The Athletic News* was particularly critical, describing it as 'ambitious.' The feeling was that the association had too much to do, with too few resources and money to carry it out.

Indifference to reform did not hold back the AAA, and, at its 1919 Annual General Meeting (AGM), it proposed another reconstruction scheme that attempted to aid general athletic regeneration. Concerns about this scheme were voiced by figures such as its own Vice-President Fisher who was worried that 'he did not know where they could get the men who could devote sufficient time to carry out such a stupendous task,'<sup>10</sup> let alone the financial backing. Perhaps an indication of its potential for success was demonstrated by the choice of the Scottish AAA not to initially pursue the scheme, preferring to 'wait and see'<sup>11</sup> the results of the scheme in England first.

An important outcome of the AAA's AGM was the decision to hold its Championships in 1919 for the first time in five years.<sup>12</sup> The lack of further action taken at this meeting was criticised in *The Sporting Life*.

It wanted to ensure the 'active promotion of amateur athletics on the right lines,'<sup>13</sup> and felt that its plans did not do enough to aid the general construction of athletic clubs. Many clubs needed extra support because largely their own reconstruction was limited by their income drying up during the war. Many clubs relied on members' subscriptions for financial backing, and the war slowed their income stream down or stopped it completely. Now clubs had to encourage members to join once again to enable reconstruction to be financed, no easy task with substandard or no facilities on offer.

Despite the financial limitations limiting both associations, the National Cycle Union (NCU) and AAA held joint reconstruction project meetings. One of the stated outcomes of their meetings was to look to the future through the 'cultivation of sport and athletics from schoolboys, early youth to manhood; the limitation of prize values; the provision of playing fields by corporations, councils, and rural authorities.'<sup>14</sup> Swimming's governing body, the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA), faced problems of pools in disrepair and their conversion to aid war purposes, such as to hospitals and national kitchens.<sup>15</sup> Its reconstruction scheme was devised in late 1918, focusing primarily upon improving facilities along with defining amateurism and expenses.<sup>16</sup>

Almost as soon as the war was over the International Olympic Committee (IOC)'s attentions turned to holding the Olympic Games in 1920. Many of Britain's sporting commentators were openly hostile to an Olympic Games taking place in 1920, because of a belief that the nation's limited financial resources should be devoted to reconstruction rather than sending a few athletes to Antwerp, where the Games were due to be held. In the summer of 1919, it was stated that the British Olympic Association (BOA) was still in possession of some of the money raised from the 1916 appeal. It was decided that the money should be split between aiding reconstruction and sending athletes to Antwerp.

The opinion of Sporting publication *The Field* was that all available money should be used for reconstruction, rather than for sending a team to an Olympics.<sup>17</sup> Columnist 'Strephon' in *The Athletic News*, made a similar argument, he regarded that reconstruction to be 'ten thousand times better than wasting money and providing holiday for a few officials.'<sup>18</sup> He concluded, 'when we have reconstructed the whole system of British amateur sport it will be quite time enough to think of Olympic Games.'<sup>19</sup> This perspective was echoed at the AGM of the influential London Athletic Club, whose membership gave their dissatisfaction of the revival of the Olympics so soon after the war.<sup>20</sup> The British perspective in summer 1919 was well summed up by the statement,

'When we have reconstructed the whole system of British amateur sport it will be quite time enough to think of Olympic Games.'<sup>21</sup>

In a letter to *The Times*, P J Baker, felt that the British Olympic Council (BOC) would be in its best interests to aid reconstruction if it was insistent upon competing in Antwerp. He suggested the 'Council might assist clubs to build new tracks, or to improve their existing ones – the lack of good tracks accounts for much of our failure.'<sup>22</sup> He also believed the Association should:

provide clubs with new and up-to-date equipment; they might help them to build adequate dressing-room and bath-room accommodation. These are all real and vital needs; deficiencies in these respects are the real handicap to the clubs; they rob them of attractiveness to potential athletes, and so prevent their growth.<sup>23</sup>

Baker's letter indicated a belief that all athletes up to Olympic standards should be given a chance to compete, but those who did not prove themselves in trials should not be sent. He continued with the declaration that once the team arrived in Antwerp it should be 'properly catered for.'<sup>24</sup> These points related to avoiding the failure of Stockholm when the team was housed in poor facilities and athletes with no chance of success were sent. He proposed that the BOC should work closely with the AAA to ensure the 'build up of the clubs on which the athletics of the country must depend.'<sup>25</sup> He concluded, 'the programme of the Olympic Council needs thorough and searching preparation, and the most energetic carrying out. The Olympic Council can count on support of it is bold enough to seek it.'<sup>26</sup>

Prior to the war, people who desired an improved British Olympic performance believed that coaching was the answer to the problems, but after the war this thinking was absent from the press. The indication was that British priorities had changed; 'competitive facilities' were now the priority. Peter Lovesey comments that after the war 'athletes requiring assistance made private arrangements with professional trainers in attendance at the tracks, just as the Victorians had.'<sup>27</sup> The reference to the Victorian era was fairly widespread during 1919, with British athletic practices being more reminiscent of the period prior to 1908 than those of 1914.

The desire for reconstruction presented a new strand to the arguments of those who were apathetic of British Olympic participation in 1919. The general preference was to ensure the long-term future of sport in the country by returning the nation's facilities to their former glories,

rather than spending the small amount of available cash to sending just a few athletes to the Olympic Games. The ambitious nature of these schemes demonstrated how badly needed reconstruction was but also the importance of sport to the nation.

### **The British reaction to the revival of the Olympic Games**

On 5 April 1919, the IOC met and determined that the Olympic Games would take place in the Belgium city of Antwerp during the summer of 1920. The Belgium city had been chosen in preference to several other cities,<sup>28</sup> most seriously Amsterdam, which had stepped aside 'as a gesture to the valiant Belgians.'<sup>29</sup> The possibility of the restoration of the Olympics in 1920 had looked probable since early 1919 and its likelihood had not gone unnoticed in the British press.

The first references of the potential return of the Olympics within the British press appeared in *The Sporting Life* on 20 February 1919, in an article headed 'Who asked for them?'<sup>30</sup> The article's opinion was that Pierre de Coubertin wanted the Games, but Britain, France and the United States did not. The article gave credit to Coubertin for his role in establishing the IOC, but argued 'it must be pointed out that the Countries concerned must decide, and not any individual, or any self-constitutional authority such as the International Olympic Committee.'<sup>31</sup> It hoped the Games would be put back at least one year, although it did state it would be 'several years before we are prepared to put a team into the field for Olympic Games.'<sup>32</sup> The need for Britain to be successful at the Olympics was indicated as the reason for this because currently it was felt that 'the effort necessary to develop Olympic Champions could not be spared'. This line further emphasises the need to be victorious as part of British sporting identity. The article was the first of a wave of press articles that spoke out against the return of the Games, and for British participation in them.

Despite a general British sporting adversity to the Olympics, some organisations supported Britain's involvement, including the Northern Counties Athletic Association (NCAA). It believed it was 'impossible to contemplate that the nation which had led the way in the development of modern sport should hold permanently aloof from other nations in this great field of human energy.'<sup>33</sup> This argument related to the British identity as her role as the founder of modern sports. This was a sentiment did not appeal to Charles Otway, who felt the general argument that non-participation would be to the discredit of the nation had 'worn a little thin.'<sup>34</sup> Otway was concerned that the British team would

be underprepared, and the 'disaster' of Stockholm would be repeated. He demanded that Britain's sporting associations to 'make it clear to the British Olympic Association that nobody is authorised to pledge them to support of Olympic Games in 1920, or at any future date.'<sup>35</sup>

Otway had been a long-term adversary of the BOC, although prior to the outbreak of war he had been a supporter of British Olympic participation. This opinion appeared to have changed post-war and throughout both 1919 and 1920, he was firmly against British Olympic participation. His grievances with the BOC were explained in a October 1919 article, when he stated that he and others believed that that the Council was 'secretive,' 'closed' and 'out of touch' with the general sporting population.<sup>36</sup> Historian Matthew P Llewellyn supports this position, stating 'the working-classes were largely excluded from Olympic participation, much of the nation's insular upper-middle class and aristocratic elites viewed the Olympic Games derisively.'<sup>37</sup> Such a perspective helps to explain why British working-class sporting fanatics were not keen to throw their support and money behind British participation in the Olympic Games. The suggestion from Otway was that the War had done little to alter the general perception of the Council:

Some members of the Council are old men, they say, eminent no doubt, but out of touch, by reasons of their years, with modern conditions and modern methods, while others are too engrossed in other duties, which prevent them from giving the necessary time to considering a scheme which would make us supreme once more in the world of sport and not leave us still a very bad third.<sup>38</sup>

This article indicates the feeling that it was these men that were holding back British Olympic progress. Otway bemoaned that the BOA 'is controlled by people who prefer darkness to light.'<sup>39</sup> He believed if Britain's Olympic organisation was to become effective there 'must be a national policy pronounced on and approved by the public for whom it caters, and to whom it appeals, and not the product of a minority who fear publicity.'<sup>40</sup> In another article, he criticised the BOC for not making its decision public knowledge regarding the issue of the return to the amateur ranks for those athletes who had become professional during the war. He stated it is 'precisely the sort of thing which destroys confidence in the BOC, and would destroy confidence in any other body of the same kind.'<sup>41</sup>

British objections to the 1920 Olympics intensified after the announcement of the venue of the Games in April. The belief was that neither

Britain nor the world was ready for the Games so soon after such a devastating war.<sup>42</sup> A *Sporting Life* editorial argued:

As far as Great Britain is concerned, we do not think that there is the slightest hope of organising the necessary preparations for Games next year. Our great sports governing bodies are nearly all engaged in reconstruction, and it seems too much of specialists for world's championships games this year.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the opinions of the sporting press, the BOC remained committed to British participation. In a letter to *The Times*, Reverend Courcy Laffan appealed to the British world to 'give practical proof their gratitude and admiration towards the heroic Belgian people by doing their utmost to make the Olympic Games of Antwerp a signal and convincing success.'<sup>44</sup> Otway responded to this comment by stating that British support for Belgium could be conveyed in other manners and how Belgium was 'in the throes of re-birth.'<sup>45</sup> He believed that every effort should be put towards 'renewing her industrial and agricultural activities, to rehousing her population.'<sup>46</sup> A similar opinion was expressed by the now 'Captain' F A W Webster, who believed that the holding of the Games 'appears to be an appeal based upon sentiment alone, and bad sentiment at that, or at the best bad logic.'<sup>47</sup>

*The Times* presented a more considerate argument, stating, 'it must not be assumed that we are hostile to the revival of the Olympic Games,<sup>48</sup> but rather 'we are anxious that it should be rightly done, and done at the right time.'<sup>49</sup> Its concern was that the Games would prove a 'fiasco,' not only for Britain but also for its organisers. *The Pall Mall Gazette* took the opposite stance and openly supported the holding of the Olympics. It commented that the Belgian people 'deserve all the good wishes that can be evoked by such a gathering.'<sup>50</sup>

Along with these new, period relevant arguments as to why Britain should not be participating at the Olympics, there was the re-emergence of older rationales for British apathy. An *Athletic News* article argued that 'nobody'<sup>51</sup> believed that the 'Olympic Games is the extension of the brotherly feeling among nations,' and continued, 'nations compete firstly, secondly, and thirdly to secure the glory of victory, and for no other reason.'<sup>52</sup> *The Sporting Life* issued a similar outlook, citing that the Games created 'bitter antagonisms'<sup>53</sup> between nations, using the difference between the United States and Britain as an example of this. It reflected, 'minor squabbles there were in plenty in London and at Stockholm, none of which tend to create good feeling.'<sup>54</sup> It concluded

with the question of 'why would Britain want to participate in the Olympic Games again?'

A long-standing source of British Olympic apathy had been the apparent questionable amateurism of other nations. These concerns were exposed once again in a speech made by Reverend J H Gray of the Cambridge University Athletic Club at the 1919 Annual Dinner of the London Athletic Club. He bemoaned the Olympics 'from start to finish they seem to be adjoining professionalism' and concluded, 'the last Olympic Games were a sheer waste of money,'<sup>55</sup> and the 1920 Olympics would be an 'unnecessary evil' upon the summer of 1920. *The Sporting Life* article that quoted this speech stated Gray had the support of those present. Part of the British aversion to the Olympics came by the manner which other nations' Olympic teams were being funded. In December 1919, it was indicated that half the £32,000 desired by the French Olympic Committee had been given to them by their government,<sup>56</sup> bringing about further questions in the British press about the amateur nature of foreign athletes.

The wave of critical articles about Britain's continued Olympic participation provoked a response from the BOC. This came in the form of a letter to *The Sporting Life* by Courcy Laffan.<sup>57</sup> In this, he wrote how the Belgian Government and people wanted the Games. He stated that delaying the event for one year could create a dangerous precedent and future Olympics could be put 'backwards or forwards so as to suit the convenience of the city in which it was to be held.' In his view, the choice for the next Olympiad was, therefore, 'simply 1920 or 1924.' He responded to Otway's concern about the potential for damaging Britain's sporting reputation by stating that something more important was at stake in Antwerp:

What is really at stake is the reputation of this country for leadership in the true spirit of chivalrous sport. From this point of view may I put it to British sportsmen that the question is not whether we can score a large number of victories at Antwerp, but whether we are bound in honour to play the game by Belgium as Belgium played the game by us in 1914.<sup>58</sup>

The perspective of Britain being a leader of nations had been a prevalent British identity prior to the war, and this article indicates that it was also present after it. Charles Otway response to Courcy Laffan's statement began a bitter exchange between the two men. Otway admitted that it would be natural for Belgium to want the Games,

but asked the questions; ‘are the nations of the world ready to send teams?’<sup>59</sup> Also, ‘who insists on holding the Olympic Games, *next year*, instead of allowing a proper time for preparation?’ His belief was that current plans for the Games were ‘haphazard’ and in ‘constant flux.’<sup>60</sup>

Otway undoubtedly incensed Courcy Laffan by stating his friend Coubertin’s<sup>61</sup> leadership of the IOC was a ‘dictatorship.’ Otway’s opinion was that Coubertin should have no say in determining the location for future Olympics, rather ‘a committee or council representative of those sports governing bodies,’<sup>62</sup> should determine the location. Laffan responded by defending his friend, and the decision to hold the Olympics in 1920.<sup>63</sup> Otway’s response came in a letter to the editor of his own newspaper where he stated there was an apparent lack of desire for Britain to compete in Antwerp:

The reputation of this country for leadership in sport depends to a considerable extent on it holding its own against those who main conceivably, and quite rightly, wish to credit their own nations with the credit of leadership. I have never gone back on the opinion that one factor in bringing about the world-war was the idea that Britain was decadent, and that this idea was fostered by our lamentable failures at Stockholm. We cannot afford for merely sentimental reasons to risk another failure at Antwerp.<sup>64</sup>

Otway’s argument gives an insight into Britain’s national sporting identity. He stresses the belief that Britain is a leader of sport, despite the Stockholm Games. The importance of participation and performing well at the Olympics was the subject of an *Athletic News* article in July. It concluded that the ‘country is not in a mood for participation in Olympic Games at the present time, least of all for competition wherein as a result of the rigours of warfare they cannot start on equitable terms with American and Swedish athletes.’<sup>65</sup>

Following this, Otway made no further reference towards Courcy Laffan until June, when he included quotes from an interview Courcy Laffan did for *The New York Sun*. The most intriguing of these quotes regarded British participation at Antwerp. The British IOC member indicated that although Britain had not yet answered ‘yes’ to Belgium, he felt that to answer ‘no’ was ‘impossible.’<sup>66</sup> Otway argued that the AAA had not yet thrown their support behind the Games, but if they did (which they did), he desired for ‘no repetition of the happenings of 1912, when men were entered who had no shadow of a chance of winning the event in which they were competed.’<sup>67</sup>



In this article Otway also reaffirmed his preference for reconstruction over the Olympics, desiring that 'there will not be any extravagant systemised training scheme. Frankly, the AAA would much prefer to devote any funds that are lying dormant to the general development of athletics than to the training of specialists.'<sup>68</sup> Prior to the war, Otway had led the desire for investment into athletes and facilities for the Olympics, now he wanted money to be diverted away from international competition. His criticism of Courcy Laffan continued later in the year after he stated that the Antwerp Games could not be held on the same scale as previous Olympics, a comment that encouraged Otway to believe that 'they should not be held at all.'<sup>69</sup>

Despite their reservations about the Games, the sporting associations began to support their athletes' participation in Antwerp one by one during the summer of 1919. In June, the NCU and Scottish Amateur Athletic Association (SAAA) publically supported British participation.<sup>70</sup> Then in August, the AAA showed its support, a move that had the support of 'Ubiquitous' in *The Athletic News*. He believed this was a 'forward move,'<sup>71</sup> arguing that the failures of 1912 had been realised and 'a very capable executive' had been put in place to aid the British team 'from the time of departure to their termination of the games.'<sup>72</sup>

In spite of the positivity expressed by the sporting associations, there were still doubters in the press, primarily regarding the fear that the British team would be underfunded and underrepresented.<sup>73</sup> This was expressed in *The Sporting Life*, a newspaper that 'regarded it as impossible in the current climate for Great Britain to be adequately represented.'<sup>74</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel A N S Strode-Jackson (the Stockholm Olympic Champion in the 1,500 metres) and President of the Oxford University Athletic Club issued his concerns about British participation via two articles on the coming Olympics. The first of these appeared on 26 September, and in this, he wrote of his fears for Antwerp:

unless we start right away with a sound system back with adequate funds, we had far better stay away, because losing badly would throw us down in the eyes of the world, which would conclude that, as an athletic nation, we had gone under during the war. We haven't; but we must prove it.<sup>75</sup>

This is evidence that trepidation of further Olympic failure hung over British Olympic participation prior to Antwerp. Several articles in the press referred to the Stockholm Olympics, such as that in *The Times*, which stated Britain had been 'badly beaten,'<sup>76</sup> and this 'showed that

other nations had ideas regarding sport which did not coincide with our own.' It proposed that 'we must therefore "play up hard" now.'<sup>77</sup> The nation's apparent contrasting sporting philosophy with other rival Olympic countries was the subject of a *Pall Mall Gazette* article. This stated that Britain was 'reluctant to extend its full interest to the highly specialised athleticism required for running, jumping and weight-throwing championships.'<sup>78</sup>

The resumption of the AAA Championships in 1919 did give Britain some hope for success in Antwerp, as apart from the victory by Harry Wilson of New Zealand in the 120 yards hurdles, Britain swept the board in the track events. These victories were played down by 'Strephon' of *The Athletic News* in his Championship review. He believed that these victories were not 'sufficient' to warrant British entry at Antwerp as only three or four of these athletes stood any chance of winning, and this was far from certain. Overall, he concluded that Britain's best 'would have no chance with the United States and Sweden that our position would be lowly when aggregates were totalled.'<sup>79</sup> The chances of British success at Stamford Bridge had been enhanced by the fact that few foreign athletes competed at Stamford Bridge as a result of the war and the Inter-Allied Games that took place in Paris that summer.<sup>80</sup>

In field events, Scandinavian athletes dominated, and Britain's only victory came via Howard Baker in the high jump. Subsequently the press coverage reflected the pre-war concerns for field events. *The Athletic News* felt the performance indicated, 'there seems just, as much room for improvement as ever in these events, Mr F A M Webster and the Field Events Association have lots of work in front of them.'<sup>81</sup>

The popularity of these events also appeared to be a problem, as spectators were said to have paid 'little attention to them simply because they know nothing about them. They are different.'<sup>82</sup> Another article recognised the potential reasoning for this, indicating that English opinions had not changed despite the work of the Amateur Field Events Association, as the events were noted to be popular in Scotland and Ireland, but in England; 'scarce pays a man to practice these sports, so limited are the contests in which he may participate.'<sup>83</sup> In order to gain more popularity, field events required investment, and with money in short supply, they failed to get the funding that they desperately needed. Money for new impediments had been given in March 1919, with £100 prescribed by the AAA,<sup>84</sup> but the coaching required to ensure equipment was best utilised was not forthcoming.

The return of athletic events to the sporting summer brought with it the age-old arguments between amateurism and professionalism. The

war had further complicated the issue, as the lack of amateur competition witnessed amateurs moving to the professional ranks in order to compete. Despite instances where these men failed to take any rewards for their efforts, they were not immediately able to return to their former status. Consequently, the AAA had to determine if these men would be able to compete in amateur events once again.<sup>85</sup> The outcome after debates that involved the BOC was that those athletes that had 'crossed the line'<sup>86</sup> would be allowed to return to amateur competition.

Prior to the war, the perceptions of amateurism and professionalism divided the nation. Otway wrote in the London based *The Sporting Life* that those in the North of England could not act as a true amateur because 'it is not possible to induce an athlete to run for the honour of his club, village, town, or county, without receiving prizes of such value as may be considered to recoup him for his expenses.'<sup>87</sup> For this, Otway blamed the AAA, deeming that they had become 'lax' in their measures. His belief was that 'many runners think more of the value of the prize at stake than the honour of the performance.'<sup>88</sup> Despite a strong professional circuit in the North, the region also provided many amateurs by the strictest sense of the definition, of which some were members of the British Olympic team both at the 1908 and 1912 Olympics.

The strong amateur feeling present in the North of England was expressed in the Middlesbrough publication, *The Sports Gazette*. Its correspondent 'Pax' wrote on athletic professionalism that 'nothing desirable would be lost by its disappearance.'<sup>89</sup> He continued 'professionalism creates a class who, whilst they earn, give no adequate national return. They are non-productive. They are users of wealth but not creators.'<sup>90</sup> Such a statement was an indication that those in the South of England who believed that all in those in the North were professionals were off the mark. In reality there were those in the North who felt just as strongly about evils of Professionalism.

## **The situation at the end of 1919**

As the first full year of peace drew to a close, the arguments about British Olympic participation, and its preparations were still raging. The nation's Olympic governing council was committed to British participation in the 1920 Olympic Games, but this did little to impede the press debates about the nations' entry and the subject of holding the Games at all.

Those doubting if the Games should be held at all had evidence to back their claims up. Belgium had endured occupation for the majority of the war, with some of the conflicts most devastating battles taking place on her territory. British critics argued that Belgium's resources

would be better served ensuring the restoration of their country than paying for an Olympics. The difficulty of preparing for the Games was not aided by the fact that Antwerp had less time to prepare than any city in Olympic history.<sup>91</sup>

Despite the positive psychological impact of the Games, people in Britain felt that she could do better things to aid Belgian recovery than send a team to Antwerp. Britain, along with all of the previous Olympic major players (apart from the Scandinavian nations), had been deeply affected by the war. For Britain and other nations, money and resources were at a premium, creating suggestions that the Games should be put back at least one year, maybe longer.

If Britain was to enter the 1920 Olympics, it had several major obstacles to putting a team together. First, was the practical issue of the shortage of money and the lack of time to raise the required amount. Second, were concerns about the shortage of quality athletes to send to Antwerp, and consequently another performance comparable with that of Stockholm could ensue, leading to further embarrassment. Britain's sporting commentators' preference was for Britain to concentrate upon 'reconstructing' its sporting facilities for the good of the nation, rather than sending a few athletes to Antwerp.

The feeling present in 1919 ensured that a very different sense of British identity was present than had been in 1914. The identity now expressed was more reminiscent of 1908 than 1914. This is not an indication of the conservative nature of British society in this era that historians write about, but an indication of the limitations of British resources at this time.

### **British attitudes towards potential German participation at the 1920 Olympics**

Over four years of war between Britain and Germany ended on 11 November 1918. The war had been the culmination of a decade of tensions between the two nations that have been illustrated from the perspective of the British sporting press at the Olympic Games throughout this monograph. Here will be an examination of the British perspective towards the potential for German participation at the 1920 Olympics.

In February 1915, some six months into The Great War, IOC President Pierre de Coubertin indicated that he 'would not deprive Germany of the 1916 Games.'<sup>92</sup> This was a viewpoint that did not please IOC and BOC member Theodore Cook, who stated he 'would never have anything to do with Olympic Games in which Germans were in any way

concerned,<sup>93</sup> and consequently resigned from the IOC in April 1915.<sup>94</sup> Cook spent the rest of his war, 'documenting German atrocities and crusading against Prussian militarism,'<sup>95</sup> an indication of the reasons for this attitude.

Any prospect of the 1916 Olympics taking place had been dashed when the war intensified and when the ceasefire came in November 1918, Coubertin made plans that ensured the Games would take place in 1920, four years after the previously planned Olympics and a continuation of the four-year cycle that had begun in 1896. When the issue went before the IOC it brought tensions to the surface about the potential inclusion of the nations of the 'Central empires' (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey), and there was a desire that these nations would not compete,<sup>96</sup> a discussion that only brought to the surface many tensions between members of the IOC. Dikaia Chatziefstathiou states explains, 'members of the IOC found it difficult to put aside their nationalistic feelings that had arisen as a consequence of the war, resulting in internal conflicts between the members of the IOC coming from countries on different sides.'<sup>97</sup>

Coubertin believed that it would be unwise for the 'Central Powers' to participate before 1924 for fear it could 'create a rift in the Olympic constitution which had been so strong until then; and it might become a dangerous precedent.'<sup>98</sup> He reasoned that animosity towards these nations was still high and the majority of IOC members were citizens of nations that had fought against them.<sup>99</sup> The problem for the IOC was that excluding nations was contradictory to its motto of 'all games, all nations' and the Olympic peace policy.<sup>100</sup> The IOC's decision regarding this matter was not to make a decision at all. Since 1896, the host nation had sent out invitations to the member countries of the IOC asking them to compete in the Games, and so the Belgium organising committee would simply not invite the nations of the 'Central Empires'<sup>101</sup> to compete in Antwerp.

The British press first expressed their concerns about the inclusion of the 'Central Empires' in March 1919, even before the Games were confirmed. This was first discussed by the press when it wrote about the 25th anniversary celebrations of the IOC in March 1919, which were held at the organisation's new home in Lausanne, Switzerland. *The Sporting Life* was apprehensive about the decision to hold the ceremony in a neutral country and the admitting of 'the Princes, Counts and Barons who represented the Central Empires.'<sup>102</sup> This article deemed this as an indication that these nations might not be excluded for the 'considerable period' hoped for, further worrying that 'the Central

Empires have repented in sackcloth and ashes, they will be readmitted to the Games.<sup>103</sup>

Reverend Courcy-Laffan, the most prominent British member of the IOC, was quick to stamp upon any suggestion that Germany would be readmitted. He believed that ‘the success of the Games will mean yet another slap in the face for Germany,<sup>104</sup> an indication that the Games would take place without them. An *Athletic News* editorial believed that the ‘Central Empires’ should not be included ‘because those nations had proved themselves unable to appreciate the spirit of sport which was summed up by the words, play the game,<sup>105</sup> a comment that indicated the British belief in the moral of sport. The hostile feeling towards German inclusion in the Olympics was representative of a wider feeling of animosity towards Germany immediately after the war. This period witnessed some of the worst anti-German riots of the era, with tensions heightened by *The Daily Mail*, a publication that led the call to ‘Hang the Kaiser.’<sup>106</sup>

In June 1919, both the NCU and AAA announced that they would not be sending representatives to any event containing athletes from the five enemy countries<sup>107</sup>. While the ASA stated it desired no ‘intercourse’<sup>108</sup> with the former enemy nations, a view supported across the Empire and in France, but not by the Scandinavian nations at the 1920 FINA: Federation Internationale de Natation conference.<sup>109</sup>

The Football Association (FA) informed the BOA that they would only continue their relationship with the Olympics if they did not have any contact with the ‘Central Powers.’<sup>110</sup> They took this position at FIFA’s annual conference, where an agreement was reached where associations that had any contact with a ‘Central Empire’ Football Association would be immediately banned from the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). This decision split the European members of the Association and was part of the FA’s decision to leave FIFA in April 1920.<sup>111</sup> British feelings towards Germany were indicated by such articles as this that appeared in *The Sporting Life*:

Until the Germans have explained their crimes and proved their repentance Great Britain will never play them at any game. And at Football we will never meet those who choose to face them as men worthy of being admitted to the brotherhood of sportsmen.

We have nothing in common with Germany. We can share no fraternal feeling with them, and we do not want to meet our enemies at sport; only those who understand what friendly rivalry is. Could the captain of a British Football team shake hands with the leader of a German eleven? If there is such a Briton his name had best remain

in obscurity. Britons could not play against Germans without defiling the mighty fallen.<sup>112</sup>

Such an opinion was an expression of the contempt that many in Britain held Germany in and indicated that there was no possibility of Britain playing sport against Germany in the immediate future. Despite this feeling, Charles Otway praised German sporting methods in his *Sporting Life* column. After beginning his editorial by stating that the German desire 'was to get on top, to get control. He believed in his own superiority, and believes in it now.'<sup>113</sup> He then questioned British sporting attitudes and praising Germany's attitudes.

We are trading on our past reputation. That will not do. Whether the German is allowed in international athletics or kept out of it matters less than in the matter of football and other games, and for this reason – there is a basis of comparison. If Boche can find men to beat the performances of our men he will be able prate of his superiority, to suggest to the 20 or 30 minor nationalities who rule Olympic Games that it is jealousy and fear of defeat which keeps him out. It is, therefore, not sufficient for us simply to endeavour to organise opposition to his inclusion among the sporting nations of the world. We must also try to retain our own athletic reputation, and to do that must set to work to give athletes the same facilities, the same official encouragement that they are given in Germany – and some other countries.<sup>114</sup>

This represents a rare post-war example of a British commentator stating that other nations sporting methods should be adopted in order for Britain to regain its lost sporting supremacy. Such an article is more reflective of the attitude expressed after the Stockholm Olympics, when British confidence was low and Germany was described as being a nation that Britain should aspire to be alike.

As the Olympic year approached some individuals questioned if the Games should be considered 'Olympic' if some nations were barred. Reverend J H Gray, Treasurer of the Cambridge University Amateur Athletic Club,<sup>115</sup> posed this question (although it went against the grain of general opinion), it did raise important questions. An *Athletic News* article wrote of a more commonly seen view, and this further indicated the sense of animosity that was felt towards Germany. It proclaimed, 'we have nothing in common with Germany. We can share no fraternal feeling with them, and we do not want to meet our enemies in sport; only those that understand what friendly rivalry is.'<sup>116</sup>

Neither Germany nor any of other the 'Central Powers' competed at the 1920 Olympics. At an International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) meeting held during the athletic portion of the Games it was determined that 'Germany should not be allowed to compete in the Olympic Games until that country is admitted to the League of Nations.'<sup>117</sup> This is evidence of the interwoven nature of sport and politics and the growing international importance of international sport, which the Olympic Games were at the heart of. Britain also appeared to be adverse to the inclusion of these nations in future Olympics.

At the end of the Olympics, the IOC discussed the issue of these nations' future re-admission and Britain's position was noted to be 'non-committal,'<sup>118</sup> while Belgium and Italy were said to be strongly opposed to their former enemies' inclusion. A post-1920 Olympic FINA meeting yet again raised this issue, and the ASA gave a firmer British response. It confirmed that she would withdraw her membership if Germany's membership was not discontinued, which consequently it was.<sup>119</sup>

Despite the sporting adversity towards Germany, there was sympathy for the plight of the German people in the press.<sup>120</sup> While political and social attitudes towards Germany changed in the aftermath of war, the attitude expressed by sporting associations illustrated that hostile feelings were still present towards Germany in Britain at this time. It would not be until 1928 Germany was re-admitted to the Olympic Games, and it would take until the middle of the decade for Britain to recommence sporting ties with her. For example, Germany would compete at the AAA Championships for the first time since 1914 in 1926.<sup>121</sup>



# 8

## British Preparations for the 1920 Olympics

Following the trend of the Stockholm and Berlin Olympics, the amount of funding for the British team to compete at the Antwerp Olympics was determined by a public appeal. This appeal was launched via a British Olympic Association (BOA) statement in *The Times* on 31 January 1920, leaving just over six months for the money to be raised before the commencement of the athletics events in August. The appeal aimed to raise £30,000; a considerable sum, although far less than the £100,000 wanted by the 1916 Olympic appeal. When considering the shortage of time, the expendable money of the general population during a post-war recession and the number of wartime-related charities also bidding for money, the chances of raising the desired amount appeared to be slim from the outset.

The appeal was led by British Olympic Council (BOC) member, Lord Downham, who wrote a statement explaining the appeal in *The Times*. In an attempt to entice the public to give money, he appealed to the nation's sporting identity, stating that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had revived the Olympic Games not just as a 'great athletic gathering,' but also to 'leaven the world with the true spirit of sport.' He continued by appealing to the British consciousness, writing, 'British sportsmen created this spirit in the belief that sport so understood, and so practised, is not only the most powerful instrument of physical development, but the best school for the training of free men to unselfish citizenship.'<sup>1</sup> His final gambit emphasised the traditional British sporting ethos of their representatives, stating, 'they are all amateurs,' and 'men who can be relied on to uphold the national prestige.'<sup>2</sup> These comments appeared in an attempt to dampen the critics of the appeal, likely to bemoan how the money was being used to create a team of 'professionals.'

Throughout 1919, the press had desired any available money that the sporting associations acquired to be dedicated to reconstruction in preference to it being used to send athletes to Antwerp. The appeal recognised the strength of the desire to aid reconstruction, determining that part of the money acquired would go towards constructing new playing fields and training schemes for budding athletes.

One of the early supporters of the appeal was the King, who donated £100<sup>3</sup> towards the fund. He was quoted as stating the money was ‘intended to provide for playing fields throughout the country, and the encouragement of sport, outdoor exercises, and recreations, which are indispensable to the physical and moral welfare of the people.’<sup>14</sup> The same article also stated the apparent condition of the facilities across the nation, remarking ‘the country is pitifully lacking in playing fields. In providing and improving grounds, club houses, etc., a very large sum might fruitfully be spent. During the year 1920 it will at least be possible to lay the foundation of an organization for this purpose.’<sup>15</sup> The desire was that some of the money raised by the appeal would help ensure the nation’s sporting facilities were put back to their ‘former glories.’<sup>16</sup>

Comparable with the appeals for 1912 and 1916, the 1920 appeal progressed slowly. Despite the period-specific difficulties hampering the fund raising, *The Athletic News* believed the major problem for the appeal came from the BOC, who were apparently not doing enough to help promote it. In March 1920, it bemoaned that ‘apart from appeals to newspapers nothing much else had been done.’<sup>17</sup> In May, it reported four months into the appeal that just £1,600 had been raised, leaving just two months for the target of £30,000 to be reached. The impossibility of this figure being reached in time prompted Theodore Cook to propose ‘a last gap propaganda initiative.’<sup>18</sup>

Cook had resigned from the IOC in 1915 over the issue of German participation at future Olympics, but remained a member of the BOC. He proposed that adverts should be placed ‘throughout the British press,’ to gain the appeal exposure. He believed that up to £50,000 could be raised if the BOC gave him £5,000 to start the initiative. Such was the diminutive amount of money in the fund that the BOC could not spare this expense, and rejected Cook’s offer.

Cook’s reaction was to immediately resign from the BOC, and the indication from an article he wrote in *The Times* was that he had turned from being one of the biggest British supporters of the Olympics to a hater of the Games. His piece was headed ‘*The Olympic Games: A question of withdrawal,*’ and within he described that the failure of the appeal was a stern indication of Britain’s disinterest in the Olympic movement.<sup>9</sup> He

also wrote about the intention of the BOA's report after the Stockholm Olympics to drop out of the Games there and then, and his opinion was that Antwerp should be Britain's Olympic bow. He lamented, 'it is futile to try to force it upon a nation which does not want it.'<sup>10</sup> Matthew Llewellyn believes that Cook's comments can be considered as 'sour grapes' after the failure of his scheme. He argues that Cook 'had simply become disillusioned with the task of trying to spread the gospel of Olympism to a seemingly unreceptive nation.'<sup>11</sup>

Despite Cook's failed attempt, the BOC continued in its efforts to raise money. It placed an article in *The Times*, appealing to the nation's sporting identity, indicating that the British Team would be 'very small' compared to Stockholm, and those going would be amateurs, not the feared team of 'gladiators.'<sup>12</sup> Other individuals also attempted to raise money, such as the Member of Parliament for Dundee, Winston Churchill. He made an appeal at a lunch he organised for the team in London, where he indicated that only £2,000 had been raised at this late stage, and if it could not be found 'it was probable that the British representation at the Olympic Games would be greatly crippled, if not entirely ruined.'<sup>13</sup>

Comparable with the previous Olympic appeals its apparent public perception did little to aid its cause, according to a *Manchester Guardian* editorial. It stated the Southern perspective was that the 'appeal is especially directed to Lancashire and the industrial North, where ... all the money is to be found nowadays.'<sup>14</sup> Continuing by stating the southern perspective was that, 'The North has never done much for the Olympic Games,' defended by the statement 'although at least half of the athletes who went to Stockholm in 1912 and will go to Antwerp this year are North-countrymen.'<sup>15</sup> Such a comment demonstrates evidence of a regional divide, a sense of southern superiority rubbing up those in the north and of the bitterness at the power and prosperity that the North of England was enjoying.

Reverend Courcy-Laffan was responsible for attempting many of the efforts to turn British perceptions of the Olympics around in the post-war period. He believed that the appeal had fared badly because, 'the public has taken the expert view that the Games ought not to have been held this year.'<sup>16</sup> This statement went against those he had made in 1919 (when he pushed for British inclusion in the Games), but fell into line with many of the opinions expressed in the general press. He added that, 'a lot of our sporting bodies have given their word to go to Antwerp simply as an act of courtesy.'<sup>17</sup> Despite these factors, he believed that British participation was in no doubt.

To 'Pleaser' of *The Athletic News*, the failure of the appeal was an indication of British apathy. He concluded, 'the sooner Great Britain shakes off the Olympic loads the better, and this year ought to be the last.'<sup>18</sup> He believed that Britain had no interest in the Games, and would be better off without them. When considering this statement it should be considered that the BOC had done little to promote the appeal in a period when there was a desperate need to encourage it considering the competition for the public's money primarily from charities associated with the war.

In a ditch attempt to turn the appeal's fortunes around, the BOC hired press agent Sydney Colston in June, in the hope that his skills in public relations would bring the fund up to the revised target of £10,000. The shortage of money was such that an anonymous 'Mr X', gave £1,000 of the £1,500 required to pay for his services.<sup>19</sup> Despite Coulson travelling the length and breadth of the nation in an attempt to increase interest, he could not raise any significant cash. On 28 July, Laffan wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* that the BOA now required just £5,500, to be raised and needed a further £2,500 to ensure the 'appearance in any way worthy of our leading position as a sport nation.'<sup>20</sup>

With the Games only days away the BOA announced a squad of 218 men and 16 women for Antwerp, despite funding still being £1,500 short. This presented critics with a further opportunity to state that Britain was not interested in the Olympic Games. Although the failure of the appeal can be seen as a partial indicator of this, other factors should be considered in determining the reasons for the failure of this appeal.

First, the appeal had only begun in January 1919, giving a little over eight months for money to be raised. Previous appeals had demonstrated that raising such a figure could take years, not months. Second, the marketing of the appeal by the BOC did little to help promote it. Cook's initiative and the media grumblings indicated that the Council had adopted a 'laissez-faire' attitude towards the appeal, until it appeared in dire straits in June. Third, the environment in which the appeal took place needed to be considered. Britain had just come out of a brutal war; resources and expendable money were low. The population was more likely to give what little they had to causes helping people that had suffered as a result of the war, such as the 'Sportsman's fund,' which gave money to ex-servicemen, rather than this elite sporting event.

Fourth, British apathy towards the Games should be considered as a factor. Appeals for both the Olympics of Stockholm and Berlin had progressed slowly, failing to reach their targets and this illustrated apathy for the Games in Britain. The 1920 appeal indicated a similar sentiment, and had been conducted in a comparable manner. Britain

was undoubtedly a sport crazed nation, and hurt when her sportsmen were defeated, but this did not provoke a financial response from the public.

## **Final preparations**

In the summer of 1920, with the Games just weeks away, the preparations of the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) came under widespread criticism in the press, this was because it's poor organisation meant there was a lack of opportunity for British athletes to prove themselves worthy of selection. The previous winter it had proposed nationwide county trials to take place on 12 June 1920, but these did not come to fruition and the press criticised this, believing it to be a missed opportunity to find 'new material.'<sup>21</sup>

Grievances were particularly apparent in the North and Midlands, after the 'Three Nations Meeting' (between England, Ireland and Scotland) were dismissed as a means of selection. This left only the AAA Championships and the Olympic Trial both held at Stamford Bridge, London as a means to select the team.<sup>22</sup> With both events being staged in London it put those expected to reach the standard from the North and Midlands at a severe disadvantage of selection from the perspective of not being able to make either or both events because of the problems of making the journey to London.

Charles Otway felt that the AAA Championships as an Olympic trial made it difficult for new talent to stake a claim for a place. He argued that despite the pre-war expansion of the Championships to two days, and the addition of heats in some events, the number of foreign entries meant that only 'the cream' of British talent was accepted. He considered that the AAA had 'gone back in many directions on 1914, and if our 1912 team was far from efficiently organised, that of 1920 is to all intents and purposes, not organised at all.'<sup>23</sup>

In 1919, the Northern Counties Amateur Athletic Association (NCAAA) suggested that the AAA Championships be held in rotation between the North, South and Midlands regions,<sup>24</sup> but this seemed unlikely to happen in 1920, further increasing Southern domination. Regional grievances with the South were not limited to athletes' issues, as Midland Counties Amateur Athletic Association (MCAAA) official (Mr Brommage), bemoaned the lack of representation the Northern and Midlands associations had in terms of officials in Stockholm, and feared the same would happen again in Antwerp.<sup>25</sup> These factors indicated a regional divide present in British athletics.

At the 1920 AAA Championships held at Stamford Bridge, the entry of many more foreign athletes saw fewer of the Championship's events won by British athletes than had been the case in 1919, with ten of the 19 Championships going to foreign athletes. To the press this was evidence that Britain would fail at Antwerp. *The Sporting Lifes'* review of the Championships spoke of 'many disappointments,'<sup>26</sup> concluding there were 'dismal prospects for Olympic Games.'<sup>27</sup> British athletes did win the 100 and 220 yards at Stamford Bridge, but these victories were not viewed as an indication that Britain would be successful in the Olympic events, as the top American athletes were missing, but would be present in Antwerp. It was stated that, apart from West Indian H Edward (who was to represent Britain), 'no other runner displayed Olympic form. 'Two of Britain's best hopes for a medal: W A Hill and A G Hill, were apparently 'not in last year's form, and it was not proved that we have anybody to replace them.'<sup>28</sup> These reports were concerned that once again British athletes would embarrass the nation at the Olympic Games.

In comparison to the previews that had come prior to the Stockholm Olympics there was considerably less written in both the general and sporting press prior to Antwerp. Those previews that appeared projected similar opinions to those that came after the AAA Championships, that Britain would not fare well.

In *The Athletic News*, Strephon's preview determined in a sub-heading that 'America holds a strong hand'<sup>29</sup> before offering a detailed indication how Britain's finest would compare to America's on the track. *The Daily Mail's* preview offered an excuse, arguing that it was 'unreasonable to expect Britain and France who lost so many men in the war, to hold their own with other nations.'<sup>30</sup> Its belief was that the majority of events 'will be secured by the United States, Sweden and Finland,' although it did hold out hopes for a victory in the marathon race for Britain's Mills of Leicester. *The Manchester Guardian* used its preview to voice the opinion that it 'would have been better to have postponed the games for another year until things were more settled.'<sup>31</sup>

The British athletic team consisted of 80 men, of whom 35 came from England. The Varsities (past and present) contributed eight men, the Midlands six, the North four, and the South 17, a percentage that 'Strephon' of the Manchester based *The Athletic News* deemed 'perfectly fair'.<sup>32</sup> This was an indication that the southern domination of the team was justified, but it demonstrated how few men from the rest of the nation had been able to compete in trial events.

In the opinion of prominent athletic writers, Charles Otway and 'Ubiquitous', an athletic team of 80 men was too many. Their preference

was for a team of around 30 athletes to be taken. Their argument was that there was little point of taking athletes such as the field event men that were unlikely to win medals.<sup>33</sup> Otway's thoughts for the Games were mixed; he believed 'the Games are upon us too soon after the war to allow us a chance of developing new material,' but felt that 'the reputation of Great Britain is not to sink a little lower than it did at Stockholm.'<sup>34</sup> The extensive articles that Otway wrote in the immediate run up to the Games presented him with the opportunity to give his views on the Olympic movement:

Although I have never been an enthusiastic supporter of Olympic Games as at present conducted, I do believe that there were great possibilities in the Olympic movement properly handled, and for that reason am sorry that prospects of a bright future are jeopardised by the doubtful policy of sending second-raters to compete in world's championships.<sup>35</sup>

Otway's view was reminiscent of his 1919 criticism of Coubertin in particular. He was chiefly a supporter of Britain competing prior to the war, but held doubts about her competing after it in 1920, purely from the perspective of damaging her reputation as a sporting nation. Such an opinion indicated there were those who considered the Olympic Games were a sporting event of national importance. Other editorials sought to protect the team, such as this from *The Athletic News*:

What we lack more than anything else is the new blood that was split for freedom in the war. There is no reason to be ashamed. We did our bit, we kept our obligations, and are keeping them now, and we are paying the price. Not only in the matter of athletes, but even more in that of athletic organisation we have gone back in many directions on 1914, and if our 1912 team was far from efficiently organised, that if 1920 is, too all intents and purposes, not organised at all.<sup>36</sup>

Along with the apparent lack of quality athletes, this article's concern was that the Antwerp team was even less organised than the failed 1912 team, and the performance would be repeated. Another article from this publication wrote more positively, believing, 'we shall lose more events than we shall win of no doubt; but from what I know of our athletes their feeling is that it is no disgrace to be beaten by better men, whoever they may be.'<sup>37</sup> These articles demonstrated a major change in tone from the articles written during the Stockholm and London Olympics. Now it was

accepted that Britain would suffer defeats and not ‘win’ the Olympic Games, as had been the case prior to these previous Games.

The outlook for the swimming events indicated a mixed tone. In the spring, the Northern Counties Swimming Association’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) had expressed the opinion ‘that England had not an earthly chance and would probably disgrace itself at Antwerp in regard to competitive results.’<sup>38</sup> Whereas *The Athletic News* correspondent ‘Aquarius’ believed that Britain was taking its strongest ever team to an Olympic Games. The same paper previewed the water polo competition, with W J Howcroft deeming that ‘Great Britain has been exceedingly fortunate in the draw,’<sup>39</sup> as it would avoid Sweden until the final. He also predicted that in swimming all the ‘coveted laurels will be awarded to the American ladies,’ but also a probability of British success in the men’s events.

All of these opinions prior to the Games demonstrated a sense of apathy towards the holding of the Games and the British belief that they would not fare well in them. Some previews adversities to the Games came from a concern that Britain was not well enough prepared for them, while others presented the view that Britain did not have enough quality athletes in order to make a showing worthy of the nation. Despite such reservations, the British team made the short trip to Antwerp for the Olympic Games.



# 9

## The 1920 Antwerp Olympics

The seventh Olympic Games took place in Antwerp, Belgium between April and September 1920. Despite the impact of the war, the Games were expanded from Stockholm eight years before, with 29 nations competing, five of whom did so for the first time (Brazil, Monaco, New Zealand, Portugal and Estonia). As the British press feared, throughout 1919, Antwerp was not completely ready for the festival. Allen Guttmann states, 'the facilities were far from ideal. The stadium was unfinished. The track was poorly built and heavy rains made it worse. The Belgian public took little notice of the games.'<sup>1</sup> Despite this, the Games were a relative success.

These Olympic Games witnessed some notable firsts for the opening ceremony; the raising of the Olympic flag, the releasing of the doves as a symbol of peace and the reading of the 'Olympic Oath.' All of these remain an integral part of the ceremony to the present day. Belgian athlete, Victor Boin had the honour of performing the 'Olympic Oath,' and he read out at the opening ceremony; 'We swear. We will take part in the Olympic Games in a spirit of chivalry, for the honour of our country and for the glory of sport.'<sup>2</sup>

Despite the quality of facilities, there were many notable performances at the Games. Hannes Kolehmainen, winner of three gold medals in Stockholm, set a world record in the Antwerp Marathon, of which The Athletic News correspondent, Strepthon, remarked 'all of the feats I be held in the Games I think the sight of Hannes Kolehmainen showing the way into the arena after his long jaunt of 26 miles proved the most thrilling.'<sup>3</sup> Kolehmainen's compatriot, Paavo Nurmi won the three gold medals (10,000 metres, individual and team cross country). These were the first of nine gold medals that he won across three Olympic Games. Italian fencer, Nedo Nadi won Gold in five of the six fencing events,

and American swimmer Ethelda Bleibtrey won all three of the women's swimming events and broke world records in each event.

As ever, it was the United States that were the most successful nation. Her athletes won 95 medals in total, of which 41 were gold. Sweden proved that her success as host nation eight years prior was no fluke, finishing with 65 medals, of which 19 were gold. Despite the problems that the British faced, her athletes returned home with 43 medals, including 14 gold medals.<sup>4</sup> This represented an improvement in British performance compared with Stockholm, although she still finished in third place on the medals table, behind the United States and Sweden. The war had dampened British expectations prior to the Games' commencement, and it was never far away from British thoughts. For example, at the opening ceremony, a small band of members from the Worcestershire regiment 'which so distinguished itself in the defence of Ypres,'<sup>5</sup> led the team into the stadium.

In the 'important' athletic competitions, Britain won four gold medals. Albert Hill won the middle distance double in the 800 and 1,500 metres, Percy Hodge took the 3,000 metres steeplechase and there was also victory in the 4 × 400 metres relay. These were performances that defied these athletes pre-Games form. The final Olympic appearance of the tug-of-war also witnessed a British victory. Other British gold medals were achieved in the team events of water polo, hockey, polo, the doubles events of men's and women's tennis, tandem cycling, sailing and boxing.

The financial restrictions placed upon the team made the performance all the more creditable. The lack of funding ensured the team arrived at the last minute, denying them the opportunity to practice at the Olympic facilities, as other nations had. Rather than lodge in plush hotels, the British stayed in a Government School loaned from the Belgium Government for the duration.<sup>6</sup> This did allow the team to be close to the various stadiums, but was an indication of the shortness in finances and facilities by both Britain and her hosts.

*Table 9.1* The Medal table from the 1920 Olympics

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
United States	41	27	27	95
Sweden	19	20	25	64
Great Britain	15	15	13	43
Finland	15	10	9	34
Belgium	14	11	11	36

## The British perspective of the Games

No doubt owing to the low expectations placed on the team prior to the commencement of the Games, the British press were generally positive when remarking about the nations' performance. *The Observer* determined, 'Britain did better than expected,' believing it had 'confounded a great many critics by doing exceedingly well in the Olympic Games.'<sup>7</sup> The fact that Britain's athletes won only 14 gold medals illustrated how expectations had changed since the London Olympics of 1908.

In London and Stockholm, British defeats were an indication of the nations' sporting decline to the press. The defeats to the United States had been a particular source of misery at these games, but now when British athletes defeated their American counterparts they were the subject of delight, rather than expectation. There was a thought that Britain's place in the world of sport had changed, such as in the following article from *The Sporting Life*:

We cannot expect to gain the laurels nowadays as we did in the past when the opposition was small, but John Bull and Co as represented by Great Britain and the Overseas Dominions within the British Empire is still right to the fore, and that without encouragement and assistance from many quarters where it should be forthcoming.<sup>8</sup>

*The Athletic News* wrote in a similar vein. It stated 'England' might not be as successful as she once was as 'nations have successfully attacked our monopoly, our supremacy,'<sup>9</sup> but it was 'a national duty' to ensure 'the old flag hauled most-high at Antwerp, as announcing English success.'<sup>10</sup> Such comment was in direct contrast to comparable articles written prior to the war, when the British expected her athletes to win numerous events.

Press descriptions of the Games were not as commonplace or lengthy as those from the previous two Olympics. Huggins and Williams described that in the 1920s 'most of the press gave more column inches to sport events in England than to the Olympics and much press coverage of the Olympics in the 1920s consisted of lists of results.'<sup>11</sup> This was evident in the coverage from Antwerp, and newspapers that had previously included plentiful Olympic comment often included more results than description in their reports.

In addition, commonly the words were provided by the eugenic Press Association reports, which generally just featured results and gave little insight into the British perspective on the Games. For previous

Olympics, there was a wealth of editorials available for analysis, but these were substantially fewer in number at Antwerp. When Britain enjoyed success coverage was generally more plentiful, although the general shortage of press coverage compared to the previous Olympics makes the task of analysing the British perspective of the Games more difficult.

The lack of press writings could potentially be an indicator of British feelings towards the Games. The deficiency of interest in some publications could be a sign of Olympic apathy, although other factors should be considered before this assumption is made. Damage as a consequence of the war made the task of sending journalists to Antwerp difficult, both from the perspective of the British press being able to pay for their journalists to go (the effects of a recession were being felt in Britain) and the ability of Belgium to host them. Sport in general was receiving more plentiful coverage within the press during this period, reflecting the increased national interest in sport with record attendances at many venues (including the 1920 Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) Championships).<sup>12</sup> This could either be seen as a reason why Olympic coverage was lacking and a potential indication that British was not interested in the Olympic Games.

Within what coverage there was, as in previous Olympics the British press interchangeably used the terms 'Britain' and 'England,' 'British' and 'English' in its articles. There was also use of these different terms interchangeably throughout the same article. For example one *Manchester Guardian* piece wrote in reference to Hodge's victory in the 3,000 metres steeplechase; 'England registered a victory this morning before anyone had had time to digest his breakfast,'<sup>13</sup> it then stated that the 200 yards had 'brought great disappointment to England, whose hope lay in Edwards.' It finished the article writing of 'Britain' in reference to Rudd of South Africa's victory in the 440 yards and how his rival 'Butler (Cambridge) was a good second, so these old rivals made for a fine British victory.'<sup>14</sup> As in previous Olympics, the press described the team of Britain and of England and appeared uncertain of which term to use.

One of the features of British press coverage from the 1908 and 1912 Olympics was a hostility towards the athletes from the United States. American victories at these Games were accredited to their apparent 'professional' and 'businesslike' approaches to coaching and training. This perspective had largely disappeared from the coverage at Antwerp and now the British press were happy to acknowledge that American practices were different to her own, but acceptable.

A *Manchester Guardian* editorial sums up this new British perspective well. It stated, 'a good many Englishmen will still prefer our own methods. They may by comparison be somewhat amateurish, but after all in this connection, that is not a disagreeable adjective, and we do not come out badly at the finish.'<sup>15</sup> Although appreciation of American methods was still not universal, demonstrated in an editorial that appeared in the same publication that contested that 'most other nations and Americans in particular-found the genial and easy spirit of ideal amateurism more difficult to practice than we.'<sup>16</sup> Such comments as these indicate that attitudes towards American athletes and their practices had altered.

There could potentially be numerous reasons as to why the British press was more willing to accept the methods used by the United States in 1920. From an athletic perspective, the period between the Stockholm Olympics and the outbreak of war in 1914 witnessed Britain attempting to improve her own athletic performance by adopting her own coaching and training regimes, which were similar to those used by America.

It would be mere conjecture to suggest that Britain would have desired to approach the 1920 Games in the same way if the time and finances would have allowed it, but there are indications that, once again, an approach based on American methods was desirable from some sections of the press. The war could be another factor in how Britain now looked upon America. In 1920, the two nations were no longer rivals for world supremacy, but were now allies with a shared destiny. Britain loaned nearly £1,000 m from the United States (Britain herself had loaned £1,750m to her allies)<sup>17</sup> during the conflict, and now America did not have to rely on Britain and Lloyd-George for 'diplomatic dependence'<sup>18</sup> during the Paris Peace Conference, as they now held the power in the relationship. The press articles from the Games indicated a new spirit between the teams and one critique was headed 'Happy Anglo-American relations at Antwerp.'<sup>19</sup> It continued by describing the teams as being 'matey.'<sup>20</sup> The new friendship was demonstrated prior to the commencement of the nation's water polo match:

An unaccustomed but very pleasing incident, the outcome of the extremely cordial relations which have existed between the two countries throughout the Olympic Games occurred as the teams lined up for the start. The British swimmers have three ringing cheers for America, whose champions replied with equal heartiness with the Olympic cry, 'Rah, rah, rah, England!'<sup>21</sup>

At the previous Olympics, the conflicts between the two nations had primarily been fought out between the administrators, but had been felt by the athletes. Scenes such as those described above were unimaginable during the London and Stockholm Olympics, and the Antwerp Olympics signalled a new Olympic relationship between Britain and America.

The war also altered Britain's relationship with her Empire. The soldiers of the Dominions who went to fight for Britain, returned having fought for Canada and Australia. T O Lloyd believes the war went to 'encourage national feelings,'<sup>22</sup> and 'turned out to have the effect of helping to dissolve the Empire.'<sup>23</sup> The events at Anzac Bay for Australians and New Zealanders, and Vimy Ridge for Canadians witnessed these Dominions 'acting as nations in a way they had not done before.'<sup>24</sup> This was reflected by the manner that they desired Olympic independence at Antwerp and their relationship with the British team.

One of the desires after the poor British performance at Stockholm was for a United Empire team to be created for the Berlin Games. In the two years of preparations for the Berlin Olympics it became apparent that financially and logistically this would not be possible, but even its possibility demonstrated closeness between Britain and her Empire. Post-War this was not mentioned despite financial concerns about putting a British team together, undoubtedly owing to the sense of nationhood felt in the Dominions. New Zealand made her inaugural Olympic appearance in Antwerp (her athletes had previously been part of a combined Australasian team) and indigenous people from India competed at the Games for the first time (Norman Pritchard, a Calcutta born athlete with British parentage won two silver medals in the 200 metres and 200 metre hurdles for India in Paris, 1900).<sup>25</sup> The Indian athletes who competed were sent entirely via the funding of Dorabji Tata, the founder of Tata.<sup>26</sup>

The attitude of the British press towards the men of Empire was no different to their depictions at the previous Olympics and they saw them as firmly British. For instance, *The Manchester Guardian* wrote of the success of Earl Thomson, a Scottish born athlete who competed for Canada and remarked, 'anyway, what is won by one Briton is won by us all, and that very excellent feeling between the English and Dominion teams justifies one in saying so.'<sup>27</sup> Another article in the publication wrote that it was a 'pleasure'<sup>28</sup> to see Britain and South Africa walk away with the top spots in the 4 × 400 metres relay race. One of the

numerous reviews of the Games in *The Sporting Life* wrote how Britain and her Empire had done:

Our Empire is making a fine showing at the Games, and with a few exceptions the runners are performing splendidly. We cannot expect to gain the laurels nowadays as we did in the past when the opposition was small, but John Bull and co as represented by Great Britain and the Overseas Dominions within the British Empire is still right to the fore, and without encouragement and assistance from many quarters where it should be forthcoming. The prospects of the Empire in the remaining events are excellent.<sup>29</sup>

Such a perspective illustrated a feeling that the British press believed that Britain, her Dominions and Empire were still very much one nation, although the indication was that within the Dominions of Empire the feeling was different. This article was another that indicated the belief that Britain (and Empire), were enjoying a successful Olympics, a further illustration of how expectations between the Olympics and 1908 and 1920 had dramatically changed.

### Olympic apathy

A feature of the Olympic build up in Britain was the sense of apathy towards them being held. The sentiment emitted was a mixture of the feelings that had been present at the previous two Olympics, along with others directly relating specifically to the conditions of 1920 and the Olympics of Antwerp. This apathy was present throughout 1920, during and after the Olympic Games. Here will be a reflection upon these articles.

On the announcement of the team for Antwerp, 'Ubiquitous' of *The Athletic News*, remarked, 'what a marked contrast is the English folk's indifference to the games, and the enthusiastic interest other nations are evincing in them.'<sup>30</sup> As had been apparent at the previous Olympics there was strong sense of British disinterest towards the Games, and this was based upon many factors and these will be discussed here.

Other nations' apparent approaches towards the Olympics and sports had been a long-standing British grievance. The British felt that other nations took the Olympics too seriously, a vision that did not keep in with the British amateur sporting vision of 'sport for sports sake.' This perspective was voiced once again after the final of the water polo competition played between hosts Belgium and reigning Olympic

champions, Britain. Britain won the match 3–2, after a goal from Welshman Paulo Radmilovic just three minutes from full time, a goal that brought about an uproar in the crowd at the final whistle. The animosity died down before flaring up again when ‘God save the King’ was played in the medal ceremony. The noise was such that the music was drowned out, offending the British and subsequently the British Olympic Association (BOA) demanded a meeting of all the nations represented to protest against the insult. Consequently, an apology was printed in programmes and newspapers, but this did little to heed British annoyances.<sup>31</sup> An editorial in *The Athletic News* subheading was entitled ‘Where sportsmanship is lacking,’<sup>32</sup> and the ensuing article vented its fury, criticising how other nation’s sporting values were not up to the British:

With many people national feeling runs much too high for them to be able to pretend that they want to see the best man win. They don’t. And some peoples are by no means so considerate of the feelings of their neighbours and their hosts as they well might be.<sup>33</sup>

The feelings expressed in this match presented a major cause of British Olympic apathy. Many in Britain felt that other countries’ sportsmanship was not up to those from the British world. This point was further emphasised in a *Manchester Guardian* editorial that wrote with the same gusto:

Many English amateur sportsmen unquestionably do not quite feel at home with a kind of amateur athletics in which the expenses of competitors are wholly or partly paid for them, nor is their uneasiness quite removed by the reflection that, in a more quiet way, such things, on a smaller scale, have happened before, even in our pure land. You will find, too, the sportsman who, in some terms or other, expresses a feeling that an Olympic event is too big an event to be quite good for amateur sport. He generally means that where an athletic event is so conspicuously international, and so immensely advertised as momentous, it becomes materially worth winning to a degree which is apt to render national or individual over-anxiety to win a danger to the spirit of amateur sport, and even a possible danger to the international cordiality which a good sporting competition ought to increase.<sup>34</sup>

The opinions uttered here portray the view that British amateurs would not ask for expenses in order to compete. Although no nation



is mentioned here, there is the indication that British loathing came from the emphasis other countries placed upon specialising for events, contrary to the British perspective that her athletes competed in several sports. Amateur sporting administrator, Eustace Miles attributed foreign 'success in the games more a matter of special technique and practice than all-round physical efficiency and versatility.'<sup>35</sup> He continued by stating that he, 'doubted whether this country would ever take the trouble to go in seriously for the necessary training in order to produce the athletes who would confine their efforts to one particular phase of the games.'<sup>36</sup> These opinions gave the impression that Britain's athletes did not concentrate upon one event, but preferred to compete in many. Throughout this period of study, it is demonstrated that Britain's sportsmen were in fact specialists in their chosen sport, such as those competing in field events, although the similarity of the skills required for many of the athletic events meant that athletes could potentially compete in multiple events.

Amateur athletic administrator, Sir William Beach Thomas, brought up another long-standing British complaint about the Games; the lack of partition between amateurs and professionals in some nations. In *The Daily Mail* he singled out Finland as a nation that, 'possess no professionals – nor create a universal standard of what shall be judged best in style.'<sup>37</sup> He also insinuated that other nations were the same and this limited British chances of success, creating a sense of Olympic apathy within Britain.

A *Sporting Life* editorial wrote of the manner by which sport should be played, stating that Britain was 'the home of amateur athletic sport',<sup>38</sup> sport, this editorial believed had to be played 'for the good of the game, for playing the game as it should be played, for sport for sport's sake.' Another editorial in the same publication concluded, 'one more objection which British sportsmen have to Olympic Games is that they do not appear to develop the true amateur spirit.'<sup>39</sup>

Other journalists took a different perspective to the approaches of other nations. Writing upon the cycling competition, H W Barlett remarked although 'England' had not been triumphant in Antwerp, he felt that they had done 'wonderfully well,' because 'considering the limitations under which they train, compared with the life devoted almost entirely to the attainment of physical fitness which the amateurs of some countries have enjoyed, they did wonders.'<sup>40</sup> This editorial included none of the bitterness found in other articles, preferring to accept that Britain had her own ideals, different to those of other nations. The tone of this article was one replicated across the British

press during the 1920 Olympics. It appeared that now there was an acceptance that other nation's definition of amateurism was different to Britain's.

The British preference for her own sporting events rather than the Olympics was a source of apathy present at both the London and Stockholm Olympics. This issue had been particularly prevalent in 1908 when members of the press sought to explain the reasons for the low attendances in London. *The Field* reminded its readers of this in its Olympic preview edition in July 1920, remarking that the attendance at the White City Stadium and 'our national love of sport turned out, curiously enough to be rather harmful to attendances.'<sup>41</sup> It further expanded 'as a nation, to attend innumerable sporting meetings of every description all through the year that the addition of one more to the crowded calendar was at first scarcely understood.'<sup>42</sup> The article continued by using the examples of the Henley Regatta, Wimbledon and cricket as prominent British events. Writing about the Antwerp Olympics, a *Manchester Guardian* editorial gave the impression that little had changed:

The trouble is that they simply leave the general body of British sportsmen cold, at best, tepid. They have never generated here any fervour of popular interest like that which surrounds county cricket and especially League football. Rowing men and lawn-tennis players care far more about Henley and the English championships than about the Olympic events; even among international contests the Olympic ones have never been followed so excitedly as those for the Davis and the America Cups. This year the public subscription organised to defray some of the expenses of our representatives at Antwerp has been at any rate a relative failure.<sup>43</sup>

Such an article is reminiscent of those written in both 1908 and 1912 and demonstrated the British belief in the importance of her own events over the Olympics. To some in the press, the lack of British interest in the Olympics was a mystery, such as the following from Middlesbrough's *Sports Gazette*:

Britain is the most athletic country of the old world and in the new only in her children states is the passion for sporting activities more widely spread. Yet it is Britain who displays the least vivid interest in the Olympic meeting at Antwerp .... Had the movement been British its character would then have thrown themselves whole-heartedly

into the contests. As it is they are content to play their own games with ardour and out of international goodwill, when the appointed years come around, to devote the scraps and oddments of their abilities to the more mechanical pursuits of other races. That the country does not figure at the head of the Olympic prize lists may cause distress to a few partisan onlookers; should a desire for victory on the foreign field draw off the British youth from their natural forms of sport then there would be a real cause for regret.<sup>44</sup>

This editorial offers some potential explanations as to why Britain was apathetic towards the Olympics. Here it is suggested that if the movement had been British in character (in organisation and ethically), Britain would be more open to them. This editorial also states the importance of British sport, suggesting that if the Olympics were preferred to national sport that would be a real loss.

Comparable to the feeling after the 1912 Olympics, in the aftermath of the 1920 Olympics there were articles that called for Britain to remove itself from the Olympics, further revealing British thoughts and identity towards the Games. Charles Otway, who had been against Britain participation in the Antwerp Olympics, reversed his opinion after the Games and made a statement of British superiority. He stated the Games would almost 'certainly fail' if Britain dropped out and declared that, 'Britain was still the greatest sporting nation of the world.'<sup>45</sup>

In the aftermath of the Antwerp Games, the general British perspective was for continued British involvement in the Olympic Games. Articles appeared suggesting what should be done to ensure the nation was improved for the future.<sup>46</sup> In an editorial by 'Pleader' in *The Athletic News*, he offered several suggestions for how the Britain could improve its performance:

Bearing in mind the struggle there has been to raise men and money for the 1920 Games, would it raise men and money for the 1924 Games, would it not be just as well for the AAA to maintain an Olympic Sub-Committee, charged to meet at certain definite intervals, whose sole object shall be to keep alive the Olympic tradition, and secure on the 1924 team's behalf such facilities and advantages as may from time to time be possible.

... The cost of maintaining such a committee would be very small, but its existence would mean that when the games drew near we

should be prepared, and indeed a scheme for building up a team is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

It would not be too soon to start next season by looking after youngsters, and a series of Olympic events—field events. I particularly mean, such as the hop, step and jump, long jump, high jump, pole jump, javelin, hammer, etc, etc—should be instituted and for these certain standards medals might be on offer for standard performances. Experts at these games are not developed in one season, or anything like it, and we cannot start too soon.<sup>47</sup>

The suggestion in this editorial indicated an approach that was did not too dissimilar from that seen prior to the outbreak of the war, such as that field events were faced with the same issues that the AFEA encountered in the period between 1910–14. ‘Strephon’ of *The Athletic News* further emphasised the comparable position for field events between 1919 and 1920, explaining, ‘In particular field events must be encouraged. It should be possible to develop jumpers and weight jugglers, if only the men can be shown the proper methods.’<sup>48</sup> He continued of how British preparations needed to begin in earnest; ‘What is needed is a plan likely to unearth the necessary talent. Let that scheme be evolved immediately and not left until 1923, when-it will be too late. Strike while the iron is yet hot-while enthusiasm has been generated.’<sup>49</sup>

From comparing the Olympic Games of Stockholm and Antwerp offered very similar returns for Britain. In Antwerp, Britain’s medals were 15 gold, 15 silver and 13 bronze, by comparison in Stockholm it was 10 gold, 15 silver and 15 bronze. Britain had won five more Olympic Championships in 1920 compared to 1912 and the number of gold medals should be viewed as the most significant determiner between success and failure at the Olympics. The tone expressed in the two Olympics suggests a bigger difference than just five championships; rather a totally different British attitude towards what warranted success and failure at the Games.

Excluding the comments regarding field events, the negativity that had been present regarding British performance during the London and Stockholm Olympics was not present in Antwerp. From the coverage there appeared to be an acceptance of the dominance of the United States as the premier Olympic nation, with the consequence of this being that the successes of British athletes was celebrated, rather than her failures chastised. There are several contributory reasons for this new British attitude. World war one should be considered a major factor, as

some of Britain's experienced and developing athletes were killed and others were unable to progress as had previous generations enjoyed because of the lack of competition. Expectations were no doubt dampened because of awareness about the shortage of quality facilities and money to help athletes prepare.

With defeat rather than victory being the widespread expectation, notably missing from the coverage of these Games are articles that bemoaned the defeats as an indication of British national decadence. This was a significant part of the coverage particularly within the English media during the London and Stockholm Games, but this was missing from the press coverage from Antwerp. Another prominent theme in the coverage of the previous Olympics was comment about the doubtful amateurism of other nations athletes compared to the British. Aspects of this were still present in Antwerp, but the bitterness felt towards the United States that formed the majority of this criticism had now evaporated. No longer were the successes of American athletes branded as victories for 'professionalism' and 'coaching,' but now there was an acceptance of their methods.

### **British performance in field events at the 1920 Olympic Games**

After the 1912 Olympics, field events were targeted as sports in which Britain could make vast improvement in her bid to gain Olympic supremacy. In Stockholm, these events had failed to yield a medal and the majority of athletes finished at the wrong end of the field. The consequence of these performances was renewed interest from both the BOA and AAA in an attempt to improve the performance, via the provision of coaching, equipment and most significantly the appointment of Walter Knox, the first ever British Olympic athletic coach, a specialist in field events.

After the war, the level of progress had had been made in the two years prior to the outbreak of the war had been lost and owing to financial restrictions the same approach could not be repeated. Despite the shortfall in investment, the Amateur Field Events Association's (AFEA) 'Captain' FAM Webster believed Britain was close to achieving success in field events. He thought that if the most basic of training could be applied then competitive athletes would be found,<sup>50</sup> although Webster appeared to be on his own in his optimism.

A long-standing issue for field events was that they received a poor reception in the media and little attention from the public, two

elements that went hand in hand. An article depicting the 1920 AAA Championships indicated that this pre-war attitude was still prevalent after it. These Championships enjoyed record attendances, but the indication was that field events were not part of the attraction. *The Sporting Life's* review reported 'the crowd did not wait to see the finish of the javelin throw and pole jump,'<sup>51</sup> concluding it was time 'that the AAA dropped this latter, more acrobatic event than athletic event, for which there is seldom real competition.'<sup>52</sup> In addition, as had been the case in athletic meetings prior to the war, British interest in the pole vault was minimal, with no home entrant. In total only two of the nine field events championships were won by a British athlete.<sup>53</sup>

The field events at the 1920 Olympics replicated the previous Olympics with United States athletes at the forefront of many field events competitions. Prior to the Games, the American Athletic Union (AAU) Championships took place and 'Strephon' compared the winning distances in the AAU and the AAA Championships as demonstrated in the Table 9.2 below and demonstrates a disparity in standards.

'Strephon' concluded his observations stating, 'only three AAA Championships were won by Britons, so that the real standard of merit was lower even than the feats recorded might suggest. The United States will make a hatful of points and of the Field Events (at the Olympic Games).'<sup>54</sup> He feared that in Antwerp there was no prospect of British success in field events.

The shortage of funding and the small possibility that field events men would fight for a podium position in Antwerp contributed to a

*Table 9.2* Performances at the 1920 AAA and AAU Championships

1920 Champs'	AAA	AAU
Long Jump	D B Lowrie(USA) 22.4	S Butler 24.8
High Jump	B H Baker 6.3 1/4	J Murphy 6.4 1/4
Hop, step and jump	C E Lively 43 3 1/2	S Laadets 48.1
Pole Vault	A Framquenelle (Fra) 10.6	F V Fees 13.1
16lb weight	A R Paoli (Fra) 43.10	P M MacDonald 47 1/2
56lb weight	W W Coe (USA) 23.5	P M MacDonald 37 1/4
Hammer	T Speers (USA) 140 5 1/2	P Ryan 169.4
Discus	P Quinn (Ire) 123 5 1/4	A P Pope 146.3
Javelin	F L Murrey (USA)149.9	M S Angler 192.10

*Note:* Nationalities of the non-British winners of the AAA Championships have been added by the author.

*Source:* 'Performances at the 1920 AAA and AAU Championships', *The Athletic News*, 2 August 1920, p 2.

media standpoint that Britain should not send any field events athletes to the Olympics.<sup>55</sup> Despite this outlook, six British athletes (along with a seventh who also competed in the track events), made the journey to Antwerp. None of these men won a medal, with sixth position being the best British return (achieved by both Benjamin Howard Baker in the high jump, and Thomas Nicolson in the hammer). Prior to the Games there had been high hopes for Nicolson, but like had happened eight years previously in Stockholm his farming commitments caused him problems and he was forced to travel at the last minute and consequently he arrived late for the hammer qualifying competition. Only a special exemption allowed him to compete at the end of the day and make the qualifying distance for the final.<sup>56</sup> The sixth place he achieved in the final could partially be attributed to his late arrival.

The majority of British entrants failed to make the finals of their particular events, including future track medallist Harold Abrahams, who competed in the long jump.<sup>57</sup> His distance of 6.05 metres was the second longest of the British contingent, with William Hunter leading the British athletes with a distance of 6.42 metres. This jump was still a long way short of the man that finished in sixth and last place in the final, Templeton of the USA, who jumped 6.67 metres.<sup>58</sup> This result demonstrated that even in one of the field events sports where Britain had a long-standing interest, her best athletes were still a long way off the mark.

As had been the case at Stockholm, there was no British entrant in either the javelin or pole vault (or the 56 pound throw that made its only Olympic appearance). Encouragingly for Britain, there were multiple competitors in the jumping events, and, although none of these competed for medals, their participation was an indication that there was a depth of athletes in these sports. Although it was the lack of medals that the media focused upon in the media and Albert Hill described them as a 'wash out.'<sup>59</sup> *The Field* remarked that 'Great Britain was remarkable only for her failures'<sup>60</sup> in field athletics and offered an opinion of British attitudes towards field events:

such events are regarded in this country as on an infinitely lower plane than that of the track events is but a proof that they are misunderstood by the very people who have it in their power to raise them ... Many a man has joined his local athletic club in order to get training in some field event, and has found too late that his special event never appears on the programmes of his club's meetings. He naturally gets discouraged, ceases practice, and sinks into oblivion.<sup>61</sup>

Such an account illustrates how, despite the work of the AFEA and AAA, little appeared to have changed for the perception of field events within Britain. These sports remained neglected and forgotten about in many athletic clubs. The following, from *The Scotsman*, illustrated the regard by which the javelin was held; ‘throwing the javelin is something of an esoteric sport that has not yet become acclimatised in England.’<sup>62</sup>

Also, *The Manchester Guardian* described the preliminary rounds of the hop, skip and jump and pole vault as ‘tedious,’<sup>63</sup> while *The Field* believed the hop, step and jump was ‘unworthy of inclusion’<sup>64</sup> in the Olympics, stating it to be an ‘anti-climax,’ and describing the jump ‘a poor thing, short and slow.’<sup>65</sup> It also mocked the pole vault stating, ‘athletes (carry their poles) over their shoulders like knockers-up at Oldham, and they should jump as high as houses, throwing up their legs and tucking in their stomachs with monstrous elasticity.’<sup>66</sup> Such mockeries would not have looked out of place alongside depictions from 12 years before, demonstrating the extent of the apathy that was still present.

Among the negativity, there were some positive comments regarding field event competitions from the press. *The Field* wrote in contrast to *The Scotsman*, remarking that it was ‘unfortunate’ that the event was not widely practiced in Britain, because ‘we do not know the grace and skill which it develops.’<sup>67</sup> It continued by praising the winner, Jonny Myrra, as being ‘quite Hellenic in beauty of poise at every moment of his performance,’ before concluding how the event could be compared to cricket. The belief indicated was that the action would be ‘called’ a throw, but ‘a long fielder like APF Chapman (an up and coming young cricketer) could, with practice, add many feet to the present record.’<sup>68</sup> Such an article indicated that there was some interest and thoughts of field events in Britain, also an arrogance, as there was the belief present that if Britain desired, it would become successful at the event.

*The Athletic News*, correspondent ‘Strephon’ also wrote positively about field events in his column where he gave the performances of the Games. He stated his number one performance of the Games was ‘the record Javelin cast, under disadvantageous conditions, of the Finn, J Myrra.’<sup>69</sup> Second in his list also came from field events and the pole vaulting of F K Foss. These performances were rated higher than the running of Albert Hill (number four) and the marathon performance of Hannes Kolehmainen (number six). Such perspectives indicate that not all British journalists were adverse to field events and there was admiration for them.

From analysing the British field event performance in Antwerp and the media perceptions of the events, there had been little change in the event’s perception since the London Olympics. Britain was still unable



to put forward athletes for all events, and, in those that she did compete, her athletes were the also-rans, missing out on Olympic finals and finishing a long way down the field.

England in particular continued to be apathetic towards field events; this apathy signified that the indifference was the expression of English identity (and Welsh identity). Ireland had demonstrated its love for the events in the early part of the twentieth century (admittedly this had died away along with general Irish interest in athletics), Scotland had pedigree in many of the field events, and in Tom Nicolson had Britain's finest field event athlete in Antwerp. For field events to become successful across Britain there was a need for investment, but most crucially a change in English identity towards them. England was the dominant nation in British athletics and only a change in its thoughts towards field events could ensure investment.

Post-Olympics, the English-based press gave some suggestions as to why field events struggled to gain a footing. *The Sporting Life* believed the general sense of British Olympic indifference was the reason; it reasoned that if the nation cared about the Games 'there would have been hundreds of youngsters practicing<sup>70</sup> field events to ensure that the nation was competitive. It continued by stating that there is 'no enthusiasm here for the Olympic Games which do not provide the necessary incentive for the Britisher to cultivate events which do not appeal to him.'<sup>71</sup> Such a perspective was a strong indication of British Olympic apathy and suggested that the events themselves were not entirely at fault, but demonstrated they had little grounding in English athletic culture.

Despite the apathy, 'Strephon' looked towards the future and stated that field events should be targeted as an area for improvement. He believed, 'In particular field events must be encouraged. It should be possible to develop jumpers and weight juggers, if only the men can be shown the proper methods.'<sup>72</sup> This was yet further indication that field events required coaching to encourage athletes to attempt them but they did have support.

The same publication included the views of 'a whole hearted field events enthusiast' within a 'Pleaser' article. This gave yet further indication of the struggles facing field events athletes, along with some guidance of what could be done to ensure improvement for the 1924 Olympics:

It is not so much the track man who needs the special coaching (at least in the elementary stages), but rather the field games exponent, and the only solution I know of is to get the clubs to cater for the big men, and have the implements for their use. In the case of jumpers your give

facilities to a man with a bit of a spring in him, and he comes on. But the man who is the average of a nation's physique is never allowed an opportunity of displaying his strength-and very often remarkable agility. If clubs were to have an occasional discus or javelin event, or a short-put it would act as a stimulus to promoting bodies, and the benefit would undoubtedly be felt at the 1924 Olympic Games.<sup>73</sup>

All three of these perspectives indicate that the situation for field events in Britain in 1920 was comparable to what it had been in 1910. The actions of the AFEA, AAA and BOC had attempted to change British field events culture from 1910 onwards and in 1913 and 1914 they made progress towards enticing national athletic culture to be more inclusive of the events. These came through the appointment of a full-time coach who was a field events specialist and inclusion of all Olympic field events at the AAA Championships, but the shortness of time before the outbreak of war prevented them from becoming engrained into British athletic identity. In 1919 and 1920, the outlook towards athletics resembled 1908 more than 1914 and field events were on the outside.

# 10

## The Perspective of the 1920 Olympics in the Nations of Britain

### Ireland and the 1920 Olympics

The period between the Stockholm and Antwerp Olympics witnessed many significant changes for Ireland, particularly in the manner by which nationalism was expressed across the country. The most significant event with this regard was the 'Easter Rising' of April 1916, which witnessed nationalists take over the General Post Office in Dublin on Easter Sunday and proclaim an independent Ireland. Oonagh Walsh believes the event was important to Ireland for a 'variety of perspectives, not least because the Republic was declared during its course, and because it marked a break in Irish politics between constitutionalism and militarism.'<sup>1</sup> This event, along with the attempt to impose conscription upon Ireland in April 1918, in the opinion of Rhodes James transformed the nationalist movement 'away from limited Home Rule to full independence.'<sup>2</sup>

The 1918 General election demonstrated that the majority of the Irish population supported the independence cause, with Republican Party Sinn Fein, gaining 73 out of the 105 Irish seats. This action 'catapulted Irish republicanism from an obscure, minority obsession into a potential form of government for a self-governing Ireland.'<sup>3</sup> These new members of Parliament demonstrated their opposition to Britain by refusing to sit in Parliament, instead creating the 'Dail Eineann' – Irish assembly, which adopted a declaration of independence and subsequently an Irish republic. In early 1919, it established ministries, raised a public loan, and called on the people to boycott the Royal Irish Constabulary because they were 'agents of a foreign power.'<sup>4</sup>

At the same time as the 'Dail' met, the 'Irish war of Independence' began, continuing until July 1921. This was a guerrilla war by Irish

nationalists against the British forces in Ireland, and the Royal Irish Constabulary in particular. Principally this war involved:

shootings of individuals from behind hedges or at street corners; ambushes of police convoys by the 'flying squads' of the IRA [Irish Republican Army] on narrow country roads ... Black and Tan parties roaring into quiet villages at night in their lorries, with searchlights blazing, to turn out the occupants of a few poor cottages and set the buildings afire.<sup>5</sup>

During the Olympic Games of 1920, Ireland was very much in the grips of this conflict. In Britain, the government had attempted to end the conflict via the 'Government of Ireland Bill', introduced into the House of Commons in February. It envisaged the creation of two Irish states, with two Irish assemblies, 'but was intended to serve as a machine for future Irish Unity.'<sup>6</sup>

As had been evident at previous Olympic Games there was a desire for a separate Ireland team in Antwerp. Politically, the notion of an Independent Irish nation looked like more of a possibility in 1920, although from an Olympic perspective the potential for an Irish team looked more unlikely in the view of Kevin McCarthy. He states that in order to be prepared for the 1916 Olympics, the Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA) and Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) had put aside their differences and combined forces to create a combined Irish team. The pre-war good feelings between the two associations did not continue after it, as Ireland was a changed land and the IAAA's close association saw its credibility lost. Subsequently the GAA looked to establish an 'Irish Olympic Council', headed by J J Keane, prior to Antwerp, but it failed to establish a relationship with either the British Olympic Association (BOA) or International Olympic Committee (IOC).<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, Ireland did not have her own Olympic team in Antwerp because of the same rule that had prevented her having a team at the 1908 and 1912 Olympics.<sup>8</sup> Only an independent Irish nation would have been able to enter a team. The lack of an Irish team brought about talk of a protest; such as stated by Matthew Llewellyn:

In the build-up to the Antwerp Games, a series of media reports claimed that Ireland's leading Olympic medal hopefuls were threatening to boycott the Games in protest against the BOA's decision to oppose the creation of an independent Irish Olympic team.<sup>9</sup>

*The Freeman's Journal* was one publication that still hoped for an Irish team in the summer of 1920. One of its editorials stated, 'it is hoped that a move will be made to have Ireland represented and the Celt in his rightful place in the contests of skill, strength and stamina in the Olympic stadia.'<sup>10</sup> As ever, this nationalist publication was at the forefront of the desire for an Irish team.

*The Athletic News* included a statement that Irish athletes were refusing to compete for Britain in Antwerp. It indicated, 'Irishmen have refused to compete at Antwerp under the British flag, and only if allowed to do so as members of an independent nation.'<sup>11</sup> It continued by stating that the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) had heard nothing about this, and believed the Irish contingent that was just five athletes was still due to be leaving with the rest of the British team on Wednesday evening.<sup>12</sup> The belief of the unnamed journalist behind the article was that this call had come from the United States, an apparent 'hotbed' of anti-British sentiment with regard to Irish matters.<sup>13</sup>

The apparent refusal of Irishmen to compete for the British team appeared to come to nothing, as there were a number who were part of the British team for Antwerp. Two of these athletes won medals, both part of the winning water polo team (F W Barrett and Noel Purcell). As had occurred in both London and Stockholm there were successes among the Irish-Americans, most notably by Paddy Ryan in the hammer and Pat MacDonald in the 56-pound weight, who both won gold.

Press attention of the Antwerp Olympics was diminished in comparison to previous Olympics, but this was similar to what occurred across the British press. Many publications that had previously been a plentiful source for comment ignored the Olympics, while some that did failed to make the link between the athletes and their Irish identity, partly owing to the high percentage of Press Association reports that were used.

One publication that did present its own views was the nationalist publication *The Freeman's Journal*. It wrote that the lack of an Irish team ensured that its Olympic coverage interest was reduced, 'This year our native contests precede the Olympic events, and being still denied the right to self-respecting participation, we must turn our attention to the home championships.'<sup>14</sup> Despite this statement, the lack of coverage across the Irish press ensured that its coverage was some of the most comprehensive from Ireland. The coverage within it was anti-British and viewed the Games from an American perspective demonstrated by

a picture on its front page under the headline, America at the Olympic Games.<sup>15</sup>

*The Irish News and Belfast Morning News* had been a plentiful source of comment about the Olympics at London and Stockholm, but included just one article from the Antwerp Games and focused upon the Irish-Americans competing at the Games. The article was entitled 'Sure Yankee Winners,'<sup>16</sup> with the subheading 'America depends on Irish Brawn at Olympic contests.' The ensuing article was just a half column and focused upon Paddy Ryan, Pat MacDonald and Matt M'Grath, who were due to compete in the field events contests. This nationalist publication included no mention of British athletes in this article and made no further reference of the Games in its pages.

The *Belfast News-letter*, had previously included numerous reports from the Olympics, but from Antwerp, these were sporadic, but detailed. Its headlines wrote from both a British and American perspective; such as 'Britain defeats America at Water Polo,'<sup>17</sup> 'Fine British victory in the 1,500 metres flat race,'<sup>18</sup> 'Great Britain takes 800 metres flat race'<sup>19</sup> and 'American aquatic success.'<sup>20</sup> The article that followed the latter headline wrote of American success in rowing and swimming, but also of Britain's defeat to Norway in the association football competition. Such an article indicates that the newspaper had a mixed political perspective to the Games, uncommon from both the Irish press at these Olympics and those prior to Antwerp.

The most significant comments within the Irish press from an Olympic perspective during the Antwerp Games were those regarding future Irish Olympic participation. Towards the end of the Games, *The Freeman's Journal* included an interview with former leading Irish athlete, turned sporting administrator, J J Keane. His desire was for an independent Irish team to compete in Antwerp, but one that competed under the union flag. In the interview, he stated that he 'had just returned from Antwerp, where he was engaged in looking after Ireland's case before the Comite Olympique Internationale (IOC).'<sup>21</sup> Keane stated that he had met with the President of the IOC, Pierre Coubertin, who was apparently in 'appreciation of Ireland's position was in keeping with his recognition of our athletic prestige.'<sup>22</sup> This article suggested that Coubertin was aware of the Irish plight, something not indicated elsewhere. Keane's visit to Antwerp should be considered an important step for Irish Olympic independence as this represents action rather than just words as had previously been the case.

The same article also commented about how Irish athletes would prepare if they were thrust into the Olympic Games. This suggested an approach comparable with that of Pre War Britain:

The position now is that Ireland is thrown upon her merits as an athletic unit, and no possible means of re-asserting our prestige must be neglected. This means that good men and promising talent will have to receive every attention, and if we cannot give them the specialised care that the Americans do, we must at least see that they lack none of the primary essentials for the development of their natural capabilities, which is that the average Irish athlete needs.<sup>23</sup>

The approach suggested here indicates a desire for organising coaching and training, close to the mentioned American approach. This demonstrates a desire to follow the practices of America, different to that desired in Britain at this time.

For multiple reasons both the Irish competing contingent and the press coverage was substantially smaller than it had been for the London and Stockholm Olympics. From a participation perspective, Irish athletic interest had been declining prior to the 1908 Olympics and further restrictions had been brought about by the conflicts between the IAAA and GAA. Reflecting on the period, Kevin McCarthy believes that Irish athletics had taken a step back during this period:

The implication from all this must be that interest in athletics had declined but was not extinct, while the Olympic Games from the viewpoint of Irish successes or even participation in competition was reduced to a peripheral existence in the Irish sporting psyche, more or less as it had been back in 1896.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the decline in Irish interest, it had no upon impact Irish identities. The nationalist press demonstrated its identity by not concentrating its coverage on the current Olympic Games, but preferring to focus on the future and hopes for an Irish Olympic team.

Ireland's hopes of becoming an Olympic nation were realised in December 1921 with the establishment of an Irish Free State. It was granted Dominion status, but was effectively an independent nation from Britain, although those in Ulster in the very North of the country remained part of Britain. Ireland's new status was now comparable to that of the Dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. J J Keane subsequently became Ireland's first member of the IOC

in 1922, and founded the Olympic Council of Ireland.<sup>25</sup> He was instrumental in ending the feud that existed between the IAAA and GAA, and became the first president of the new association, the National Athletic and Cycling Association of Ireland, which brought the two associations together.

This began a new chapter in Irish history, one that was to change again in October 1922 when Ireland gained complete independence from Britain.<sup>26</sup> In 1924, Ireland's first ever Olympic team competed at the Paris Olympics, and apart from the 1936 Games, when an internal agreement prohibited Irish participation, Ireland has sent a team to every Olympic Games since.

### Scotland and the 1920 Olympics

Scotland's contribution to the British military during The Great War had been significant, and consequently she lost many men in service. The indication from the sporting press in the immediate post-war period was that this had done little to change her position within Britain, as she primarily projected a British identity.

In May 1920, the monthly Glasgow publication, *Leisure and Life*, wrote about the British love of sport, indicating that post-war Scottish identity was as it had been pre-war:

One of the results of the recent war has been to prove that the feature of British life which our opponents sneeringly condemned in pre-war days, namely their addiction to sport, has been the salvation of the nation, and that the British 'oaf' has to be reckoned with.<sup>27</sup>

Scotland was the biggest provider to the British athletic team for Antwerp with 28 athletes.<sup>28</sup> Of these, seven returned with medals; with gold's for Robert Lindsay (4 × 400 metre relay), John Sewell (tug of war) and William Peacock (water polo). There were also two silver and two bronze medals won by Scottish athletes. Despite this good return, there was still a sense of disappointment about the overall performance, primarily the performance of field events athlete, Thomas Nicolson. He went to Antwerp with expectations of winning a medal in the hammer competition, but finished fourth.

Prior to the Olympics, the Scottish Amateur Athletics Association (SAAA) was slow to put its support behind the Olympics and British participation in them. In February 1919, the Association formed a reconstruction committee, although it was separate from the ambitious



reconstruction schemes of the AAA. The SAAA's preference was to 'wait and see'<sup>29</sup> how reconstruction went in England before adopting its policies. The SAAA decided that it would attempt more low-key reconstruction. The SAAA also demonstrated some autonomy by giving its support for the Belgian Olympic Committee to host the Games in June 1919<sup>30</sup> and then in November 1919<sup>31</sup> for British participation in Antwerp. This represented one of the last British sporting associations to get behind the Olympic cause, four months after the AAA.

In swimming, the Scottish Amateur Swimming Association's (SASA) general committee remarked on the growth of the sport since peace had been declared in the spring of 1920. It reported that 16 new clubs had appeared since the war, and now there were about 80 clubs in total across Scotland. Its position towards the Olympics was to follow the lead taken by their English counterparts. It stated:

The question of Scotland taking part in the Olympic Games at Antwerp in August was discussed, and it was agreed to await the decision of the English Associations on the subject, and to assist the Association as far as possible in the event of its deciding to take part in the Games.<sup>32</sup>

Continuing the trend across the British press, coverage within the Scottish press of the Antwerp Olympics was reduced in comparison to the London and Stockholm Olympics. Also comparable to the Scottish coverage from the two previous Olympics was the British outlook from the Scottish press, and the disregard for the performances of Scottish athletes.

Throughout the period under consideration here, it had been *The Scotsman* that had devoted the most column inches towards the Olympics and this continued at Antwerp. As in previous Olympics, its coverage came via the bland depictions of Press Association reports, commonly consisting of results appearing alongside a few short lines of description. The preference for these reports may explain why 'England' was commonly used when 'Britain' would have been more suitable, as these reports were written for a primarily English audience.<sup>33</sup>

The *Edinburgh Evening News* provided a more interesting perspective upon the Games. Its coverage from Antwerp was irregular, with articles commonly consisting of around one-third commentary and two-thirds results. As was typical across this period, this publication was pro-British in its outlook. For example, its heading from 16 August was 'British athletes start well at Antwerp',<sup>34</sup> and four days later, it was

'Britain wins tug of war' and 'Albert Hill's brilliant victory in the 1500 metres.'<sup>35</sup>

Both of these publications and the others examined, made substantially fewer Olympic references during the Antwerp Games than compared to the pre-war era. The preference of the sporting coverage within these publications was to concentrate on the sporting events that were taking place within Britain, rather than the Olympic Games.

The indication from the limited amount of sources that can be used to analyse the Scottish perspective on the Olympics is that there was little interest within the Scottish press for the Antwerp Olympics. The Scottish press' coverage was little different to the general tone presented within other sections of the British press. As had been the case in their coverage of the previous Olympics the performances of Scottish athletes were ignored, with the coverage focusing upon how the entire British team fared. This angle of coverage is comparable with that in the unionist-Irish press, different to the Welsh coverage that included reference to Welsh athletes.

## **Wales and the 1920 Olympics**

Welsh political influence within Britain grew during The Great War. In 1916, Wales had its first ever Prime Minister, when the Caernarfonshire raised David Lloyd-George took office in December. Along with him, he brought a 'clutch' of countrymen, men who were to become some of his most trusted advisors.

Wales suffered a series of domestic crises during the war from the mining industry, with the continual threat of strikes by miners' unions, events that gave the British Government some of their 'worst domestic nightmares.'<sup>36</sup> Post-war, coal remained the principality's primary employer, and in 1921 it employed four in every ten Welshmen.<sup>37</sup> Gwyn Williams believes that when the Welsh economy is compared to the rest of Britain was 'perhaps the most buoyant and expansive in Britain.'<sup>38</sup>

Comparable to the other nations of Britain, Welshmen served the British Wartime cause in great numbers with over 280,000 Welshmen serving during the conflict, a proportionately higher number than came from England and Scotland.<sup>39</sup>

As had been the case in previously studied Olympics, at Antwerp Wales provided a small but significant number of athletes for the British Olympic team. Four of them won medals, all of which were gold. As had been the case in London and Stockholm the leading Welsh athlete

was Cardiff's Paulo Radmilovic. After winning the water polo competition in both previous Olympics, along with a swimming title in 1908, Radmilovic was Britain's most successful Olympian. In Antwerp, he was 34 years old, and in Belgium solely to compete in the water polo competition, part of a team that included fellow Welshman, Christopher Jones. These men were part of the last ever British Olympic water polo winning team.

The remaining two Welsh medallists from Antwerp were members of the victorious 4 × 400 metre relay team. They were Cecil Griffiths from Neath and John Ainsworth-Davis from Aberystwyth, along with Robert Lindsay and Guy Butler who both came from England they combined to defeat the South African team by 0.8 seconds in the final.

The two Welsh newspapers that have principally been used throughout this research, *Western Mail* and *South Wales News* (that had previously been known as the *South Wales Daily News*, prior to 1918), did not cover the 1920 Olympic Games with the same enthusiasm as the previous two Games. In keeping with the trend reflected across the British media, much of their coverage was nothing more than results, although on occasion they did include some brief reports of the events. Also lacking were the editorials that had provided a wealth of intrigue and discussion at the London and Stockholm Olympics.

As had been the case in previous Olympics, the Welsh press confused the name of the British team, stating it to be of 'England' and the athletes 'Englishmen', such as occurred in the *South Wales News*. One article wrote about the performance of the 'English team',<sup>40</sup> and another headline wrote of 'More British success.'<sup>41</sup> *The South Wales Echo* was another publication that wrote of England at the Games. On 4 September its headline was 'England's surprise Football defeat',<sup>42</sup> in reference to Britain's 3-1 defeat to Norway. The same publication included an editorial by Eugene Court, on the Boxing competition, this also referred to England:

The Olympic tournament is a thing of the past, but there were certain features-none too pleasant-which cannot be allowed to pass without comment. It is the English way never to question decisions by referees our judges, however wrong they may be, and I am proud to say that our boys accepted several unfortunate verdicts at Antwerp in the right spirit. But from what I learn, and my information comes from the most reliable and impartial sources there were happenings which, surely, should never have been.<sup>43</sup>

This editorial states the team was ‘English,’ although it is written from a British perspective, an indication that despite references towards Wales within the Welsh press, their identity was still of Britain. The editorial’s interest also came from its perspectives about the Olympic boxing competition, although it demonstrated apathy towards the event, based upon the controversial decisions made during the competition and the manner by which other nations conducted themselves. The indication here is that other nations did not keep to the same morals as the English, an aspect that had been present within the press at the prior Olympics examined.

Typical of the Welsh coverage of the Antwerp Olympics was that presented in the *South Wales Echo*. Its Olympic-related articles were sporadic, but those articles that appeared gave a Welsh perspective upon proceedings. An example of this came prior to the commencement of the Olympics, when it gave the names of the three Welshmen that trialled for the water polo Team,<sup>44</sup> but did not state who, if any had been selected in future editions. Its reports from the Games were infrequent, and when they were present they commonly just listed the results, such as its article from 18 August. On this occasion, it listed the results of the 800 metres, high jump and 5000 metre competitions.<sup>45</sup>

The Swansea-based weekly sports newspaper *Sporting News*, wrote from a similar perspective about the Olympics. Its general focus was on Welsh sport, primarily that taking place in Swansea and South Wales, and its Olympic reporting focused on local athletes’ fortunes. Its coverage from Antwerp was not regular, appearing for the first time on 21 August, when it included a short reference to the lawn tennis competition and a picture of local runner Cecil Griffiths, who had been selected for the Antwerp athletics team.<sup>46</sup> Cardiff’s Paulo Radmilovic’s picture was included on 4 September, but this is to signify that he was victorious in the 100 yards championship in Swansea on 2 September,<sup>47</sup> not to comment about his fourth Olympic gold medal, which was ignored by the publication.

The coverage within *Sporting News* is comparable to other regional sporting newspapers examined for this research, such as Middlesbrough’s *Sports Gazette* and Southampton’s *The Football and Sports Gazette*.<sup>48</sup> All three of these publications concentrate solely on sport taking place in their locality, make few references to more national sport and mention the Olympics rarely. The indication from these newspapers was that there was little interest in events taking place in Antwerp, and a preference for local sporting matters. This perspective is arguably true of the majority of the British press during these Olympics.

The sentiment of those articles regarding the Olympics demonstrates no difference in Welsh Olympic identity than prior to the war. As had been present in the earlier coverage, the successes of British athletes were celebrated, although when Welsh athletes were successful they took prominence within the coverage. The coverage of the Welsh press was in direct contrast to that given by the Scottish press, who ignored their athletes' performances and concentrated almost upon the British perspective.

Paulo Radmilovic had been at the centre of Welsh Olympic coverage in both London and Stockholm and this was the case once again in Antwerp. His performance in the water polo semi-final victory over the United States received extensive coverage in the *Western Mail*:

The outstanding figure in the semi-finals in the Olympic water polo contests at Antwerp on Thursday between Great Britain and America was Radmilovic, the Cardiff and Welsh international swimmer, who scored three out of Britain's seven goals against America's three. He was playing on the top of his form, as the following description of the great contest will show. A great and gruelling game ensued. Britain went out early to the attack, Radmilovic, the British captain, soon scoring. Dean made the score two, and Peacock added the third goal. These successes were vociferously greeted by a small, but quite adequate body of British partisan Union Jacks. The Americans then got a look-in and scored. At half-time the position was 3 goals to 1.

Immediately after the resumption America scored again, but afterwards the British dominated the game. Dean scored with a great cross shot after a single-handed effort. The British goalkeeper (Smith) brought off a brilliant save a minute later from a shot at two yards from goal, and then Radmilovic, who throughout played an expert game, went away alone, and added the fifth goal. His shooting was of the deadliest, his lightening back handed efforts always threatening danger. The sixth goal came from a penalty, while Radmilovic, with a great individual effort, scored the final point. The match was worth going a long way to see it.<sup>49</sup>

This article represents one of the most in depth articles describing the Olympics in *The Western Mail*. This was also the case of the article regarding the same match that appeared in *The South Wales Echo*. It wrote, 'Radmilovic gave England the lead with a brilliant individual swim, finding the corner of the net.'<sup>50</sup> Both these articles indicated that Radmilovic was central to British success, very different to the Press Association report of the same match that appeared in *The Scotsman*.

This only mentioned Radmilovic briefly to describe that he had played an 'expert game' and his 'shooting was of the deadliest.'<sup>51</sup> The difference in the depth of interest between these publications indicates once again the interest of the Welsh press in the fortunes of their athletes, the desire to emphasise their physical superiority and importance to the British cause.

Astonishingly, the *Western Mail's* coverage of the water polo final was not as substantial as its semi-final article, particularly surprising as Radmilovic scored the winning goal. Across the Welsh press reference to this match was brief; such as that within the Swansea publication *Sporting News*. Its reference to the final came in a small article entitled 'Olympic Games,' and the subheading of 'British water poloists in final.'<sup>52</sup> It continued by making reference to Radmilovic, although this was only to describe his goal, 'Radmilovic gave England the lead with a brilliant individual swim, finding the corner of the net.'<sup>53</sup> This was different to the coverage of the London based *The Sporting Life* that singled out Radmilovic's performance and described that, 'No player deserves more credit for the success than Radmilovic. He played the game of his life, was clever at all points of the game, and was well supported by his colleagues both in defence and attack.'<sup>54</sup> This description indicates that Radmilovic had played a crucial role in the final, making the lack of coverage within the Welsh press even more surprising.

The Welsh perspective of the 1920 Olympics is more difficult to analyse than the 1908 and 1912 Olympics because of a lack of available material. This keeps in with the coverage across the British press but extenuated from a Welsh viewpoint because of a smaller amount of publications. The Antwerp Olympics was one of Wales most successful Games of all-time and within the limited coverage there was a British perspective emitted, although when Welshmen come to the fore it was their achievements that took precedence. This approach mirrored that of the two previous Olympics and indicated that there was a real pride in the achievements of Welsh athletes, but also in all those competing for Britain.

# Conclusions

The concern of this monograph has been to examine British identity at the Olympic Games between 1908 and 1920, with the desire to observe what can be determined with regard to her identity, both sporting and beyond. A 12-year period has been considered, which includes three Olympic Games, a World War and many significant changes within the world that had an impact on Britain.

A major desire has been to determine British identity by looking at the expressions found in each of the nations that make up Britain. The Scottish perspective the overriding identity that is projected is a British one (ignoring *The Glasgow Observer*, a publication written for the Irish immigrant population). The manner in which the Scottish press wrote from a British perspective was to the detriment of her own athletes who recorded considerable success with 25 medals across the three Olympics.

Apart from comment about Wyndham Hallswelle at the 1908 Olympics, there is little reference to the performance of any Scottish athletes throughout the period. Hallswelle was represented as being Scottish but also British in the available coverage, a prime example of how Scotland saw itself as British. The only comment found about individual Scottish performance was *The Scottish Referee* and this was to bemoan the apparent 'insignificant part' that Scotland's athletes had played. This comment was yet further an expression of Scotland's British identity and frustration about not contributing towards the British cause.

Feeling British in Scotland keeps in with the perspective of those historians that believed Scotland's central part in the Union ensured that it saw itself as British, rather than Scottish. The desire of the Scottish Amateur Athletic Association (SAAA) and the Amateur Swimming Association (SASA) to enter their own teams at the 1908 Olympics

potentially indicates otherwise. Although this could be attributed to the fact that the early international sporting contests had mainly been between the British nations and Scotland had retained its sporting independence, rather than any desire for political independence.

The Welsh press expressions also emit a British perspective, with headlines, articles and editorials depicting British successes and disappointments. Although the coverage was notably different than the Scottish press who included more reflection upon the performances of Welsh men and women. A prime example of this is Paulo Radmilovic from Cardiff, one of Britain's most successful Olympians of all time, who competed in all three Olympic Games under consideration here. The Welsh press considered him as a Welshman who competed for Britain, commonly referring him to being from Cardiff or Welsh. The same was afforded many Welsh athletes across this period and is a unique perspective within the British press.

The manner by which Welsh people are depicted keeps in with those historians that argue there was a growth in a new Welsh identity during this period. Demonstrated by the findings made, this was not to the detriment of Welsh people's British identity, as Welsh identity was in support of Britain, with the two identities existing side by side. Welsh people were proud of their contribution towards the British cause, perhaps best demonstrated in sporting context by the 1905 rugby victory over New Zealand, but this is also prevalent at the Olympic Games.

The identities that are presented through the Irish press's Olympic coverage demonstrates the political divisions present within Irish society. Those publications that give a pro-British perspective (the Unionist press) demonstrate a perspective comparable to the Scottish press, as they focus on British performances, but neglect any local standpoint. Consequently, the performances of Irish athletes are not recognised.

The anti-British, nationalist press illustrate the complete opposite to the unionist press in its Olympic coverage. To the nationalist press the Olympic Games presented an opportunity for them to present their hatred of Britain, demonstrate Irish superiority and state the case for an independent Irish team. Nationalist attempts to signify Irish physical supremacy were presented by emphasising the performances of Irish athletes for Britain, the United States and Canada. At the London and Stockholm Olympics, where there was substantial coverage within the nationalist press of the Olympics there was the regular theme of belittling the achievements of Britain in comparison to Irish people's. The coverage from the nationalist press of the Olympics diminished throughout the period of study (a reflection of the general downturn in



Irish interest in Olympic sports, and a preference for Gaelic sports) and frustrations about the lack of an Irish Olympic team.

Defining an English identity through Olympic coverage is not such an easy proposition. The majority of English publications reflected a British perspective, with little or no room to reflect upon individual British performances, itself an interesting perspective on English identity. Regional newspapers from differing parts of England demonstrate that potentially there is an English identity, but it is by no means a universal one and appears to be a dividing factor. The nations' outward facing identity was of high amateur morals and a belief that other nations were not up to Britain's values. This was one continually expressed within daily national newspapers and London sporting daily *The Sporting Life*, a publication that believed that the amateur morals of those in the North and Midlands of England was far more lax than in the South, where there was an apparent preference for professionalism and handicap races. Although there is evidence of a professional circuit in these regions (as there was in football, rugby league and cricket), there was also a strong preference for amateurism and its ideals.

The difference in attitude between the North and South of England came from the perspectives upon the inclusion of the working person or 'artisan' within amateur sport outside of the south. These people in some cases had physical professions and sometimes required expenses in order to compete in events held in London. By comparison, those in the South believed that only gentleman amateurs, people of primarily of the middle and upper classes, who did not have physical professions and competed at their own expense, should be allowed to contend. This attitude had been the primary reason why the split between North and South in the game of rugby occurred. Within athletics, it produced a difference in opinion, aggravated by the fact that the majority of the major meetings took place in London, making it difficult for Midlands and Northern athletes to compete.

Across the all sections of the British press is the depiction of the British team as 'England' its athletes 'English', when they should be identified as 'Britain' and 'British.' This may have occurred because of the regular use of 'Press Association' reports by some publications or although it could be a further demonstration of the dominance of England within Britain. This notion was seen in wider than just sport and Michael Billig writes upon the subject of how the inhabitants of England term themselves in the modern era; 'The pair "Britain/British" is more frequently used, although the English will unthinkingly substitute 'England/English' for the wider term. Such semantic habits reveal

that the complex nomenclature of the United Kingdom permits the complex continuation of an English hegemony.<sup>11</sup> Such a comment may not relate to the era being studied here but it represents the continuation of the identity indicated in the period examined here.

Other nations' interpretations of the amateur ethos in comparison to Britain's was constantly under discussion throughout the publications examined for this research and one that demonstrates some evolution throughout this period. The main nations under observation with regard to amateurism were the United States. This was particularly evident within the British coverage of the 1908 and 1912 Olympics, although there is little comment upon this at the 1920 Olympics, potentially because of the turndown in coverage, but it also could be a reflection of the changing manner by which the United States were seen in Britain after World War One.

A significant changing in British sporting identity in this period was the realisation that her athletes could not be successful solely by relying upon the values of 'effortless superiority' that had been so prominent in the nineteenth century. This change to British practices occurred after the Stockholm Olympics, a performance that was dubbed a 'national disaster.' The result was that Britain's Olympic authorities determined they would seek to improve the nation's performance by pursuing an approach of coaching and training, not dissimilar to that used by the United States. This change presented a major alteration to the British sporting ethos, and fears among some that Britain's amateurs would become professionals. Such a change also meant that Britain was no longer setting sporting practice standards, but following other nations. Britain's change in sporting practice also demonstrates the importance of Britain performing well upon the international sporting stage to its identity.

The failures of Britain at both the London and Stockholm Olympics saw that British expectations of success were amended. In this 12-year period, Britain went from being a nation who believed she was the dominant Olympic to one where she accepted that she could only ever be second best to the United States. The belief in the British media at the 1908 Olympics was that her athletes would be supreme and win the majority of the events. The reaction to the British performance at these Games thereafter was mixed. There were those editorials that focused upon how the nation had won the most events at the Olympic Games believed that this was proof of British supremacy. Other editorials concentrated upon making analysis upon the events that took place in July, primarily athletics, which included the largest number of foreign

competitors, gave a different perspective. Many of these editorials stated that the Games had been a damaging defeat, which to some further raised concerns about British physical decline.

Four years later, the expectations for the British performance were mixed, contrasting between those who expected numerous British victories, and others that believe she would have to fight for second place at the Games. The manner, by which Britain lost the fight for second place to Sweden, and the performance within athletics in particular, further damaged the British belief in her sporting superiority. This went to increase concerns of national decadence and encouraged Britain to seriously look at its sporting identity and encourage radical changes to her sporting ideology. These changes were being to take shape in 1914 and although they faced opposition, they demonstrated a change in philosophy.

British expectations at the Olympics were considerably different at the 1920 Games. Coming into them there was no expectation that Britain would be the premier nation at the Games, partly attributed to the impact of World War One. This was reflected in the media coverage, which no longer appeared to be concerned about its apparent decadence when her athletes were defeated, but rather British performances were applauded, and her athletes' triumphs, were congratulated. What is unclear from this research is if this was a temporary change in attitude because of the impact of the War, or a complete change in British thinking. A further study, certainly looking at the 1924 Olympics and likely beyond this, is required to determine this.

Also altered in the post-war period was the British approach towards the Olympics, which was more of a reflection of that in 1908 than 1914. The desire for and structured training that has been present in 1914 had evaporated in 1919. There are several potential reasons for this; primarily the financial constraints of the period, but the total lack of reference to this approach indicates a conservatism and a British identity more common with that seen at the 1908 Olympics. The preference for an older British sporting identity in this period keeps in with other areas of British society at this time, as argued by J M Winter:

Efforts were made by artists, writers, film-makers and poets as well as politicians to reassert older lines of continuity in British cultural life and thereby to help overcome the trauma and in some way lift the cloud evident in Britain after the war.<sup>2</sup>

The evidence presented in this research suggests that sport can be added to this list of things in British cultural life that reflected an 'older' value

in 1919. Part of this 'older' identity as seen at the 1908 Olympics had been an adversity to other practice of the United States, but this was not present, perhaps owing to the improved relationship with the United States at this time and Britain's own approach towards training prior to the outbreak of the war.

No longer were American athletes and their methods portrayed as enemies of Britain, but rather her athletes' performances were celebrated. This completely different perspective to that prior to the two could be attributed to several factors: Anglo-American relations had improved during World War One via the entrance of the United States into the war in 1917, an action that turned the war the allies' way.

Another factor that might explain the change in perceptions towards the United States could be the manner by which Britain attempted to approach the 1916 Olympics. This approach was similar to that employed by the United States, as she had copied the United States by employing professional coaches and providing organised coaching. The new perspective could be due to the fact that the British accepted their own decline as the world's premier sporting nation, and the United States position as the holder of the crown.

At the 1908 and 1912 Olympics, on numerous occasions, the press attributed British failures to further evidence of British physical decay, decline and decadence. Joseph Maguire argues this occurred because of the importance that Britain placed upon sport: 'in the English/British case, given the role that sport plays in personal and national identity formation, defeats on the playing field become represented as a kind of litmus test for the nation's decline.'<sup>3</sup> Within this period, concerns about the British performance at the Olympic Games appeared alongside the other worries about her overall physical condition, Britain's loss of status and power in world affairs.

At both the 1908 and 1912 Olympics, comments relating to the reason for British failures often included statements about her apparent physical decay. Coakley states, 'the major emphasis among many of those who promote and watch the Olympics is on national medal counts and expressions of national superiority.'<sup>4</sup> With British victories becoming fewer at the Olympics in the period under observation, the fear of physical deterioration intensified through editorials, reports, cartoons and even a poem that appeared in *The Daily Mail*<sup>5</sup> during the Stockholm Olympics.

Both in the sporting and wider press after the war, the concerns about British physicality that had been a feature of the coverage prior to the war had disappeared. No longer were the comments that linked

British Olympic performances to physical decline. The absence of these comments may be because of a general change in tone British Olympic reporting, or even the downturn in reporting, but the negativity that had previously come with defeat was not apparent. This may owe to the fact of the confidence that had been brought about by the performance in World War One, evidence that the nation was not in decline.

The other nation that is examined throughout is Germany. The period of this study was one of growing tensions and eventual conflict between Britain and Germany, and these issues are apparent in Olympic coverage. Comments relating towards Germany during the 1908 and 1912 Olympics are not substantial, but the growing coverage demonstrated an increasing interest in the fortunes of Germany and German athletes. At the 1908 Olympics, the majority of articles referring to Germany are more concerned with German military prowess than her athletes' sporting ability, an indication of not only Germany's poor performance, but also of British fears of her navy at this time.

In the years between the London and Stockholm Olympics, the British sporting press placed more attention on the efforts of German athletes. This came as a consequence of the improvement in German athletic performances, primarily through middle-distance runner, Hanns Braun. The new interest was demonstrated by a subsection in *The Athletic News* report of the 1911 Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) Championships headed 'The Coming of the Germans',<sup>6</sup> which wrote about the German performance at the championships. *The Sporting Life* also demonstrated the interest in German athletics when it included the full list of German athletes due to compete in Stockholm and a preview of their chances of success.<sup>7</sup> The only other nations to be given such treatment by the publication were the British Dominions and the United States, a potential indicator of the importance of Germany to Britain.

After the disappointing British performance at Stockholm, no doubt whatever the location of the 1916 Olympics Britain would have undertaken actions to improve her performance. To some, the fact that Germany was to host them placed more importance on performing well, as performing badly in the capital of the rival German Empire would have been of great embarrassment. Such a position emphasises the closeness of the Olympic and politics, as argued by Richard Espy, 'sport exhibits the state's relative sense of political and economic strength through its prowess as a competitor on the playing field. Thus, generically, the competition in sport parallels the competition in political or other arenas.'<sup>8</sup> Such a comment was undoubtedly true of Britain's adversity to both Germany and the United States, as demonstrated in

this monograph. Undoubtedly part of Britain's sporting identity can be defined as needing to be superior to its rival nations.

Those in Britain who were concerned by the potential German performance at the 1916 Olympics were worried that the combination of the downturn in British performance, the improved German showing in Stockholm and the likeliness of a further improvement at a home Olympics would see Germany defeat Britain in Berlin. Such a defeat would represent a major blow to British sporting identity and pride.

After four years of war, British thoughts regarding competing at the 1920 Olympics alongside Germany demonstrate the hostility that was present towards her in Britain at this time. Historians argue that in the course of 1919, particularly after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, there was a 'softening'<sup>9</sup> of attitudes towards Germany in Britain. Although politically this may be true, the indication from an Olympic perspective was that the thought of playing sport against Germany and building a relationship via this medium could not be contemplated in 1919. J M Winter states that in the aftermath of World War One many 'British institutions distanced themselves from contamination by contrast with German culture.'<sup>10</sup> He uses Elgar's music, that was used to 'drown out' the sounds of German music as an example, and also Oxford University, an institution that had close links with Germany prior to the war, but concluded it afterwards through ending the scholarships for German students, the cutting in half of the salary of a German-born professor and excluding German students from war memorials:

In the aftermath of war, Oxford's war memorials, many sponsored by bereaved parents, excluded the names of Germans who had been at Oxford and who had served (and died) in the war. What better proof could there be of the yawning gulf separating British and German elites than their unwillingness to mourn together?<sup>11</sup>

The desire not to associate with Germany culturally demonstrated here is comparable to that seen in the Olympic Games. The thought of contact with Germany via sport appears to be too much; something that not only demonstrated the important part sport had to play in the recovery from war and its centrality to British identity.

British attitudes towards field events are a constant theme throughout this monograph. It has been included because it demonstrated the problem of changing British sporting identity and that this identity differed across Britain. The apathetic field event identity that held back athletes

in these events should be considered an English rather than a British identity. Both Ireland and Scotland had history in these type of events that was transmitted to the modern era of athletics.

By contrast, England had not taken its historical field identity seen at events such as the Cotswold Olympics to the modern era and owing partially to the ethos of the gentleman amateur who did not like physicality of the events. This had a debilitating impact upon those who desired to compete in these events, as there was a shortage of equipment, training and often competitions. The desire by English field event enthusiasts to improve performance witnessed the birth of the Amateur Field Events Association (AFEA) in 1910. The organisation came about as a result of the disappointing athletic performance in 1908, and further indicated the importance of performing well to British sporting identity. The AFEA came into its own after the Stockholm Olympics, when it gained the support of the British Olympic Association (BOA), and the AAA adjudged that this was an area in which Britain could improve. This also was aided by the appointment of Walter Knox in 1914, the first ever full-time professional British athletics coach, who was a noted a field events expert.

Such was the shortness of Knox's appointment owing to the war (he was in his job for just seven months), that he was only able to make some minor improvements to the set-up and performance of athletes, but did have an impact. After the War, field events were in a similar position as to they had in prior to 1910. The money required to invest in facilities or for urgently needed equipment and coaching was not available. One article from the 1920 Olympics believed that the failure of field events to attract athletes to its events was an indication of British (or should it be English) Olympic apathy,<sup>12</sup> something that was certainly present prior to the war. Although mere speculation, the evidence suggests that had the War not taken place British field events performance, would have been significantly improved at the 1916 and 1920 Olympics.

Many of the primary sources used here suggested there was a general British indifference towards the Olympics during the period in question. Apathy towards the Olympics is demonstrated in the media throughout and the same regular arguments are given all the way through, although period-specific debates appear prior to the 1920 Olympics. These relate to the ability of Britain and Belgium to be ready for the Olympics, also the British preference for the reconstruction of the nations' sporting facilities in preference to the Games.

One source of British apathy was her preference for her own sporting contests, rather than the Olympics. Athletes demonstrated this by

preferring to compete in these contests than the Olympics and the press believed the British public demonstrated this through the failures of the public appeals for money for the 1912, 1916 and 1920 Games. All three of these appeals had mitigating circumstances that would have affected the public's ability to give money, and the uniqueness of a public appeal to pay for an amateur sporting event, which many in Britain believed should be undertaken solely at the expense of the competing athlete, may have also not aided the appeals.

The 1912 appeal was not helped by internal problems within the BOC, doing little to help the Committee's public perception. The appeal for the 1916 Olympics was held back by the GBP 100,000 asked for which some in the media commented would be used 'to secure a team of gladiators' – further deviating from the British amateur ethos, a principal that many held dear. The 1920 appeal found itself up against time constraints, appeals for wartime veterans, high unemployment and a recession.



# Appendix

## AAA's Preparation Scheme, 1913

*(AAA Archives. August 1913)*

- 1) Public schools championships: the necessity to arouse enthusiasm in the schools and systematically develop a taste for athletics; to obtain the approval and co-operation of the headmasters, and to form a committee from the schools to accept entries and to manage the meeting.
- 2) County Championships: To arrange for these to take place in counties where they do not at present exist at metric distances.
- 3) Triangular Olympic contests: To arrange triangular contests between England, Scotland, and Ireland at metric distances.
- 4) Olympic field events: To include these in the Amateur athletic Association Championships, and introduce such field events which are not at present included, and if possible to arrange a two days' meeting.
- 5) Scratch races: To assist affiliated clubs with prizes, provided they include approved scratch races at metric distances in their programmes. Such race to include:
  - (a) Scratch races during the 1913 and 1914 for novices, open only to competitors who have never won a prize at athletics, ordinary school competitions not to count.
    1. A series of competitions at Olympic distances and events to be called Olympic novice trials.
    2. The events to be level and open only to competitors over 17 years of age who have never won a prize at athletics, ordinary school competitions and junior sections of athletic clubs not to count as wins.
    3. The prizes to consist to gold, silver, and bronze medals of special designs.
    4. These events to be allocated proportionally to sports meetings willing to accept the same in the North, South, and Midland districts of England, and to Scotland and Ireland.
    5. The distribution of the competitions to be left to the discretion of the various governing associations who are the best authorities to deal with the matter and most likely to know the events to allot to advantage in special districts.

The proportion to be 150 events to England and 50 each to Scotland and Ireland in the two years.

The results of the effort to be reported, the names of novices showing promise to be carefully registered, and the novices themselves to be watched and have special training facilities provided.

- (b) Scratch races for those in receipt of a certain start.
  - (c) Scratch races for back-makers.
- 6) Standard medals: to award standard medals, gold, silver and bronze, to athletes beating standards at Olympic distances, these standards to be fixed for all metric scratch and field events, no athletes to hold more than one of each class at any one distance.
  - 7) Gymnastic Clubs: To arrange gymnastic clubs throughout the country to promote competitions during the winter for the following items:
    - Standing high and long jumps
    - Running high and long jumps
    - Putting the weight
  - 8) To support the Northern counties and Midland counties in holding an annual championship meeting at Olympic distances, the support to take the form of guaranteeing the meeting against financial loss up a specified amount.
  - 9) Training: The question of training has been considered at length, and it was agreed that necessary arrangements should be made for central quarters in London and other centres, such as Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, and Newcastle, where an official trainer and advisor and help approved athletes.
  - 10) To provide proper sets of impedimenta for field events at various centres.
  - 11) To hold Olympic trials in 1915.
  - 12) To urge every affiliated club or permitted body to include a field event in their programme.

# Notes

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# Index

- Abrahams, Harold: 211  
Athletes Advisory club: 98, 168  
Athletics News: 18, 19, 30, 47, 48, 92,  
94, 96, 97, 135, 136, 167, 169,  
171, 173, 176, 178, 181, 183,  
185, 186, 187, 190, 192, 194,  
195, 196, 199, 203, 204, 207  
American Athletic Union (1920  
Championships): 210  
Amateur Athletic Association: 4, 11,  
14, 46–47, 91, 94–95, 100, 101,  
105, 106, 107, 119, 159, 160,  
161, 168, 169, 172, 173, 175,  
180, 182, 183, 193, 217  
(AAA) Championships: 30, 32, 47,  
101, 102, 106, 112, 130, 131,  
135, 170, 173, 182, 193, 194, 210  
Inclusion of field events in  
Championships: 169  
Amateur Athletic Association plans  
for 1916 Olympics: 160, 237–8  
AAA Reconstruction Scheme (1919):  
172, 173–75, 188, 220–21  
AAA General Olympic Committee: 107  
Amateur Fencing Association: 159  
Amateur Field Events Association: 92,  
98–103, 121, 124, 131, 132, 133,  
168, 182, 208, 209, 214, 235  
Amateur Gymnastics Association: 159  
Amateur Rowing Association: 125, 164  
Amateur Swimming Association: 70,  
88, 89, 93, 98, 161, 174, 227  
Amateurism: 4–5, 13, 25, 123, 124,  
126, 127, 162, 163, 171, 175,  
177, 183, 189, 191, 204–05  
Antwerp Games (1920): 174, 176,  
177–78, 184, 185  
Australia (1920): 202  
Britain: 208, 211  
British press coverage of: 194, 196,  
199–200, 208–209, 223, 224  
Cycling: 205  
Finland: 205  
Football: 223  
Ireland: 202, 216–217  
Opening ceremony: 197  
Prospect of German participation  
in: 184–85, 186–87  
Swimming: 198  
United States of America: 198, 199,  
200, 201–202, 209, 218  
Water Polo: 204, 217–18, 225–26  
Athens 1896: 2, 3, 11, 18, 30  
Aherne, Timothy: 29, 55, 141  
Association Football: 70, 135, 187  
Ashington, Henry: 172  
Australian identity: 202  
Baker, Howard: 167  
Baseball: 115  
Beach-Thomas, W: 130  
Belfast Weekly News: 57  
Berlin 1916 Olympics: 127–28,  
131, 138, 158–160,  
163, 174, 184  
Birmingham: 44, 48, 173  
Birmingham Mail: 19, 35  
Bishop of Pennsylvania: 9  
Blackwood's Magazine: 122  
Boer War: 69, 74  
Border Games: 32  
Boland, John: 2  
Boys Realm: 33, 158  
Braun Hanns: 112, 136  
Brickett, Walter: 111, 112, 113  
British athletic coaching: 98, 107–113,  
149, 175  
British identity: 40–42, 52, 72,  
75, 76  
British Olympic Committee 'Ways  
and Means Committee' (1913):  
165, 169  
British Olympic trials (1912): 103,  
109–110, 119

- British Olympic trials (1920): 193  
 British desires to drop out of the Olympic Games: 127–28  
 British desire for British Empire Team for 1916 Olympics: 129, 158, 161  
 British Empire Day: 129  
 British Government: 95  
 British fears of decline in athletic prowess: 24, 58, 63, 73, 92–94, 106, 154–55, 205, 206–07, 120–122, 125  
 British Olympic Association/Committee: 3, 11, 53–54, 70, 95–96, 105, 118, 128, 140, 141, 158, 159, 160, 165, 166, 168, 174, 175, 177, 179, 189, 190, 191, 192, 204, 210  
 British Olympic Association 1912 Fundraising: 95–97, 105–106  
 British Olympic Association 1920 fundraising: 190–93  
 British Olympic Committee: Special Committee for the Olympic Games of Berlin, 1913: 160–62, 164–66, 174  
 British Olympic Apathy: 22–24, 26, 28, 118, 119, 127–28, 157, 163, 179, 192–193, 200, 203–207, 213  
 British Olympic proficiency badges: 160, 170  
 British sporting identity: 10–11, 12–14, 18, 20–1, 24, 40, 50, 52, 69, 72, 117–8, 122–26, 128–129, 141, 150–51, 157, 159, 165, 179–180, 198, 203, 204, 207, 220, 230, 232  
 British Physical Decline: 20, 35, 38, 93, 105, 122, 129, 150, 157  
 British 1912 Olympic Trials: 103, 109  
 Bulpett, CWL: 120  
 The Bystander: 23, 25, 26, 38, 42, 75  
 Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News: 83  
 Cardiff: 80, 88  
 Carey, Dennis: 130  
 Carroll, Timothy: 141  
 Carpenter, John: 75  
 Casement, Sir Roger: 53–54  
 C B Fry's Magazine: 14, 15, 27, 34, 37  
 Churchill, Winston: 134, 191  
 Clay Bird Pigeon Shooting Association: 159  
 Colston, Sydney: 192  
 Conan-Doyle, Sir Arthur: 99, 128–29, 158, 160, 161, 162–3, 165  
 Cook, Theodore: 160, 184–85, 190–1, 192  
 Cooper, John Astley: 15  
 Cork Sportsman: 58  
 Coubertin, Pierre: 5, 16, 114, 176, 184, 185, 218  
 Courcy-Laffan, Reverend: 97, 103, 133, 158, 160, 161, 162–3, 165, 179–181, 186, 191, 192  
 Cox, E W: 19  
 Cricket: 27, 39, 40, 46, 122  
 Daily Express (Ireland): 57  
 Daily Mail: 117, 121, 127, 129, 131, 132, 138, 158, 186, 194, 205, 232  
 Daily Telegraph: 61, 192  
 Davis Cup: 11  
 Desborough, Lord: 118  
 Diem, Carl: 163  
 Driscoll, James: 152–53  
 Downham, Lord: 189  
 Edinburgh Evening News: 72, 76, 147, 148, 149, 150, 221  
 English Sporting identity: 10, 20–21, 40, 41–46, 48, 50–1, 229  
 English identity: 39, 44–45  
 Evening Times (Glasgow): 75  
 The Field: 118, 174, 206, 211, 212  
 Field Events: 29–35, 63–67, 100–02, 103, 130–33, 136, 166, 167–68, 169–70, 182, 208–214  
 Finland: 115, 144–45  
 Flanagan, John: 55, 60, 131, 141  
 Flanagan, Peter: 110  
 Flaxman, Alfred: 168, 170  
 Football Association: 12, 52–53  
 FA Challenge cup: 45  
 Football and Cricket Field (Bolton): 111  
 Football and Sports Special: 17

- Fédération Internationale de Football Association: 53, 186
- Fédération Internationale de natation: 188
- Franco-British Exhibition: 8, 9
- Freeman's Journal: 60, 62, 63, 65, 67, 75, 217, 218
- French Olympic Committee: 179
- Fry, C B: 14, 15, 27, 34, 37, 137
- The Gaelic American: 141
- Gaelic Athletic Association: 30, 32, 52, 53, 54, 62, 78, 139, 140, 142, 144, 216, 220
- Germany: reaction to her potentially competing in the 1920 Olympics: 185–188
- The Gaelic Athlete: 144
- Glasgow Evening News: 73, 77
- Glasgow News: 147, 150
- Glasgow Observer: 77–79, 227
- Glasgow: 69
- Gladstone, Albert: 87
- Gray, Rev J H: 179
- Griffiths, Cecil: 224
- Hallswelle, Wyndham: 41, 68, 74–77, 172
- Hayes, Johnny: 18, 55, 63–64, 65–66, 78, 142
- Hayes-Fisher, W: 165–66
- Hellenism: 16
- Henderson, Walter: 101
- Henley Regatta: 4, 25, 26, 125, 162, 206
- Herbert, Charles: 2
- Highland Games: 32
- Hill, Albert: 194, 198, 211, 212, 272
- Hodge, Percy: 198, 200
- Holmes, Elizabeth: 111
- Horgan, Dennis: 30, 32, 60, 63, 78, 101, 110, 141
- Howard-Baker, Benjamin: 211
- International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF): 53, 188
- The International Match (1914): 170
- Intercalated Games (1906): 3, 30
- Inter-Empire Championships (1911): 94–95
- Irish identity: 51–52, 60, 61–63, 66, 67, 139–141, 215–16, 227
- International Olympic Committee: 2, 28, 51, 70, 140, 141, 161, 174, 176, 185, 189, 216
- International Olympic Committee meeting of 1907: 11
- International Olympic Committee, 25th anniversary (1919): 185
- Irish Amateur Athletic Association: 53, 140, 159, 216, 220
- Irish Amateur Rowing Union: 53
- Irish Independent: 54, 59, 60
- Ireland, 1908 Olympics: 54–67
- Ireland demands for her own Olympic team: 1908 Olympics: 53
- Irish demands for her own Olympic team: 1908 Olympics: 58, 78–79  
1912 Olympics: 140–41  
1920 Olympics: 216
- Irish News and Belfast Morning News: 26, 58, 61, 65–66
- Irish Sporting identity: 52–58, 62, 65–67, 142, 143, 217
- Irish Times: 57
- Ireland v USA athletics meeting(1908): 63
- Jarvis, Clara: 111
- Javelin: 34–35, 110, 130, 133, 168
- Kaiser Wilhelm II: 36, 159
- Keane, JJ: 216, 218, 219–220
- Kerr, Bobby: 55, 141
- King Edward VII: 9, 23, 58
- King George V: 190
- King Gustav: 114
- Kitching, Frederick: 172
- Knox, Walter: 166–67, 169, 235
- Kolehmainen, Hannes: 95, 115, 197, 212
- Leahy, Cornelius: 30, 55, 59
- Leander Rowing Club: 172
- Lemming, Eric: 34
- London (1908): Australasian team: 8  
Autumn Games: 71, 91  
Awarding of: 4, 8  
Attendances: 206

- London (1908) – *continued*  
 British Teams preparations: 48–49  
 British organisation of: 13, 14  
 Cycle Polo: 54–55  
 Controversy at: 10  
 Field Events: 99  
 Hockey competition: 54–55, 71  
 German Performance: 36, 37, 38  
 Marathon: 17, 18, 22, 29, 35, 41,  
 63, 64, 73, 76, 84, 86  
 Polo: 55  
 Regatta: 25  
 Rules of: 13  
 Spectators: 23–24, 26–28  
 Tug-of-war: 29, 72, 74  
 United States of America: 10, 17, 19,  
 20, 22, 29, 43, 50, 53, 55–56, 57,  
 67, 72, 73, 84  
 Opening ceremony: 23, 71  
 Swimming: 57, 85, 88–89  
 Venues: 9  
 Water Polo: 88  
 400 metre final: 72, 74, 75–76, 77  
 London (2012): 1  
 London Athletic Club: 46–47, 174, 179
- MacDonald, Patrick: 55, 218  
 Manchester Guardian: 133, 191, 194,  
 200, 201, 202, 204, 206, 212  
 Manchester athletic facilities  
 (1919): 173  
 McArthur, Ken: 142, 144  
 McGrath, Matt: 143–44  
 Meath, Earl of: 36  
 Merillon, Daniel: 2  
 M’Gough, J: 71  
 Midland Counties Athletic  
 Association: 49, 101–102, 106,  
 109, 111, 193  
 Morning Post: 128  
 Morton, J W: 41  
 Montreal Gazette: 168  
 Moore, Isabella: 146  
 Munster Express: 60  
 Myrra, Jonny: 212
- National Cycle Union: 100, 111, 159,  
 161, 174, 181, 186  
 National Wrestling Association: 159
- Nedo, Nadi: 197  
 Nelson, Alec: 98, 107, 108, 109, 112,  
 119, 126  
 Newnham, Lord: 189  
 New York Evening News: 57  
 New York Sun: 180  
 New York Times: 108, 116  
 New Zealand Rugby (1905 tour of the  
 British Isles): 13, 82–83  
 Nicolson, Thomas: 29, 119, 130,  
 170, 211  
 The Northern Athlete: 17, 26, 37, 41,  
 47, 48, 49  
 Northern Counties Amateur Athletic  
 Association: 46, 106, 176, 193  
 Northern Counties Swimming  
 Association: 196  
 The Northern Whig: 56, 57  
 Nurmi, Paavo: 197
- The Observer: 14, 16, 17, 19, 24, 42,  
 117, 121, 121  
 O’Connor, Peter: 30, 53  
 Orwell, George: 44  
 Otway, Charles: 91, 99, 100, 109, 110,  
 112, 119, 165, 166, 169, 170,  
 176, 177, 179–81, 183, 187,  
 193, 194–95, 207  
 The Outlook: 115
- The Pall Mall Gazette: 119, 126,  
 178, 182  
 Paseman, Robert: 136  
 Parker, Fred: 102, 107, 108, 109,  
 119, 126  
 Paris (1900): 2, 202  
 Paris (1924): 220  
 Petri, Dorando: 18, 66, 84  
 Professional sport: 5, 25, 45–46, 120,  
 122, 137, 162, 177, 183, 189
- Radmilovic, Paulo: 87–89, 153–54,  
 204, 223–24, 225–26  
 Roche, PJ: 59  
 Rose, Ralph: 55–56, 64, 78  
 Rugby League: 45, 152  
 Rugby Union: 82, 152  
 Russell, Arthur: 2  
 Review of Reviews: 19, 38

- The Saturday Review: 27  
 Stamford Bridge: 102–103, 108, 109, 194  
 Steer, Irene: 154  
 Scottish Demands for own team, 1908  
 Olympics: 70  
 Scottish identity: 68–70, 76–77, 78,  
 145–46  
 Scottish Amateur Athletic Association:  
 70, 75, 159, 181, 220, 221, 227  
 Scottish Amateur Athletic  
 Association reconstruction  
 (1919): 220–21  
 The Scotsman: 71, 123, 148, 149, 150,  
 212, 221  
 Scottish Amateur Swimming  
 Association: 70, 221  
 The Scottish Referee: 28, 71, 79, 227  
 Sheridan, Martin: 55, 60  
 Sherman, Montague: 4  
 Sinn Fein: 51  
 Sinn Fein (Newspaper): 53, 142  
 South Wales Daily News: 82, 83, 87,  
 90, 134, 152, 153, 155  
 South Wales Echo: 224  
 South Wales News: 223  
 South Wales Weekly post: 84  
 The Sphere: 22, 25, 36  
 Sport(Ireland), Newspaper: 143  
 Sporting News: 224  
 The Sportsman: 159  
 Sportsmanship: 126, 137  
 Sports Gazette (Bishop Auckland): 35,  
 50, 183  
 Sporting Life: 18, 20, 30, 33, 34,  
 91, 93, 99, 100, 101, 108,  
 109, 110, 117, 119, 123,  
 124, 136, 146, 158, 165,  
 166, 171, 172, 173, 176,  
 178, 181, 183, 185, 186,  
 187, 194, 199, 210, 213  
 Sporting Mail: 19, 20, 47, 48, 49, 50,  
 101, 110, 119, 128, 138  
 The Star: 24  
 St Louis 1904: 2–3  
 Stockholm (1912): 92, 114–156  
 Art competitions: 114  
 Cycling: 11, 112, 140–141  
 Demonstration sports 114–15  
 Germany: 121, 136–38  
 Great Britain: 115–118, 120, 123–25  
 Great British change in philosophy  
 following: 126–27  
 Finland: 143–144  
 Marathon: 142–43  
 Nations competing: 114  
 Opening: 114  
 Rowing: 124–125, 136–37, 164  
 Tug of war: 148  
 United States of America: 115,  
 122–125, 127–128, 147–49,  
 151, 180  
 Water Polo: 92, 94, 153–54  
 4×100m race: 153  
 200 metres: 147  
 Strode-Jackson, ANS: 181  
 Studd, JEK: 160, 163  
 Tailhean Games: 32, 53  
 Thorpe, Jim: 115  
 Tom Brown's Schooldays: 16  
 The Times: 13, 17, 19, 27, 30, 33, 43,  
 100, 105, 109, 117, 118, 126,  
 127, 128, 157, 162, 163, 164,  
 165, 175, 178, 181, 189, 190, 191  
 Vanity fair: 50  
 Varsity athletics: 159  
 Villa Park: 173  
 Voight, Emil: 47, 56, 169  
 Webster, FAM: 99, 121, 132–33, 178,  
 182, 209  
 Weekly News for Edinburgh and the  
 South: 72, 73, 76  
 Welsh identity: 79–81, 90, 151–52, 155,  
 222, 227  
 Welsh Home Rule: 152  
 Welsh Language: 80–81  
 Western Mail: 20, 23, 36, 41, 83, 85,  
 86, 89, 90, 135, 146, 153, 154,  
 223, 225  
 Westminster, Duke of: 157  
 White City Stadium: 9, 23, 28  
 Woodward, Vivian: 12  
 World War One: 156, 171, 172–73,  
 194, 202, 231, 234  
 Yeoumans, Alfred: 87