

In 1896 the very first Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece. Although the original host city of the Olympics is much more world renown than a small backwater city in Canada, there could be comparisons drawn between Hamilton and Athens .

"The city of Hamilton proved a gracious first host of the Commonwealth Games movement and is as important to it as Athens is to the Olympics."¹ Hamilton, Ontario, Canada was the birth place of the Commonwealth Games; although what today is known as the Commonwealth was in 1930 known as the British Empire Games. In the following, a careful examination of the history of the 1930 games will give us a backdrop from which to study and analyze the actual events that took place as they were portrayed in the local newspaper, The Hamilton Spectator. Comparisons will be drawn between the 1930 games and the up and coming 2006 games in hopes to bring insight into the importance of the nations involved, sports played and total costs to name a few. The history of the games and the basic facts and figures of Hamilton 1930 will be deducted mainly from secondary sources that are on the outside looking in, so to speak. Later, the running stories and reflections of the games will be abstracted from the newspaper articles in the Hamilton Spectator from 1930.

The history of the 1930 British Empire Games dates back to the coronation of King George V and his famous celebration known as the 'Festival of the Empire' in 1911. Although the original festival was focused mainly on the progress of the British Empire, the added athletic competitions became very popular and were talked about far and wide. The events were all held in London and included athletes from Australia,

¹ Commonwealth Games Federation, *The Story of the Games* (2002)
<http://www.thecgf.com/games/intro.asp?yr=1930>.

Canada, South Africa and the host, Britain. It is interesting to note is that Canada won the athletic competitions held in 1911; Canada's success in London will hold great significance for the future of the British Empire Games.²

Following the success of the Festival Games and "further friendliness between the Empire athletes at the [1928] Olympiad"³, talks continued in hopes of reviving some sort of British-based games. Canada's victory at the 1911 British events clearly gave them international prestige as far as athletics were concerned; but it would take more than just athleticism to get the British Empire Games up and running. It would take a creative man with a bit of financial backing to pull together the inaugural Games.

[So] it was appropriate that it should have been through the initiative of a Canadian - M M Robinson - that the British Empire Games took definite shape, and were revived at Hamilton, Canada in 1930. Support was forthcoming from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, with the result that strong teams were sent to Canada.⁴

It was this opportunity that the Canadian track and field manager, M M "Bobby" Robinson, seized in order to bring and create the first British Empire Games to his hometown, Hamilton.

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² Australian Commonwealth Games Association, *The Story of the British Empire and Commonwealth Games* http://www.commonwealthgames.org.au/atcg_gen_bec.html.

³ Australian Commonwealth Games Association, http://www.commonwealthgames.org.au/atcg_gen_bec.html.

⁴ Australian Commonwealth Games Association, http://www.commonwealthgames.org.au/atcg_gen_bec.html.

⁵ http://mmr.hdsb.ca/index.asp?p=who_is_mm_robinson

The initial reaction towards the British Empire Games was one of extreme enthusiasm to the point of desiring to have better organization than the Olympics themselves. Not only was “Bobby” able to ensure that his country would be given recognition for a smoothly run week of athletic events and competitions, he was also able to encourage the success of the Commonwealth Games for future participants and spectators. Clearly the British Empire Games were off to a good start.⁶

Now that the groundwork had been laid, the actual facts and figures of the games were soon to follow. The 1930 British Empire Games began on August 16th of that year and ran for one week until the 23rd. By today’s standards the numbers surrounding the original British Empire Games would seem minuscule, but being that it was one of the largest athletic gatherings, outside the Olympics, at the time the numbers spoke about the importance of this competition. Eleven countries competed in the original games; these included Australia, Bermuda, British Guiana, Canada, Northern Ireland, Newfoundland, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, Wales, and finally, the mother country, Britain.



⁶ Australian Commonwealth Games Association,
http://www.commonwealthgames.org.au/atcg_gen_bec.html

As the Commonwealth has grown and changed over time, so has the number of countries participating in the Games grown and changed. There are a total of 72 countries that will have athletes competing in the upcoming 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games. The significance of the growth in nations participating in them has a great impact on the number of athletes that are participating as well. In 1930 there were a total of 400 athletes; athletes who will be competing at Melbourne in 2006 will be up against 4500 other athletes, 11.25 times more competitors than what the athletes from the British Empire Games had to face.⁸

The athletic events in the opening British Empire Games numbered only six; they included track and field events, boxing, lawn bowling, rowing, swimming and diving, and wrestling. The 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games has organized the athletic events into sporting disciplines; they include aquatics, badminton, basketball, boxing, elite athletes with disabilities, gymnastics, hockey, lawn bowling, track and field, netball, rugby 7s, shooting, squash, table tennis, triathlon, and weight lifting.⁹ Although the 1930 events may have been small in number they established very early what the fundamental athletic competitions would be for all of the Commonwealth Games to follow. The costs to run the preliminary athletic contests came to a grand total of \$97, 973.00! One could hardly purchase a house in the Hamilton area for that amount of money by today's standards. What is even more amazing about this final tally is that it includes the \$30, 000 that Hamilton gave to competing countries to cover traveling costs! Given the obvious rise in inflation costs over the years, the final cost for the games is still regarded

⁷ Maps.com, *Imperialism in the Modern World* (2004)
http://www.maps.com/reference/history/whistory/hw_016.html.

⁸ Commonwealth Games Federation, *Melbourne 2006 The XVIII Commonwealth Games* (2003)
<http://www.melbourne2006.com.au/>.

to be a fairly low amount of money for 1930 standards. This becomes even more evident when looking at the amount of money that Hamilton was willing to bid for the upcoming 2010 Commonwealth Games, a whopping 5 million (the winning bid went to Delhi for 7.2 million)¹⁰. Also, when taking into consideration that the stock market had crashed less than a year earlier on Black Tuesday in October of 1929 the amount of money that Hamilton put into the games seemed somewhat justified and actually stands as a testament to resourcefulness and creativity of the organizers of the British Empire Games.

A final aspect of the 1930 British Empire Games that is interesting to note concerns the event stadium and the athlete's village. Civic Stadium was built especially for the Games and seated around 2,000 people comfortably.¹¹ The stadium still exists today although remodeled and renamed and it has become part of Hamilton's architectural history. Today it is known as Ivor Wynne Stadium and is the home of the Hamilton Tiger-Cat football team.



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⁹ Commonwealth Games Federation, <http://www.melbourne2006.com.au/>.

¹⁰ CTV.ca News Staff, *Hamilton Loses 2010 Commonwealth Games Bid* (2004 Bellglobe Media Inc.) http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/1068820273003_64229472/?hub=Canada.

¹¹ Hamilton Public Library, *Ivor Wynne Stadium* <http://www.hpl.hamilton.on.ca/collections/landmark/ivorstad.shtml>.

¹² Hamilton Public Library, *Picture of Ivor Wynne Stadium* <http://www.hpl.hamilton.on.ca/collections/landmark/ivorstad.shtml>.

Although a brand new stadium was an awesome addition to the games, its creation probably used some of the money that could have been put towards an equally inspiring athlete's village. The athletes were all accommodated by the nearby Prince of Wales school, where they slept twenty-four per classroom.¹³ Although these accommodations would seem outlandish by modern standards, there were no serious complaints from the athletes, and the first British Empire Games received rave reviews. Although the facts and figures are interesting to note and analyze, looking at the primary source of the Hamilton Spectator provides more access to the unique stories and different trends that took place at the Games.

All that was important to Hamilton in 1930 immediately becomes evident when reading the Hamilton Spectator headlines from the 13th of August to the 25th of August in 1930. Three aspects immediately become obvious and they include: the amount of attention given to white male sports heroes, the amount of attention shown to athletics in general and finally the amount of attention given to the mother country, Britain. All of these issues jump off the page and strike a disconcerting chord with modern readers. However, in the context of 1930 Canada, all of these issues were really non-issues.

The first aspect to be discussed would be the amount of attention given to social minorities in the athletic events; more specifically the focus that was given to the role, or lack of one, of both women and different races in the British Empire Games. Women were definitely not a significant part of the main attractions of the Games. They were not viewed as being serious competitors, or competitors at all. Their involvement in the 1930

¹³ Commonwealth Games Federation, *1930 Commonwealth Games* (2002)
<http://www.thecgf.com/games/intro.asp?yr=1930>.

Games was very limited; in fact they only competed in the swimming events. However minor their participation they were still able to make some impact in the one event they could compete in, swimming. It was noted in an article from August 9, 1930 that the Australian team actually sent along seven female swimmers to accompany their thirteen male swimmers in an attempt to bring home as many medals in this event as possible.¹⁴ This lack of participation of women in the athletic competitions did not last too long; in the very next set of games their involvement was significantly increased. Although they had a limited place at the British Empire Games this did not mean that they had a limited place in sport itself. In the Hamilton Spectator on the same pages that were reporting the happenings of the British Empire Games were photos and an article covering a local female track meet.¹⁵ Such a mention causes the reader to conclude that although their role was limited in the athletic components of the festivities, women were well on their way to becoming equal participants given the same opportunities as male athletes in the British Empire Games. Just like the women, the assumption can be made using primary sources and a little history knowledge that there was little involvement of athletes of different races. All of the pictures from the Games that were placed in the Hamilton Spectator during its approximately two week coverage of the games were of white athletes; the majority of these photos of white males.

¹⁴ *Strenuous Practice Keeps Swimmers Fit* (The Hamilton Spectator 9 Aug. 1930) p. 16.

¹⁵ *Picture of Women Competing at a Local Track Meet* (The Hamilton Spectator 17 Aug. 1930) p. 17



When examining the different nations that were involved in the British Empire Games a quick look into their cultural and racial history will provide an explanation for this lack of diverse athletic involvement; the majority of these nations had Caucasians as their native peoples or had their native peoples overrun by the white English race. It is also important to note that at this time in history very little to none at all special privileges and rights were given to people of different races in the British Empire. As a result there was very little to no participation in the Games of people of different races; the British Empire Games were competitions available to and dominated by white males.

Studying the British Empire Games through the presentation by the Hamilton Spectator would be incomplete without looking at how sport was viewed, understood, presented, and influential in the days of the 1930's. One of the first conclusions that a present day reader might make about sport when studying the British Empire Games as it was presented by the Hamilton Spectator is that it was not a dominating factor in the every day life and culture of the day. If the reader once again looks at the presentation through the glasses of history they will come back to the significance that Black Tuesday

¹⁶ *In the Greatest Athletic Project in Canada's History* (The Hamilton Spectator 16 Aug. 1930) p. 23.

had on the culture of the 1930's. The decision to keep the Games scheduled as planned despite the stock market crash can be seen as a reflection of the mass population's thoughts or beliefs about the economy; the organizers thought the crash was not a serious enough financial reason to cancel or postpone the Games. The Games could also have been thought of as an event that would help lift and keep spirits high while the economy was looking dreary. Sport at this time was seen more as a distraction from the everyday pressures of life, instead of one that could consume valuable time, energy, and add pressure and stress to every day life like sport sometimes does now. If this interpretation is correct then sport was given lesser value and importance compared to the other issues of the day. This lesser value is significant because it also affects how sport was played or prepared for. An excellent illustration of this lessened value, in connection with the British Empire Games, is in the scheduling of the events, for the track events the preliminaries and the finals were held on the same day.¹⁷ Athletes at the Commonwealth Games level of today would not even dream about having to run their finals within the same day or even couple days of completing their heats. Another example of this has to do with the preparation and arrival of the athletes to Hamilton. If all of the nations were like Britain and Canada then it is safe to say that the nations did not feel that advanced notice or early arrivals were important to their athlete's athletic abilities. The Canadian representatives were only given a week's notice that they would be representing Canada with their athletic abilities at the very first British Empire Games. The headline in the Spectator from Monday, August 11 read, "Canadian Team for B.E. Games was Elected

¹⁷ *Nation's Best Battle for Premier Laurels (The Hamilton Spectator 18 Aug. 1930) p. 17.*

on Saturday”¹⁸ (August 9, 1930). The Canadian team was only selected five days before the opening ceremonies. Although it would be unfair of the reader to make a judgment about Canada’s interest in their athletes doing well at the Games based upon the short notice, or so it seems to the modern day sport analyst, given to its athletes. A modern day athlete cannot help but cringe at the lack of preparation time – even if it is only mentally that they would have needed to prepare for their event. In preparation for the Commonwealth Games of 2006 athletes are chosen months, if not at least a year in advance so that they might have adequate time to prepare mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically for the tough competition that they would be facing. Another good example of the limited amount of preparation time was the British and their late arrival to Hamilton, “Arrival of Great Britain’s Team Delayed Until 7:05 Tonight”¹⁹ read the headline from August 14. A little slack can be given to the athletic trainers, coaches, and organizers when it comes to the very short preparation time that they allowed for the competing athletes; the unknown particulars about the preparation of athletes both physiologically and mentally limited what preparation time and activities they could prescribe to their athletes.

A very significant relationship that the Hamilton Spectator addresses possibly unconsciously was the strong tie between Britain, the mother country and the fellow members of the commonwealth; this strong bond is especially evident in Canada and is articulated quite clearly in the Hamilton Spectator. It is interesting to read the headlines of a Canadian newspaper during the time of an important sporting event that is taking

¹⁸ *Canadian Team for B.E. Games to be Elected on Saturday* (The Hamilton Spectator 11 Aug. 1930) p. 17.

place on home territory. A reader in today's time would expect that first of all main coverage would be given to the Canadian athletes participating and then as well to the influence and particular events that were especially impacting the host nation. It was almost discouraging for the modern day reader to read the *Spectator* in hopes of hearing a couple grand stories about the Canadian athletes of the day and then to find very little about Canadian athletes at all. Of course there was some information and a couple of articles on how the Canadian athletes were doing, but the majority of the focus was given to the British. It was almost humorous to read headlines about another country's travel itinerary over the host nation's own athlete's achievements and preparations. A few specific examples of such headlines are: "English Bowlers are Acclaimed Champions,"²⁰ "Great Crowd Welcomed English Athletes Last Evening,"²¹ and "Mother Country Well in Lead of Dominions in Great Competition."²² The most striking example of this devotion to the mother country is clearly illustrated in that the only article in relation to the Games that was found in the newspaper after they had been concluded was about the British team heading off next to the States to compete in track competitions there, "Expect British Empire Team to Shine At Chicago Track Events."²³ Even following the British Empire Games there was no real summary of Canadian accomplishments in both the organization of the Games themselves or about their athlete's accomplishments; here too, the focus was given primarily to the British and their successes and their future endeavors.

¹⁹ *Arrival of Great Britain's Team Delayed Until 7:05 Tonight* (The Hamilton Spectator, 14 Aug. 1930) p. 22.

²⁰ *English Bowlers are Acclaimed Champions* (The Hamilton Spectator, 22 Aug. 1930) p. 21.

²¹ *Great Crowd Welcomed English Athletes Last Evening* (The Hamilton Spectator, 15 Aug. 1930) p. 22.

²² *Mother Country Well in Lead of Dominions in Great Competition* (The Hamilton Spectator, 25 Aug. 1930) p. 16.

Hamilton's success at organizing the very first British Empire Games has left an impact on all of the following Commonwealth Games. Hamilton set high standards for the following host nations in terms of venues, finances, smoothly running schedules, and the athletic competitions. The solid history that began with the planning and time put into such an event provides the story of the Commonwealth games with a strong beginning of which all following major sporting events would be proud. The different conclusions that were able to be made from secondary and the primary source of the Hamilton Spectator leave modern day athletes and sports enthusiasts in shock about the situations and circumstances that surrounded the events, for example lack of preparation time, finances, and selection of athletic events. Through such a historical study on the Commonwealth Games one is better able to appreciate the humble beginnings of the Games and how far they have come. As Hamilton looks now into the future in hopes of winning a bid for an upcoming Commonwealth Games, it only seems appropriate that the history of the week of August 16 to 23, 1930 be remembered and reflected upon as the Games potentially come back home to their birthplace.

²³ *Expect British Empire Team To Shine at Chicago Track Meet* (The Hamilton Spectator, 27 Aug. 1930) p. 16.