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The Commonwealth Games were first held in 1930 in Hamilton, Canada. The idea of holding a competition of this size for the countries in the British Empire had come much earlier. The idea was born in 1891 and was fathered by a man named John Astley Cooper, an Englishman who wanted a festival to “promote goodwill and understanding in the British Empire”.<sup>1</sup> They held the first “festival” in 1911 to celebrate the coronation of King George V in London. This first competition included teams from Britain, South Africa, Canada and Australia. The four teams participated in five athletic events, two swimming races, boxing and wrestling. After the festival they decided to continue more sporting events but the First World War put these ideas off until the 1920’s. In 1928 the Olympiad games were held in Amsterdam, after which, Bobby Robinson, manager of the Canadian track and field team, called together the Empire Representatives and decided to have the British Empire Games in Hamilton, Ontario, Robinson’s home town.<sup>2</sup>

Over the next three decades the Games grew in size. The growth in size reflected an increase in the number of nations that participated, but also the fact that, as time went by, more and more female athletes chose to participate. The number of sports also increased giving more variety to the Games. This growth was paused for a time because of the Second World War that caused the cancellation of the Games from 1938 to 1950.

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<sup>1</sup> Olympic Studies Center <[http://www.olympic.org/uk/passion/studies/index\\_uk.asp](http://www.olympic.org/uk/passion/studies/index_uk.asp)>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

The 1946 Games were to be held in Cardiff, Wales, but because of the cancellation of the Games during the war, Cardiff would have to wait until 1958 to play host.<sup>3</sup> In those Games there was a dramatic increase in participants almost doubling the previous Games, the number of nations participating went from twenty-four to thirty-five.<sup>4</sup>

The Games at Cardiff, Wales was very successful but not without controversy. The Games would be the last games in which the South African team participated in until their post-Apartheid return in 1994. The controversy surrounding this team was due to the fact that their team was selected on the basis of race rather than ability.<sup>5</sup> There were many objections from numerous interests groups and in 1961 South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth for thirty years.

The Games themselves changed over the years, not only with the addition of sports but also the name successfully changed. The Games were first coined the British Empire Games and lasted for the first four sets of games, 1930-1950. The name of the Games then changed to the British & Commonwealth Empire Games for the 1954-1962 editions of the Games. The name changed again to British Commonwealth Games, which lasted from 1966-1974. The last name change occurred in 1978 and for the last quarter century the Games have been known as the Commonwealth Games.<sup>6</sup> The evolution of the name suggests within it a change in the ownership of the Games from being British-owned to being collectively owned by the Commonwealth of countries. It is also interesting to see what name different journalists that cover the Games use; as they reflect differing attitudes toward the Games.

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<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth Games Federation <<http://www.thecgf.com/games>>

<sup>4</sup> Olympic Studies Center <[http://www.olympic.org/uk/passion/studies/index\\_uk.asp](http://www.olympic.org/uk/passion/studies/index_uk.asp)>

<sup>5</sup> Commonwealth Games Federation <<http://www.thecgf.com/games>>

<sup>6</sup> Manchester Online <<http://www.manchesteronline.co.uk/m2002/gameshistory/>>

The remaining portion of this paper will deal with the study of one specific source of media, the *Hamilton Spectator*, and how it covered the 1958 British & Commonwealth Games from the week before the Games, the week of the Games and the week after the Games, July 11-August 2. In this study the articles covering the Games will be critically reviewed and some key issues will be identified. Articles will be critically read to identify whether race or gender was an issue during these Games. Another important element that may be exposed is the media's coverage of the games and whether they held any bias. And finally, were there any athletes who became local our national heroes?

A sport hero may be classified in many different ways but a good definition has been brought forth from John Keys "Introduction," in *Socio-cultural Characteristics and the Image of the Urban Anglo-Canadian Athletic Hero*. In his paper he informs the reader that a sports hero must first of all, have measurable athletic excellence. Secondly, Keys says a sports hero will have charisma, which often includes inspiring qualities and a nickname. Lastly, Keys describes a sport hero as someone who is transmitted across society, which means that they are well known by all as an icon for that sport.<sup>7</sup>

Aspects of race and gender, and the idea of the hero will be considered as the sources are examined. The following pages will investigate the *Hamilton Spectator's* coverage of the 1958 British and Commonwealth Games in Cardiff, Wales.

### **Critical Review**

When reading through these primary articles, there are a number of interesting observations that can be made. The *Hamilton Spectator* conveys a picture of sport that is

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<sup>7</sup> Keys, John., "Introduction in *Socio-cultural Characteristics and the Image of the Urban Anglo-Canadian Athletic Hero*."

quite different from that of today, but is also quite revolutionary for its time. When doing an exhaustive search of the Hamilton spectator from July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1958 – August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1958, we find the following.

### **Submission to Australian and British Athletic Superiority**

When reading the articles from this period during the British Empire Games, it is apparent that the Spectator emphasizes participation over competition in the beginning of their coverage. During the coverage, as Canada does well, but not as well as was hoped, competition becomes more important. When competition is stressed and focused on, there are only two real competitors: Britain and Australia. Australia had gone as far as to proclaim that they were going to win 40 gold medals during the Games.<sup>8</sup> This was taken as a challenge by the British, who were hosting the Games, and, in the end, spoiled the Australian prediction by gaining more points.

However, in the Canadian newspaper the *Hamilton Spectator*, this Australian / British competitiveness did not receive as much coverage as would have been otherwise present if Canada were to be more of a competitive force in the Games.

### **Three-Fold Focus to the Cardiff Games**

*Increasing Athletic Achievement.* This aspect of excellence was measured against the successes of others, but more than this, excellence was celebrated when records were set. A main focus on the 1958 Cardiff British Empire Games seems to be on the number of Empire Games records and world records that were broken. Examine the following

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<sup>8</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, “Run and Swim Faster Than Ever at This Year’s Empire Games”. Jul. 26 1958, pg.23

exert from the *Hamilton Spectator*. “Track records in the men’s 100 yard dash, six-mile run, and the 440 hurdles were broken 12 times, leaving the only marks in the footraces unscathed in the men’s half-mile and the women’s 100 yard dash... best Games times in all four races and a world record...”<sup>9</sup> This is one good example of how readers wanted to know about the records being broken. It was not as much of a deal that Australia beat Britain in many swimming events. However, it was a big deal that while beating Britain, Australia set numerous world, and Empire Games records. This is one thing that made the Games noteworthy.

*Theme of Friendly Rivalry.*<sup>10</sup> This term was used as an official description of the Game’s focus. It reads as follows: “The theme of the show was that this is one cozy family gathering of athletes engaged in friendly rivalry.”<sup>3</sup> This is a good theme in principle; however, it is quite rare that you find a competitor that personifies this so-called friendly rivalry. Indeed, it is even that much more rare when you find that sort of friendly rivalry between two competitive countries, such as Britain and Australia.

## **The Name Game**

It is important to note that the Games had at this point been officially renamed the British and Commonwealth Games. However, as one can see from above, Canada still refers to these games as the British Empire Games, as this is what they are referred to throughout the *Hamilton Spectator*. Why was it that Canada did not make this shift? Perhaps this is connected to Canada’s performance at these games. When referring to the games as the British Empire Games, one assumes the games to be primarily a British

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<sup>9</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, “BEG Athletes Launch Record Breaking Orgy”. Jul. 21, 1958, pg.21

<sup>10</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, “British, Aussie Athletes Seem Likely Victors”. July 19, 1958, pg.21

event. However, when the games are referred to as the British Commonwealth Games, it conveys a certain level of shared ownership to all members of the commonwealth. For in the name Empire, one cannot help but feel as though they are being ruled. It would be interesting to study further to see at what point Canada began to refer to these games as the British Commonwealth games. Perhaps this change coincided with a better-expected performance at the games. In this way they may have felt as though they were no longer being ruled by the empire, but instead have gained more of an equal footing with Britain.

### **Athletes**

Athletes in the 1958 Cardiff games bear little resemblance to athletes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Today, national level athletes specialize in their sport. They spend hours every day training for their event and their whole diet, sleeping schedule, exercise schedule, and life revolved around this. However, it is implied by the *Hamilton Spectator* that this dedicated, focused training was not the case with some of the Canadian athletes who participated in Cardiff. For example, take the title of an article found in the *Spectator* on July 21<sup>st</sup>. “Canadian Training on Beer, Cigarettes”.<sup>11</sup> In this article, a Canadian sprinter is interviewed, who confesses that he enjoys drinking, smoking, and last night he stayed up most the night with fellow teammates talking about the Games. A female athlete, Jackie MacDonald Gelling, also admitted to slacking off in her training. Before the Games began, she informed the press that this would be her last year due to other interests. She is quoted as saying, “ [I] have allowed my training to slip during the last year.” She also

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<sup>11</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, “Canadian Training on Beer, Cigarettes”. Jul. 21<sup>st</sup>, 1958, pg.21

said that, "I just enjoyed the competition and the sport in general".<sup>12</sup> Perhaps it is because of reasons such as these that Canada failed to perform as well as they could have in the 1958 Games.

Further evidence of this is suggested by the fact the Canadians are often referred to in the newspaper in the following way: Their name, followed by their city of residence, followed by their job. No other countries' athletes are credited with a profession. This could be for one of two reasons. The first being that other countries athletes' devote more of their resources into their sport than to Canadian athletes, thus obtaining better results and achievement. The second possible explanation is that the *Hamilton Spectator* does not report this information because they felt as though it was irrelevant to their readers.

## **Women**

Women received much more attention in these games than they did in years past. For example, an article appearing in the *Spectator* summarizing the day's results mentioned female athletes twelve times and male athletes fifteen times. For the social times this equality of coverage was quite tremendous. In fact, the *Hamilton Spectator* did an enormous piece on a female athlete by the name of Irene MacDonald. She was a small athlete, which worked well for her since her sport of choice was diving. She was only 22-years-old and yet she had already won Canadian Nationals three times and the U.S. Nationals once. She had won a bronze metal in the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, participating despite an injured shoulder that had to be frozen moments before her victorious final dive. This article went deeply into her career, her training and her chosen sport, outlining how she performs and how she is judged. The treatment that this

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<sup>12</sup> *The Hamilton Spectator* "Jackie Quits Soon" July 17 1958 pg 26

article gave her was very respectful of her as an athlete; there was no belittling of the female athlete. Throughout all the articles, the women mentioned were given the credit due to them. However, this is not to say that there were not indicators throughout the coverage that indicated the different social positions males and females had in normal life. In the article that announced the impending retirement of Jackie MacDonald Gelling, it mentions that after retirement she will, “settle down and raise a family”<sup>13</sup>. The *Spectator* does not point this out in a negative way; it is merely stating the facts. The quote just shows that the home was still, in that time, considered the normal place for women to be.

### **Sports Heroes**

Although there were, throughout the coverage, certainly favourites from the Canadian team that the *Spectator* commented on more than once, there was no single athlete that really fit the criteria that John Keys gives to identify a sports hero. The closest that the *Spectator* got to making a hero out of an athlete is Irene MacDonald. They give her a nickname, “The Queen of the Springboard”.<sup>14</sup> However, beyond that the *Spectator* was disinclined to raise anyone to that pedestal.

The *Spectator*’s coverage of the event was interesting and fair. The coverage was made interesting by reporting not only on names and results but also on human facts, rivalries, romance, rigors of training and foibles. It was fair in respect to equal gender

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> *The Hamilton Spectator* “Our Springboard Queen Will Dive For Gold” July 13, 1958, p. 13

coverage. Taking into consideration that the Games were held across an ocean that seemed a lot bigger than it is now, the *Spectator's* coverage was quite enlightening.