

1982 Commonwealth Games Hamilton Spectator Article Review

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The first Commonwealth Games, then known as the British Empire Games, took place in 1930 in Hamilton, Ontario. Bobby Robinson was a big reason why the event was able to take place. Eleven countries came in with 400 athletes into Hamilton. The City of Hamilton provided \$30 000 to these nations to help cover traveling costs.¹ After the Games in Hamilton, they were held every four years (except during 1942-1946 due to World War II).

The Games were known as the British Empire Games from 1930-1950. The name was then changed to the British Empire and Commonwealth Games until 1962. The Games were known as the British Commonwealth Games from 1966-1974. From 1978 to the present, they have been called the Commonwealth Games.²

Unlike other Games, such as the Winter Olympics and the Pan Am Games, that were founded on geographic or climatic factors the Commonwealth Games were founded on history. The Commonwealth Games were unique from other Games because all the countries that participated had a common language-all the athletes could talk to each other in English. This common language created an atmosphere that has led to the Commonwealth Games being long known as the “Friendly Games.”³ The Games were also unique in that all the countries that participated had a common history: they shared the same experiences, they had a unified language, and they had bonds that looked past cultural barriers and physical borders.⁴

The Commonwealth Games encouraged people to be healthy and fit and it provided an opportunity to inspire young people to excel at what they do.

At the Opening Ceremony of every Commonwealth Game, there is an oath that is taken on the athletes’ behalf. The Oath is: “We declare that we will take part in the

Commonwealth Games of (year) in the spirit of true sportsmanship, recognizing the rules which govern them and desirous of participating in them for the honor of our Commonwealth and for the glory of sport.”⁵

The Queen is Head of the Commonwealth Games and Patron of the C.G.F. (Commonwealth Games Federation). The Queen’s Baton Relay is one of the great traditions of the Commonwealth Games. It signifies the call to the athletes to come together to celebrate the Games. It also carries the Queen’s message which is read at the opening of the Games. At the heart of the C.G.F.’s work is the will to dynamically promote and celebrate a unique, friendly, world-class Games.

The Commonwealth Games held in Brisbane in 1982 is still known as one of the best. Everything went smoothly from the Opening Ceremonies until the very end of the Games. A total of 46 nations, with a record number of 1,583 athletes and 571 officials participated in the Brisbane Games. England won the Games with 108 medals, closely followed by Australia with 107 and Canada with 83 medals. At the Games nine sports were featured: athletics, badminton, boxing, cycling, lawn bowls, shooting, swimming and diving, weightlifting and wrestling.

Of the 83 medals that Canada won, they had 26 gold, 23 silver, and 34 bronze. Both men and women participated in the archery competition, badminton, diving and swimming, and athletics. The athletics included races of all lengths, relays, decathlons, discus, hammer throw, heptathlon, high jump, javelin throw, long jump, marathon, pole vault, and shot put. Only men participated in boxing, cycling, weightlifting, wrestling, and shooting.⁶

To hear the story of the 1982 Brisbane Commonwealth Games from a slightly different point of view, rather than the more general view above, we looked at the Hamilton Spectator to see the media's story of the Games. Looking at the 1982 editions of the Hamilton Spectator starting a week before the start of the Games and continuing on to a week after the Games, we developed the following story.

During the week prior to the Games (Sept 23-Sept 30), there were in total eight articles pertaining to the upcoming Games. The articles became progressively bigger, appearing every other day (Saturday, Monday, Wednesday) until the Games started. The first article appeared on Saturday, September 25. It was a small article containing two small paragraphs (half a column). The article itself took up only a very small portion of the page. The article discussed the CBC television coverage for the Games that would add up to more than 20 hours and also indicated that the telecasts would be hosted by five male broadcasters. The article then briefly discussed three serious Canadian medal contenders: Shawn O'Sullivan, a 20 year old boxer, who won 64 of 67 bouts as a light middleweight, would be the top contender for the gold at the Brisbane games because he beat both the gold and bronze medallists (Olympic) the previous year at the World Cup of Boxing; Angella Taylor, a 23 year old sprinter, had been the top female Canadian sprinter for four years and held the Commonwealth and Canadian records for the 100m, and Canadian records for both the 200m and 4x100m relay; Jill Ross-Griffen, a 24 year old, held the Commonwealth heptathlon record. Along with the article was a picture of each girl in action.

The second article, "Canada's cyclists eye gold," was printed on Monday, September 27. It had three shorter columns that added up to about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a column and $\frac{1}{4}$

of the page. This article mentioned the expectations of the Canadian male cyclists as well as several setbacks to the preparations. Setbacks included hot temperatures that caused sickness and fainting and a large thunderstorm that drenched competitors and spectators during a rehearsal. There were also several dropouts due to injury. Henry Rono, a top Kenyan Steeplechase competitor, dropped out due to an ankle injury. His dropout was a great disappointment because he held many records and was to race Dave Moorcroft. Dave had recently broken one of Rono's records. This race was to be "the big event of the games."

Louis Garneau, along with three other Canadian cyclists, placed during the men's cycling time trials. Louis, age 24, had won a warm up 40 km race and came in 6th in a 100 km race. The Canadian cycling coach expressed his high expectations (gold) for his cycling team. In the middle of the article, a small paragraph was added talking about the 3000 aboriginals that had marched through Brisbane for three hours to focus international attention on their demands for land rights. This was one of the biggest aboriginal demonstrations.⁷

On Wednesday, September 29, the day before the games, six articles about the games were included in the paper. The first article appeared near the front section of the newspaper and referred to the other five articles that appeared later in the sports section. The first article, "'Top dog' Canadians have hackles up," is a short article discussing the outcome of the last games held in Edmonton (1978) where Canada came out on top. Canada became the 'top dog,' the team to beat rather than being just another team competing. Athletes, such as Shawn O'Sullivan and Jill Ross, were skeptical as to

whether the Brisbane games would live up to the Edmonton games. Canada's goal was to win at least 45 gold medals as they had done in Edmonton, to put themselves ahead of England. Canadians also recognized that swimming pool events had the most potential for winning medals for Canada. Unfortunately, two more Canadian prospective medal contenders had to drop out due to injury and 'lack of conditioning.'⁸

The second article, "Marcel takes on folk hero status in walking stride," was a special article about the oldest athlete competing, 40 year old Marcel Jobin of Quebec. This was the biggest article of the five on the page. Jobin was a walker. In the article, he explained how the popularity of walking as an event has greatly increased since he started. In 1981, Jobin was named the second most popular athlete; as the title suggests, he was of folk hero status. The rest of the article expands on Jobin and his struggles and successes as a walker. This article included another small paragraph about the aboriginals who were planning an illegal protest march over land rights.⁹

"Canadian swimmers hope to strangle kangaroo" was a short article focused on the "psych game," not the events themselves but how being in the right mindset is almost equally as important as being physically in shape. There was also a large emphasis on team unity. The title refers to the shirts made by the women's swim team that had a picture of a beaver holding a flag and strangling a kangaroo. These shirts were a response to the motto the Australians had hit them with in Edmonton "catch a Canadian in the pool" along with several other poolside chants. The Canadians have also come up with a bunch of new cheers. Canadian women swimmers won 7 gold medals in 1978, confirming, as mentioned in a previous article, why Canada had high expectations for the

pool events. The men also showed team spirit with their Maple Leaf tattoos on the side of their chests, and the men's coach added, "we'll be chanting...something like this [chanting] is a team effort."¹⁰

A small article, "Whitby girl surprised by success," talked of Canadian swimmer Anne Ottenbrite, age 16. Although she had even not been even ranked in the top 25 in the world, she set two new breaststroke records. Her sudden success concerned her as the more she thought about it, the more nervous she became, which caused her to worry that it might affect her performance.¹¹

Another very small article, "No bombs found," told of a bomb threat to the stadium and the huge 4-storey kangaroo statue named "Matilda." This statue was the symbol of the games. The bomb threat was phoned in, causing an evacuation of 1000 people. Police believed Matilda could be a target.¹²

The next article, "Sheridan therapist expects to be busy," speaks of therapist Evert van Beek, age 39 of Sheridan College. He was one of the seven selected sports therapists to treat Canadian athletes at the games. Evert would treat mainly strained and torn muscles as well as pulled ligaments, while four other doctors would treat the more serious injuries. In the past he had been chief therapist for the Pan-American games, as well as for the Olympiad showing that he was a good choice for the Games. Evert did not expect to have much time for himself as he would not see much more than the inside of the clinic. A working day usually started at 7:00am and did not end until 12:00am. He was excited because he would be able to discuss treatments with other countries, as a sports medicine symposium would be held prior to the games. Evert believed that sports

therapy is as much an art as it is a science; therapists treat more than just the injury. For example, many athletes have a specific way they like to be treated or have a bandage wrapped.¹³

The articles seemed to aim at the problems with the Games so far, almost as if they were trying to make the Edmonton games look much better than the Brisbane Games even before they had started.

The 1982 Commonwealth Games began on Thursday September 30 in Brisbane, Australia as John Primrose of Edmonton, the Canadian flag bearer, followed by more than 2,000 athletes into the Queen Elizabeth Stadium. This parade of athletes along with a display of music and dancing, a crowd of almost 60,000 spectators, and a message read by Prince Philip from the Queen delivered in an ornamental baton started off the Games.¹⁴

Friday, October 1 was the first day of competitions, but was a “Sobering Start for Canadians at Games” as the article was titled. The 1982 team started slowly compared to the 1978 team in Edmonton. Only two medals were won that day: silver by Sylvie Bernier of Ste. Foy, Quebec in women’s springboard diving and a bronze in the 4x100-metre freestyle relay event. “We started too slowly and if you start slow, you tend to stay slow,” said Louis Garneaux, a Ste. Foy member of the Canadian cycling team who just missed the bronze medal placing.¹⁵

The article title of the Saturday, October 2nd paper was “Canadians Swim to Gold, But We’ve Lost Ground In Other Events.” The Canadian swimming team won six

medals that day, as expected, but could still not compare to the 1978 games. There was a medal sweep by three Ontario swimmers in the 200-metre breaststroke race. In first place was Anne Ottenbrite, 16 years old, who lowered her own Commonwealth record for the second time in two days. Kathy Bald took the silver while Kathy Richardson took the bronze medal. In the men's 400-metre individual medley, Alex Baumann of Sudbury placed first. Canada was still, however, far behind as Australia and England still dominated most of the day by winning medals and setting new records.¹⁶

Canadian Alex Baumann, 18, set a new Commonwealth record on October 4th in the men's 200-metre swimming, taking the gold despite a sore shoulder. Two more gold medals were won in the men's and women's hurdles and a fourth gold was won in the men's 200m breaststroke where Victor Davis set a new record. Two silver medals were won, along with two bronze medals including one from Jill Ross-Giffen of London, Ont. who mentioned in a pre-games article as a medal contender. Canada did however lose a medal that day. There was a disqualification in the men's 4x200m freestyle when officials took 45 minutes to review the tape to decide that Wayne Kelly had left the block before teammate Cam Henning had touched the second exchange. Team officials as well as the media all felt that the Australians had left early on their exchange as well. Canada and Australia lost their first and second place finishes on Saturday due to disqualifications in the 4x100m freestyle.¹⁷

Canadian champion Dave Steen shared his thoughts about use of steroids among many athletes in one of the two articles in the October 5th sports section. He said, "It's a shortcut I'm not willing to take, but I blame the system. It's difficult to resist when some

countries have random testing and others don't." Steen blamed the inconsistency of the testing procedures around the world and the increasing number of athletes that are using them and getting away with it. At the end of the day however, Canada came out with four gold, three silver, and four bronze medals. Still trailing Australia and England, Canada now had a total of 12 gold, 13 silver and 18 bronze.¹⁸

Wednesday, October 6 was another tough day for the Canadian swim team after two more medals were lost due to disqualifications. These controversial disqualifications ended the day with a gold medal being taken away from the Canadian men's 4x100m relay team. With the Queen in attendance, the members of the Canadian team still showed their frustration as they banged the walls. "It's unfortunate that this happened, but some of the guys on this team are highly emotional," says Dave Johnson, coach of the Canadian men's team. Canada did win a few medals that day, but the loss of so many through controversial disqualifications made many upset and frustrated.¹⁹

"Historic dead heat at Games," was the headline of the sports report on the Commonwealth Games. It was the first dead heat in the history of the Commonwealth Games. Allan Wells of Scotland and Mike McFarlane of England had a double gold sprint. Both men were awarded the gold medal by judges after half an hour of reviewing tapes could not determine which sprinter crossed the line first. Apologies were made by some of the Canadian swimmers after the disqualifications of the previous day. "It's an unfortunate incident and I apologize for anyone who may have been offended," Canadian swim coach Dave Johnson said. Despite all of these incidents, Canada remained third in the total medal standings.²⁰

The bold title, “Canada’s gold rush,” was followed by an article full of uplifting news of Canada’s nine more gold medals which increased their total number of medals to 24 gold, 19 silver, and 32 bronze. Canada’s team worked hard to beat their competitors as Debbie Brill of Burnaby, B.C. said, “The knee still wobbles when I jump and it hurts a lot now, but I guess I wanted to beat the Australians so that was why I came to the games.” In this article, much emphasis was placed on the Canadian athletes and their outstanding efforts of the day.²¹

The final events of the Commonwealth Games were relays in which the Canadian teams picked up a few more medals. The article of Saturday, October 9 was titled “Canadians play spoiler” as it refers to the relay races and close finishes by the Canadian teams. “One of the most exciting races of the day came in the women’s 4x400 relay when Angella Taylor of Toronto, the 100m gold medallist, held off Australian Raelene Boyle at the line.”²²

There were two follow-up articles after the games, both appearing on October 12. The first, “‘A sobering experience’ Questions arise over performance at Aussie Games” was a more general article concluding the results for Canada as a whole. As the title suggested, Canada had not lived up to its expectations and had received a “well-beaten” third behind Australia and the new leader, England. Canada finished with 26 gold, 23 silver, and 33 bronze which was a far cry from the previous win. The article mentions one natural reason for the loss: the home team always has the advantage. Canada also took it hard when the women’s swimming came out with only ten medals compared to the Australian women’s 21, not meeting expectations expressed in the articles of the

week prior to the games. The article includes a large picture of “Matilda” winking as the Australians win emphasizing Canada’s defeat.²³

A second article, “Ontario athletes shine with medals,” was more geared towards Ontario. Despite the lousy result for Canadians as a whole, the province of Ontario had reason to be happy because over half (almost 75%) of the medals Canada had won were from Ontario’s athletes. Coach Andy Higgins gives several reasons for this including a relatively new four-year-old jump center at the University of Toronto training quarters. This center was introduced by the sports and fitness branch of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Information. The new jump center had developed many good jumpers. As well, top coaching and research on mental and physical approaches to sport were being done to improve performance. This new program was starting to pay off therefore the results of the Games were not surprising. Another reason for the success of Ontario athletes was commitment, taken seriously by Ontario athletes: standings showed that the province of Ontario itself could have taken on and beat at least 40 countries by itself. The aim of this new program was not to beat others, but to aim or gear athletes towards their potential. It is a framework to enable top athletes to reach their potentials.

In the future it would be the sports that have proven to put athletes in the world’s top six that would get the extra support, accounting for 18 of the 60 sports supported by Canada. Suggesting that if an athlete does not show potential to make it all the way to the top, the government would not support them financially. The emphasis of the games has moved to be more competitive.²⁴

The aim of this program seems to contradict what the newspaper was portraying about the Games. The newspaper seemed to say that the aim of the Games was to beat the other teams and to come out on top; winning was the main goal presented by the newspaper. This emphasis was seen in most of the articles as only the top athletes who were medal contenders or held a record were mentioned. The new training center sounds like a big asset to Canadian athletes, but as the last article said, only extremely talented athletes will get the help needed to reach their potential. Not only did it present the games as competition between athletes, but among countries as well. England was Canada's main competition followed closely by Australia. However, England was rarely mentioned while there seemed to be a constant battle between Canada and Australia, not only to win the games, but also to determine who held the better games. Which games were better, the Edmonton games or the Brisbane?

There were only a small number of different sports reported on during the 1982 Games, swimming and track events being the main ones. Many of the events, such as boxing, shooting, wrestling, and many others, were never mentioned by the Hamilton Spectator due to the fact that there were no medals won by Canadians in these events.

In general, the Games did not receive a significant amount of newspaper coverage. The coverage included for the most part one or two articles per day with the exception of the Wednesday, September 29th edition, which consisted of six small articles. The articles started out very small and insignificant in comparison to the size of the paper, but they grew until the start of the Games where the articles took up almost a whole page including the large pictures. The articles were consistently the same size

during the games and concluded with two slightly smaller articles after the games. The articles rarely appeared before the second page of the sports section, with one exception where a pre-game article appeared near the beginning of the newspaper. Sports such as baseball, hockey, and football seemed to dominate the sports section, possibly due to the fact that these are regular season sports that fans supported regularly.

The Games took place on the other side of the world, meaning that the games actually took place during, for North Americans, the late night and the early morning, this could account for the lack of coverage. The time difference and the fact that Brisbane is so far away probably made following and getting excited about the games much more difficult. It was a little surprising that there was so little for these Games, especially in Ontario as Ontario's athletes won the majority of Canada's medals. The lack of coverage could be due to the fact that Canada did not win a large number of medals as they had the previous year and since the articles in the paper mainly talked about medal winners, there was not as much to write about. The lack of coverage could be also accounted for by the fact that there were no Hamilton athletes present in the games; there would have most likely been more coverage had there been a Hamilton athlete to support.

In conclusion, the media (The Hamilton Spectator) only gives a small taste of some of what the media considers important highlights of the Games, and not the whole story. The media's story also reflects what is important to our society, in this case society views winning as the most important goal.

Melbourne Olympics. Games History [Online]. Available:
<http://www.melbourne2006.com.au/history.html>

¹ The Commonwealth Federation (2002). The Growth of the Games [Online]. Available:
<http://www.thecgf.com/games/growth.asp>

² The Commonwealth Federation (2002). The Growth of the Games [Online]. Available:
<http://www.thecgf.com/games/growth.asp>

³ The Commonwealth Federation (2002). The Growth of the Games [Online]. Available:
<http://www.thecgf.com/games/growth.asp>

⁴ Melbourne Olympics. Games History [Online]. Available:
<http://www.melbourne2006.com.au/history.html>

⁵ The Commonwealth Federation (2002). The Growth of the Games [Online]. Available:
<http://www.thecgf.com/games/growth.asp>

⁶ The Commonwealth Federation (2002). The Growth of the Games [Online]. Available:
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⁷ Canadian Press. "Canada's cyclists eye gold." *The Hamilton Spectator* 27 Sept 1982: Sports.

⁸ Canadian Press. "'Top dog' Canadians have hackles up." *The Hamilton Spectator* 29 Sept 1982: Sports.

⁹ Kernaghan, Jim. "Marcel takes folk hero status in walking stride." *The Hamilton Spectator* 29 Sept 1982: Sports.

¹⁰ Canadian Press. "Canadian swimmers hope to strangle a kangaroo." *The Hamilton Spectator* 29 Sept 1982: Sports.

¹¹ Canadian Press. "Whitby girl still surprised by success." *The Hamilton Spectator* 29 Sept 1982: Sports.

¹² Southam News. "No bombs found." *The Hamilton Spectator*. 29 Sept 1982: Sports.

¹³ Booth, Godfrey. "Sheridan therapist expects to be busy." *The Hamilton Spectator* 29 Sept 1982: Sports.

¹⁴ Canadian Press. "Canadian leads in opening ceremony." *The Hamilton Spectator* 30 Sept 1982: Sports.

¹⁵ Canadian Press. "Sobering start for Canadians at Games." *The Hamilton Spectator* 01 Sept 1982: Sports.

¹⁶ Canadian Press. "Canadians swim to gold." *The Hamilton Spectator* 01 Sept 1982: Sports.

¹⁷ Canadian Press. "Canadians start moving-Baumann sets world record." "Canada loses another medal." *The Hamilton Spectator* 04 Sept 1982: Sports.

¹⁸ Canadian Press. "Widespread drug use claim." *The Hamilton Spectator* 05 Sept 1982: Sports.

¹⁹ Canadian Press. "We wuz robbed in the pool." *The Hamilton Spectator* 06 Sept 1982: Sports.

²⁰ Canadian Press. "Historic dead heat at Games." *The Hamilton Spectator* 07 Sept 1982: Sports.

²¹ Canadian Press. "Canada's gold rush." *The Hamilton Spectator* 08 Sept 1982: Sports.

²² Author Unknown. "Canadians play spoiler." *The Hamilton Spectator* 09 Sept 1982: Sports.

²³ Kernaghan, Jim. "'A sobering experience' Questions arise over performance at Aussie Games." *The Hamilton Spectator* 12 Oct 1982: Sports.

²⁴ Canadian Press. "Ontario Athletes shine with medal." *The Hamilton Spectator* 12 Oct 1982: Sports.