RULE BRITANNIA: NATIONALISM, IDENTITY, AND THE MODERN OLYMPIC GAMES

A Dissertation in
Kinesiology

by
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Abstract

As the cradle of modern sport, Britain’s rich sporting history contributed significantly to the nation’s identity both at home and abroad. Through their governance and control of leading bureaucratic organizations and clubs, the British established and maintained a position of leadership both on and off the field. Britain’s early sporting dominance, coupled with the use of sport as medium for shaping the abilities, values and character of a British governing class, cultivated a belief that sport played a crucial role in the acquisition and consolidation of British hegemonic power. After an initial period of unrivalled dominance, Britain’s monopolistic position as leader of modern sport eventually came under serious assault. Britain’s historical sporting supremacy—similar to her imperial and economic power in general—was relative, not absolute; a position predicated more on the weaknesses of her opponents rather than her own strengths. Like the example of industrialization, a “catch-up” phenomenon quickly occurred. As foreign nations gained experience and established sporting institutions and customs of their own, free from the restraints of Victorian notions of “true” amateurism and often with direct governmental assistance, British prowess diminished at an alarming rate.

Perceiving an unwelcome deterioration in their country’s relative position as a military, economic, imperial, and sporting power, the predominantly elite and politically conservative members of the British Olympic Association (BOA) naturally embraced the Olympic Games as a platform for promoting British interests. Throughout the two decades following the establishment of the BOA in 1905, Britain’s Olympic leaders pursued an administrative policy designed to stem the tide of British decline, both
perceived and real. Within the framework of the Olympic movement, BOA chiefs fought bitterly to maintain a sporting union with Ireland, endeavored to foster a greater sense of imperial identity with her white dominions, and even undertook an ambitious policy of athletic specialization designed to reverse the nation’s waning fortunes in international sport. The BOA’s nation-building efforts faced strong opposition in the face of political squabbling between the constituent parts of the British Isle, the rising political independence of the dominions, and unwavering British public and governmental aversion to the Olympic Games.
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Since the establishment of sports history as a significant academic discipline in the 1970s, a wealth of scholarship has focused on the sporting traditions of Great Britain, the progenitor of modern sport. Numerous historical studies, the most notable of which include Richard Holt’s *Sport and the British* (1990) have provided broad-based overviews of the development during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of modern competitive sport in Britain. More commonly, countless academic studies have focused on specific sports, issues, and time periods across British history.

Despite the abundance of British sporting histories, the historical study of the British Olympic movement has surprisingly received limited scholarly attention. General scholarly texts or articles that examine British sport history either make brief reference to the nation’s Olympic participation, or, more commonly, overlook it altogether—the substantial lines of research examining the relationship between the British government and the Olympic Games established by Martin Polley and Peter J. Beck’s notwithstanding. This is certainly not the trend in other nations. For example, the United States’ Olympic participation has been the subject of a wealth of scholarship led most notably by Mark Dyreson and John Lucas. Similar studies have also focused on the Olympic histories of other nations, including, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, and Greece. Unlike their counterparts who study other nations, British sport historians appear to have been limited by their own academic parochialism, focusing their attentions primarily on the trinity of British sporting pastimes, association football, cricket, and rugby union. With the conclusion of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the passing of
the baton to London, the importance of reviving Britain’s Olympic history is unprecedented.

Predictably, with the award of the 2012 summer Olympic Games to the city of London British sport historians have slowly begun to redirect their research attentions. In the summer of 2008, two British academic conferences on the Olympic Games were hosted by the Centre for Contemporary British History, University of London, and Leeds Metropolitan University—Martin Polley’s forthcoming book, *The British Olympics: British Olympic Heritage 1612-2012*, will provide a much needed broad-based historical foundation. Signs that London’s successful bid for the 2012 games is boosting British interest in Olympic studies are further evidenced by the recent wave of populist histories focusing on the 1908 and 1948 London Olympic Games, along with the concerted efforts of economists, philosophers, and political scientists to analyze the Olympics in a British context.

Standing at the forefront of a recent upsurge in Olympic scholarship, this dissertation will provide the first comprehensive historical examination of Britain’s participation in international Olympic competition between the inaugural modern Olympic Games, held in Athens, Greece, in 1896, to the conclusion of World War II, when the Olympics were revived in 1948 and held in the worn-torn British capital city, London. Based upon a vast body of original research collected from archives throughout Europe and North America, including the British Olympic Foundation, London, England; the Olympic Studies Centre, Lausanne, Switzerland; the National Archives, Kew, England; and the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, USA, this dissertation explores
the complex political, imperial, and social issues that shaped Britain’s Olympic participation throughout the early decades of the twentieth century.
Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his appreciation to both the British Olympic Foundation and the International Society of Olympic Historians (ISOH) for their generous research grants that made this study possible. The author would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Amy Terriere at the British Olympic Foundation and the research staff at the International Olympic Studies Center (OSC) in Lausanne, Switzerland, for their kind assistance in providing key archival materials. Finally, the author would like to express his deep gratitude to his adviser, Mark Dyreson, and the members of his dissertation committee for their continued support and advice throughout this process.
In Loving Memory of

Lisa Rowan Burke
Introduction

An Indifferent Beginning

On July 6, 2005, during the 117th annual session of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) held in Singapore, delegates voted to award the 2012 summer Olympic Games to the city of London, opening a new chapter in Great Britain’s illustrious Olympic history. In defeating a highly favored Paris bid, the British capital realized the unrivaled prospect of hosting the summer games for the third time since Baron Pierre de Coubertin’s 1894 revival of the Olympic movement.¹ For a nation that served as the cradle of modern sport, the IOC’s decision provided a crowning glory for British sporting and Olympic history.² Born on the playgrounds of the nation’s most prestigious public schools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, modern competitive sport flourished throughout the British Isles. The British embraced sport as a vehicle for the promotion of masculine virtue and muscular Christianity and also as an instrument for empire building. The British believed that sports such as cricket and rugby solidified colonial and dominion relations with the motherland and furthered Britain’s territorial claims overseas.³ Even outside of the framework of empire, the British actively exported their games to the farthest reaches of the globe. In the Pax Britannica, an age of unrivaled British commercial and naval power, sailors, merchants, and engineers introduced British sporting pastimes to foreign lands, established the organizational framework that ensured their diffusion, and inspired the development of local traditions and patterns of play.⁴

The British not only spread sport around the globe, they organized and controlled the process as well. Through their dominance and control of bureaucratic organizations...
such as the Jockey Club (1752), the Marylebone Cricket Club (1788), the Royal &
Ancient Golf Club (1754), and the Football Association (1863), the British provided the
formal codification and national administration that propelled sport from its traditional
roots towards its place in modernity. The British reveled in their role as the leader of
international sport, espousing their own chivalrous ideology of amateurism and fair play,
a sporting ethos that was translated into guidelines for social intercourse. By the second
half of the nineteenth century a sports mania had gripped the British Isles. Fueled by the
twin-forces of industrialization and urbanization, football, rugby union, and cricket
became not mere pastimes but passions for the British, transcending and reconfiguring
class, racial, and eventually gender boundaries, and pervading social and literary
discourses. Renowned West Indian scholar and liberationist, C. L. R. James, confirmed
the importance of sport in the fabric of national life when he described games such as
football and cricket “as the greatest cultural influences in nineteenth century Britain.”
Sports provided an image that the British presented to the world and which foreigners
came to associate with Britain.

Olympic Heritage

Embedded within the patchwork of Britain’s rich and vast sporting history lay the
roots of the modern Olympic movement. While the ancient Olympic Games of classical
Greek antiquity (776 BCE-394 ACE) obviously provided an important foundation for a
modern Olympic revival, the British provided the ideological and institutional framework
that inspired Baron Pierre de Coubertin to bring it to fruition. Born in Paris on January 1,
1863, Coubertin grew up in the aftermath of Napoleon’s stunning 1815 defeat at
Waterloo that led the French empire into a decline that reached its nadir with their capitulation in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. A crippling sense of degeneracy, together with an impassioned search for the root cause of the malignancy, pervaded French life in the post-war Third Republic. Reeling from the humiliation of defeat, Coubertin became absorbed with finding a remedy to the debility and turmoil that gripped the nation. France had fallen behind her imperial rivals in the quest for overseas expansion, her foreign trade plummeted, and the nation’s birthrate declined at an alarming rate. Coubertin identified a lack of physical training in French schools as a major cause behind his nation’s rapid decline. Rejecting the military, political and legal careers expected of a member of France’s old aristocracy, Coubertin devoted his life towards overseeing the physical and athletic development of the nation’s youth.²

As an aspiring educational reformer Coubertin embraced Britain’s sporting traditions as the cornerstone of his pedagogical ideology, eschewing the German model of regimented gymnastics—*Turnen*—that had long proven popular on the European continent—even in France. During the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, a “cult of athleticism” dominated the English public school system as educational reformers elevated sport to a position of unrivalled prominence. Built upon the chivalrous Graeco-Renaissance concept of manhood, along with the aggressive spirituality of muscular Christianity, a coterie of influential public school headmasters endeavored to redefine elite concepts of masculinity and behavior. Through organized team sports such as football, rugby union, and cricket, proponents maintained that students acquired important character traits such as equanimity, bravery and honesty—qualities deemed central to the development of patriotic, imperialistic, and religiously devout English
Coubertin’s fascination with British competitive sport derived from reading Thomas Hughes’ totemic fictional novel *Tom Brown’s School Days*. Reading *Tom Brown* as a work of detailed and contextualized history, Coubertin mistook Hughes’ fictional version of Thomas Arnold, the legendary headmaster of Rugby school and a champion of muscular Christianity, as the person responsible for the significance accorded to competitive sport in English schools.

In reality, the historical Arnold had been far more interested in promoting the moral and religious education of his students rather than overseeing their physical development. Blissfully unaware, the passionate Anglophile Coubertin sailed across the channel in 1883 to the homeland of his own personal athletic philosophy, calling at public schools in Rugby, Eton, Harrow, and the two leading bastion of elite English university education, Oxford and Cambridge. The baron returned from his pilgrimage convinced that Britain’s sporting traditions were the keystone of her empire, a vast collection of transoceanic realms that covered over one-quarter of the world’s land mass “upon which the sun never set.” He hypothesized that if France adopted a British sporting culture it would revitalize French society, restoring the nation to its former status as arbiter of western civilization. Inspired by his educational sojourn in Britain, followed by at least three subsequent visits before the end of the decade, Coubertin returned to France to begin a twenty-one year campaign to transplant an English and “Arnoldian” physical educational system to his homeland.

Unsurprisingly, Coubertin’s educational mission put him at odds with many of his Anglophobic countrymen who held a strong distaste for the British and their wild sporting pastimes. The baron proved resilient in the face of Gallic prejudices, producing a
constant stream of publications in support of a British educational model and even founding a number of sports organizations, the most notable of which was the *Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques* (USFSA).\(^\text{12}\) While chauvinism continued to stymie the baron’s ambitions for overhauling the French educational system, a new objective had captured his attention: the revival of the Olympic Games. The baron’s attempts to reignite the Olympic flame after nearly 1,500 years—the Christian Roman Emperor Theodosius dissolved the ancient Olympic Games in 394 ACE on the grounds that they were a pagan festival\(^\text{13}\)—has been the subject of a body of consummate research.\(^\text{14}\) Evidence has clearly shown that in spite of his own historical account and a strong tendency for personal aggrandizement, Coubertin was not the first to conceive of the Olympic revival idea.\(^\text{15}\) On the contrary, Panagiotis Soutsos, a Greek poet writing in the aftermath of his nation’s victory in the War of Independence, first raised the notion of a modern Olympic revival in 1833, while a number of sporting events that were called “Olympic” (or variants thereof) had flourished throughout Europe since the seventeenth century.\(^\text{16}\)

The British themselves boasted a long series of pre-Coubertin “national” Olympic events, dating back to 1612 and Robert Dover’s Cotswold Olympick Games.\(^\text{17}\) Held in Dover’s Hill, in the parish of western sub edge in north Gloucestershire from 1612 to 1852 (and from 1951 to the present), the Cotswold games comprised sporting, dancing, and music events characteristic of “Merrie Olde England.”\(^\text{18}\) The Wenlock Olympian Games, held in the village of Much Wenlock, Shropshire, northwest England, were another important harbinger to Coubertin’s modern Olympic revival. Established in 1850 (and continuing with limited interruption to this very day) by William Penny Brookes, a
local medical practitioner, magistrate, philanthropist, and one of the most important figures in modern Olympic history, the Wenlock Olympian Games promoted the ancient Greek ideal of moral, physical, and intellectual development by blending sporting and educational events into a program open to all social-classes. Inspired by the success of a Greek revival of the Olympic Games held in Athens in 1859, Brookes later expanded his Olympic movement to the county level by hosting annual “Shropshire Olympic Games.” Held in rotation in surrounding borough’s and towns, Brooke’s Shropshire Olympics provided the inspiration for Coubertin’s ambulatory, city-to-city, modern Olympic Games.

Modern recreations of the Olympic Games continued to spread throughout the British Isles. In Liverpool, Charles Melley and John Hulley, founders of the Liverpool Athletic Club, began holding annual “Olympic Games” in 1862. Unlike Brookes’ Olympics, however, the Liverpool games prohibited both professional and semi-professional athletes from competing—introducing the elitist “amateurism” that would later become a cornerstone of Coubertin’s international Olympic revival. Through the ingenuity of Hulley in Liverpool, Brookes in Much Wenlock, and Ernest Georg Ravenstein, honorary director of the German Gymnastic Society, a Turner group in London, a National Olympian Association (NOA) came into existence in 1865. As an early precursor to the British Olympic Association, the NOA endeavored to unify the various Olympic societies in existence—which included an openly professional Olympic Games in Morpeth, Northumberland—throughout England into a truly representative national body. Under the NOA’s auspices, “National Olympian Games” were held for the first time in Crystal Palace, London, in 1866, an event that witnessed English
cricketing icon W. G. Grace become an Olympic champion following his victory in the 440-yard hurdles. Comprised of swimming, track and field, gymnastic, wrestling, and fencing events, the inaugural National Olympian Games reflected Brookes and Hulley’s opposing class sympathies. While the NOA barred professional athletes from competing, they refused to draw a strict social-class amateur definition.26

Incensed by the NOA’s more democratic leanings, England’s southern-based, upper-class gentlemen immediately formed a rival organization in 1865, the Amateur Athletic Club (AAC).27 The AAC, the first sport organization to ever use the word “amateur” in its name, unveiled their own rival athletic championship and expressed their indifference towards the NOA sponsored Olympic Games.28 The AAC’s opposition dealt a temporarily debilitating blow to the fledging NOA. Although annual National Olympian Games took place in Birmingham and Manchester over the following two years, the games were suspended until 1874, when they were revived in Brookes’ native Much Wenlock. The NOA staged two further National Olympian Games in Shrewsbury in 1877 and Hadley in 1883, after which the organization fell into a state of dilapidation. The AAC’s, recently reorganized and renamed the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA), decision to loosen its amateur restraints and grant entry to working-class athletes delivered the death knell to the NOA.29

Disheartened but not defeated, Brookes continued to champion the introduction of compulsory physical education into British schools, serving as a member of the National Physical Recreation Society’s executive board and overseeing his annual Wenlock Olympian Games. Expanding his own Olympic revival ambitions, Brookes secured a prominent place in the annals of modern Olympic history when he became the first
person to propose the establishment of “international Olympic Games.” In a series of impassioned correspondences to John Gennadius, a former chargé d’affaires at the Greek embassy in London, Brookes recommended that the games should be held on a permanent basis on Greek soil. For a nation still reeling from the harsh realities of centuries under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, Brookes’ proposition failed to garner the enthusiasm of the new independent Greek nation.\textsuperscript{30} Lacking a rudimentary domestic sporting culture and understanding of competitive sport, the Greeks had already responded indifferently to their own Olympic revival. The Zappas Olympics, named after Euangelés Zappas, a wealthy diaspora Greek living in Romania who had funded them, were held on four occasions between 1859 and 1889 to limited public interest. After trying in vain to rally Greek support for organizing international games, Brookes, now in his eighties and suffering from ill-health, passed the Olympic torch onto a younger and more influential successor, Baron Pierre de Coubertin.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{A Modern Olympic Revival}

While history has shown that the British, in the person of William Penny Brookes, can claim the mantle as the first to conceive of the international Olympic revival idea, the French and Pierre de Coubertin have rightfully been credited for bringing the vision to fruition. Brookes certainly played a pivotal role in fostering Coubertin’s Olympic spirit, exchanging personal correspondences and even inviting the baron to Much Wenlock for a special autumn edition of his Olympic festival in late October, 1890.\textsuperscript{32} Inspired by Brookes’ Olympic ardor and the global interest generated by the recent excavation of ancient Olympia, Coubertin promulgated the idea of a modern international Olympic
revival during a speech at the Sorbonne, University of Paris, on November 25, 1892. When his Olympic proposal aroused limited interest in France, the baron traveled in search of international support. On the way back from an extensive trip to the United States, Coubertin stopped for a brief visit in the British Isles during February of 1894. The prominent Conservative MP and sporting enthusiast, Sir John Astley, hosted Coubertin at his exclusive London Sports Club, in St. James Square, where a small number of British sporting personalities discussed the question of an Olympic revival. The baron found a trusted ally in the form of Charles Herbert, the secretary of the powerful Amateur Athletic Association (AAA). Although Herbert dismissed the plan to revive the Olympic Games as neither “viable nor useful,” he still promised Coubertin his full support in turning a grandiose dream into a distinct reality. Herbert forwarded an extensive list of sporting contacts throughout the British Empire from which the baron hoped to drum-up wider international support.

The baron, refueled by his overseas adventures, stepped-up his Olympic revival efforts by arranging an “International Athletic Congress” to be held at the Sorbonne, Paris, on June 17-23, 1894. Coubertin, eager to bestow the Paris Congress with a sense of aristocratic patronage, named a long list of honorary members including eight Britons: The Prince of Wales; Sir John Astley; Lord Aberdare, first Vice Chancellor of the University of Wales; Lord Dufferin, British ambassador in Paris; A.J. Balfour, a future Conservative Prime Minister; Charles Waldstein, a Cambridge University archaeologist and Director of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens; Hodgson Pratt, an acclaimed international peacemaker; and Dr. William Penny Brookes. Coubertin, a master of persuasion and spectacle, seduced the seventy-eight sport administrators from
nine countries that attended the Congress, including British representatives from the National Cycling Union, the Irish Amateur Athletics Association, the National Skating Association, the London Rowing Club, the Scottish AAA, the London Polytechnic Club, and the AAA, with modern sporting exhibitions, extravagant banquets, and frequent allusions to antiquity. The baron’s charm worked favorably as delegates voted to revive quadrennial international Olympic Games and to institute the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Two Britons, Charles Herbert and Lord Ampthill, a former Oxford rowing blue and a future Viceroy of India, were among the list of influential sporting elites named as representatives to the new international governing body. Demetrios Vikelas, a prominent Greek man of letters and former London University student then residing in Paris, was appointed as the inaugural president of the IOC. Vikelas’ appointment appeared a blatant move by the baron to win Greek favor, particularly since Athens had beaten out motions in favor of London and Budapest to serve as host of the first modern Olympic Games, scheduled for 1896.

News of an international Olympic revival produced a mixed reception within the British press, with comments oscillating between sympathy, apathy, and outright opposition. In a series of articles The Times offered the most favorable commentary in support of the restoration, praising the decision of the Paris Congress as “grounds for hope” in fostering international harmony. Similarly, the London Graphic declared its “cordial sympathy” for the baron’s Olympic revival but expressed “a little curiosity” as to whether athletes would be competing in ancient or modern sporting events. “Will running shoes be allowed, and will athletes oil themselves,” the British daily queried? The Spectator proved far more indifferent, labeling Coubertin’s Olympic revival both a gross
waste of money and a “harmless whim.” Another high-brow British publication, the National Observer, took an acerbic tone, dismissing the Olympic Games as a mere “French” initiative that violated the aesthetic canons of antiquity. The conservative monthly journal branded the forthcoming Athens games a “ghastly parody” and a “desperate caricature,” and sneered haughtily at the prospect of “Frenchmen making an exhibition of themselves at le football . . . and a scratch pack of second rate yachtsmen, bicyclists, and German gymnasts” vying for Olympic glory. Through their glaringly ethnocentric and parochial lenses, the National Observer expressed hope that the British would remain “virtually aloof” to a project that would leave a “nauseous aftertaste.”

Answering the National Observer’s plea, enthusiasm for the forthcoming Athens games failed to develop throughout the British Isles. Sir Edwin Egerton, the British minister in Athens and a future ambassador to Italy, certainly played his role in trying to foster British interest towards the Olympic revival. In a series of dispatches from the Greek capital, Egerton regularly kept the British Foreign Office, a governmental department responsible for handling overseas interests, apprised of ongoing developments. The British minister wrote enthusiastically about the recent refurbishment of the ancient Panatheniac Stadium, the site for the first modern Olympic Games; the widespread excitement that the Greek public demonstrated towards the impending games; and the prominent role that the Greek royal family was playing in Olympic affairs. Back on British shores, news of Olympic developments proved extremely scarce, with only The Times and the Birmingham Daily Post publishing pertinent information. After securing the franchise for tourism from the IOC, the leading British travel organizer,
Thomas Cook, did attempt to drum-up wider interest throughout the country, offering twenty-six day sightseeing tours to the Olympic Games in Athens for £40.46

Reflecting on the dearth of Olympic propaganda, The Field apportioned the blame squarely on the shoulders of the French and Greek organizers of the Athens games. “Official invitations dated December, reached England in March; detailed programmes, which should have been issued at least two or three months before the time fixed for the games, appeared only a few days before the opening [only in French] and were so badly arranged that only by collating several could one know the details of the competitions, and the order in which they were to take place,” the country gentleman’s newspaper later fumed.47 The Times expressed a similar sentiment, deploring the fact that “while the Olympic Games were advertised in every village in France, a comparatively slender effort was made to attract the attention of the English athletic world.”48 Information regarding the forthcoming Athens games also failed to reach Britain’s leading universities, Oxford and Cambridge. As George S. Robertson, a student at New College Oxford, and a participant in Athens, lamented: “What was done to persuade Oxford and Cambridge men to compete in the Olympic Games? Practically nothing.”49 Writing on the pages of the Oxford University Magazine, John Pius Boland, a student at Christ Church College, Oxford, and a fellow participant in the first modern Olympics, passionately refuted Robertson’s claims, insisting that “a clear year before the Games came off” the Olympic program appeared on a notice board in the student union and also in The Isis, a university magazine. Boland strengthened his claim by pointing to the presence of Constantine Manos, the chief organizer of the Athens games and a post-
graduate student at Balliol College, Oxford, who always proved “willing to give every information on the subject.”

Whether the Olympic organizers provided sufficient advertisement or not, the absence of British interest in the Athens games raises questions about what role Britain’s representatives to the IOC, Lord Ampthill and Charles Herbert, played in trying to organize a strong British presence in Athens. From the outset Lord Ampthill’s nomination to the IOC typified Coubertin’s predilection for influential aristocrats that would add a sense of prestige to his fledging organization. Owing to his recent engagement to Lady Margaret Lygon, the daughter of Frederick Lygon, the 6th Earl of Beauchamp, Ampthill did not attend the Paris Congress and appears to have played an extremely limited role within the framework of the international Olympic movement before his resignation in 1898. Charles Herbert, the secretary of the AAA, certainly took a more active interest in Olympic affairs. A perusal of his personal correspondences reveals that Herbert offered Pierre de Coubertin advice on the structure and format of the athletic program for the 1896 Athens games. Herbert further attempted to rouse support for an Olympic revival within the ranks of the AAA. On November 23, 1895, the General Committee of the AAA proclaimed that the “athletic events to be held at the Olympian Games in Athens” are “in accordance with AAA laws.”

Herbert and the AAA ultimately proved unsuccessful in raising an official British athletic team to compete in the Greek capital, prompting the Bristol Mercury to bemoan British sporting insularity and the widespread “disfavor with which English athletes regard contests arranged out of England.” In reality, the British held a robustly parochial and ethnocentric view of sport. They believed that sports were their sole
property and displayed limited interest in playing against foreign rivals, except their own white dominions. In football during this period, the British even limited themselves to their annual Home-Nations Championship. When Britons such as John Astley Cooper trumpeted the idea of increased international competition during the early 1890s—albeit a “Pan-Britannica” or “Anglo-Saxon” festival of culture, industry, and sport—the British public greeted the notion with skepticism and indifference.\(^{55}\) The British reluctance to teach the world how to play eventually drove the French to take the lead in organizing sport as a global phenomenon. Coubertin revived the Olympic Games and founded the IOC, while the French were also the driving force behind the establishment in 1904 of *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA), the world governing body of football. Frustrated by Britain’s insular sporting attitude and their limited interest towards his Olympic revival, Coubertin, writing on the pages of the French publication *Cosmopolis*, lambasted the British for their belief that the “culture of bodily vigor and agility has become the exclusive privilege of its sons.”\(^{56}\)

The baron had every right to feel aggrieved that the British did not share his romantic view of an Olympic revival; after all, Coubertin set-up the Olympic Games to safeguard and internationalize Britain’s amateur principle. Britain’s elite-amateur ethos first developed in the mid-nineteenth century as a reaction to the rising commercialization and mass participation of modern sport. As a strictly modern invention, amateurism served as a legitimating ideology for an elitist sporting system—its founding purpose was to exclude the lower social orders from the play of the leisure class. Between the foundation of the Football Association (FA) in 1863 and the institution of the IOC in 1894, Victorian upper-and-middle-class gentlemen fought to establish a period of
amateur hegemony in British sport, usurping existing professional athletes and professional sporting institutions. For Coubertin, amateurism had never been an obsession, but he shrewdly defended the sanctity of the concept in order to gain the support of his influential contemporaries. Fueled by the erroneous myth of ancient Greek amateurism, delegates at the Paris Congress in 1894 passed a resolution defining an amateur for future Olympian spectacles as someone “who did not accept prize money of any kind.” Although the definition failed to draw a strict social-class barrier, as some British delegates at the Sorbonne allegedly wished, the ruling of the Paris Congress offered a timely boost to both the preservation and dominance of the amateur ethos, particularly in light of the rising commercialization of British sport. In 1885, the FA begrudgingly recognized professionalism, while a similar concession appeared ominous in rugby union.

The First Modern Olympic Games

In spite of Coubertin’s championing of the amateur cause, only a small contingent of nine Britons participated in the 1896 Olympic Games. The British competitors in Athens all entered individually, made their own travel and accommodation arrangements in the Greek capital, and were conspicuous for their mismatched sporting attire. George S. Robertson, a classics scholar from Oxford (hammer throw and tennis), made his own way to Athens, where he joined his university teammate, Charles Gmelin of Keble College, Oxford (400-meters). Another Oxford University classical scholar of independent means, John Pius Boland (tennis), had been in Athens on vacation and only decided to enter the Olympics the night before his competition. Launceston Elliot (100-
meters; weightlifting; and wrestling) and Grantley Goulding (110-meter hurdles) sailed together from Marseilles aboard the SS Congo, while Britain’s four remaining participants, George Marshall (800-and 1500-meters); F. Battell and F. Keeping (cycling), both employees of the British Embassy in Athens; and Sidney Merlin (shooting), son of the British Vice-Consul in Athens, were all residents in the Greek capital at time of the Olympic Games. This small band of athletes were in no way representative of an officially organized British Olympic team—contemporary attempts to label them as such are merely trying to attach homogeneity to a heterogeneous event. As the Field begrudgingly remarked, “Britain . . . made no attempt to send a representative team to Athens, and the few Englishmen who took part in the games came out for a holiday more than anything else.”

A large British party, which included Charles Perry, the London Athletic Club’s chief groundsman hired by the Greek organizers to lay a cinder track in the newly refurbished Panatheniac Stadium, greeted the nation’s sightseeing Olympic athletes in the Greek capital. Although the period leading up to the Athens games had been marred by organizational problems—the Greek hosts were embroiled in political turmoil, on the verge of bankruptcy, and decidedly apathetic towards Coubertin’s Olympic revival—the first modern Olympics officially opened on April 6, 1896, to great fanfare. Britain’s mismatched band of nine athletes made-up a modest roster of two-hundred-and-forty-five athletes from twelve predominately white, European nations; Coubertin’s dream of Olympic universality would have to wait. As a reflection of the baron’s chauvinistic attitude towards female athleticism and his loose attempt to replicate the traditions of his movement’s ancient predecessor, only males were permitted to compete in Athens; a
move that set the stage for decades of patriarchal dominance both inside the Olympic arena and within the ranks of the IOC.\textsuperscript{69}

Over the ensuing nine days of Olympic competition, Britain’s athletes achieved modest success. Launceston Elliot, a relative of the Earl of Minto, a future Viceroy of India, secured his place in the record books by becoming Britain’s first modern Olympic champion following his victory in the one-handed weight lift. Elliot achieved further success in the two-handed lift, where he placed second. He also competed, although without comparable success, in the 100-meter sprint, the rope-climbing contest and in heavyweight wrestling.\textsuperscript{70} John Puis Boland proved the most triumphant British athlete in Athens, winning two Olympic championships in the singles and doubles lawn tennis events. In the track and field portion of the Olympic program, arguable the center-piece of the Athens games, the United States dominated proceedings, winning nine out of the twelve events. Grantley Goulding represented Britain’s best performer on the track following his second place finish in the 110-meter hurdles. In spite of their superior home advantage and dominance in other Olympic sports, the Greek team cut a poor figure on the track. Spyros Louēs, a local Athenian peasant, salvaged Greek pride with a scintillating first-place finish in the marathon event.\textsuperscript{71} Conceived by Michel Bréal, a French classical linguist, the marathon represented a purely modern invention, an ode to the legendary Pheidippides (Philippides), an Athenian messenger who allegedly ran from the plains of Marathon to Athens to declare a Greek victory over an invading Persian army in 490 BCE.\textsuperscript{72} Reflecting upon the “disappointing” British showing in Athens, the Speaker expressed its “regret” that “we should have allowed our supremacy in games to pass from us by default.”\textsuperscript{73} The Times took a more buoyant tone, hoping that “on the next
occasion, in 1900, when the games are held at Paris, we shall make a better show.”74 Irish double-Olympic champion and future nationalist MP, John Pius Boland, also expressed his hope that “England will make some attempt to recover the athletic prestige which she has so disgracefully forfeited in the eyes of those nations who saw her figure so poorly in these recent Games.”75

Beyond the murmurings of dissatisfaction regarding the nation’s performance in Athens, the British media saved their most barbed commentary for Coubertin and the Olympic organizers. The Field launched the most scathing attack, branding the Athens games a “second rate athletic performance which might have failed by a very little to do discredit to an ordinary college meeting at either Oxford or Cambridge . . . . The games bore no intrinsic value or interest of any kind.”76 The Pall Mall Gazette proved equally condemnatory. “For ourselves,” the popular London evening tabloid opined, “we still do not quite grasp the point of the games.”77 In a series of inflammatory publications, British Olympian George S. Robertson offered an extensive critique. Robertson, who had earlier endeared himself to the Greek people for his composition and recital of a Pindaric ode in classical Greek during the closing ceremony of the Athens games, criticized the Greek organizers for the “objectionable” shape of the athletic track; the lack of quality foreign competition; and their failure to print the official rule book in English.78 In a personal correspondence to Pierre de Coubertin written months after the conclusion of the Athens games, Robertson unsurprisingly proved less forthcoming, retracting his earlier criticisms and even going as far as to lavish praise on the baron and his Greek colleagues for the “success of the whole meeting.”79
Amongst the barrage of British criticisms, a few isolated voices spoke out in favor of the Athens games. In his report to the Foreign Office, Sir Edwin Egerton, the British minister stationed in the Greek capital, celebrated the first modern Olympics as “a great success.” Egerton continued enthusiastically, “nothing could have been better managed . . . . It is certain that these games will become an institution and be more attended by foreigners in future than they have been on the present occasion.”80 As Egerton’s sympathetic comments suggested, the Athens games marked a crucial early step for Coubertin and the development of his incipient international Olympic movement. Contrary to contemporary efforts to establish continuity, the Olympic Games were not born fully grown and properly developed. The Athens games illustrated the experimental nature of early Olympics. In tennis, Britain’s John Pius Boland won the doubles event playing alongside his partner, Germany’s Friedrich Adolph Traun. Another mixed nationality pairing, Britain’s George Stuart Robertson and Australia’s English-born representative Edwin “Teddy” Flack, who won both the 800-and-1500-meter events, were eliminated in the opening round. More definitive guidelines for national representation were still to be introduced. Similarly, the sporting program in Athens, which included obscure events such as a rope-climbing contest and a 100-meter swim for sailors of the Greek Royal Navy, combined with the absence of gold, silver, and bronze medals, which were not introduced until the 1904 Games in St. Louis, further reinforced the haphazard and piecemeal development of Coubertin’s quadrennial Olympic festival.81
A Struggle for Survival

As the Athens games concluded to mixed international reviews, the baron moved the Olympics to his native Paris, where they were to be held in conjunction with the *Exposition Universelle* planned for the summer of 1900, beginning the Olympics long and troublesome association with world trade fairs. To Coubertin’s chagrin, enthusiasm for the second edition of his Olympic spectacle proved relatively scarce amongst his fellow countryman. The *Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques* (USFSA), of which Coubertin served as secretary-general, fiercely opposed his plans. The exhibition organizers proved equally averse, pushing both Coubertin and his Olympic sports to the periphery of their grand industrial and cultural celebration of western civilization. While the baron struggled desperately to secure much needed financial and organizational support, he found a new and trusted Olympic disciple across the English Channel, in the form of the Reverend Robert Stuart de Courcy Laffan, headmaster of the prestigious Cheltenham College. Laffan’s first introduction to the Olympic movement came at the 1897 IOC congress at Le Havre, where he attended as an emissary of the Headmasters’ Conference, an association of headmasters of the English Public Schools. Proclaiming his belief in the broader value of sporting activity in “French of the utmost purity,” Laffan captivated the baron, who instantly co-opted him onto the IOC where he joined Charles Herbert and Lord Ampthill in the trio of British representatives. “A new collaborator of the most invaluable quality had come down from the heavens to help us,” Coubertin rejoiced. For Laffan, a graduate of Merton College, Oxford, and a former servant in the Indian Civil Service, an administrative career within the framework of the Olympic movement proved an unexpected development. He later admitted, “I came to the
Olympic Movement prepared to scoff and I remained to admire and to work.” Work he did. Over the next thirty years, until his death in 1927, Laffan served indefatigably, almost single-handedly promoting the Olympic cause throughout the British Isles.  

While Laffan’s appointment to the IOC offered the baron a timely boost, the Olympic movement in Britain remained virtually non-existent. Lacking an official national Olympic committee and a broad network of influential supporters, Britain’s participation in Paris appeared to rest solely on the shoulders of Charles Herbert. The long-serving secretary of the AAA fronted an Olympic selection committee and even secured a sum of £100 to underwrite the cost of the nation’s Olympic campaign. Through Herbert’s endeavors a nine-man British athletic team, including Olympic champion in Athens, Launceston Elliot, competed in Paris. A further eighty-five Britons, including members of the Upton Park Football Club, Devon & Somerset Wanderers Cricket Club, and Moseley Wanderers Rugby Club, accompanied the nation’s track and field athletes in the French capital. Despite a substantial British presence, the 1900 Paris Olympics, renamed by the French organizers *Concours Internationaux d’Exercises Physiques et de Sport*, proved to be a disaster. Spread out over a period of five months with no opening and closing ceremonies, and containing a bizarre assortment of events, including underwater and obstacle swimming races, live pigeon-shooting, as well as special handicap contests and professional events, the Paris games were so disorganized that some athletes were shocked to later discover that they had competed in the Olympic Games. The British press proved equally perplexed, with *The Times*, *The Field*, and the *Daily Telegraph* referring to the event as an “International Championship” or “International Meeting,” rather than an official cycle of Olympic competition.
Under such farcical conditions, British athletes won fifteen first places, including victories in the football, cricket, rugby union, and water polo competitions, plus four of the twenty-three track and field events. Twenty-nine year old Middlesex native, Charlotte Cooper, earned the distinction of being the first woman to ever become an Olympic champion following her victory in the lawn tennis singles event. Miss Cooper, a future five-time Wimbledon singles champion, also placed first in the mixed doubles with Reggie Doherty as her partner. The visible internationalism of the Athens games remerged in Paris, obscuring claims of national representation. An Australian-British combination won the 5000-meter team race, the British-USA Foxhunters Hurlingham Club won the polo, while a British-Bohemian pairing secured third place in the mixed-doubles lawn tennis event. For The Field, the only British publication to carry extensive coverage of the 1900 Olympics, the Paris games were a trivial and haphazard affair. “The whole series of sports produced nothing but muddles, bad arrangements, bad management, bad prizes, and any amount of ill-feeling amongst the various nationalities engaged,” the country gentlemen’s newspaper wrote indignantly. British sympathy for an international Olympic revival reached a despairing low.

In 1904, Coubertin’s Olympic movement took another faltering step towards dissolution as the IOC repeated its disastrous association with world fairs. The games, originally scheduled for Chicago, home of the recent Columbian Exposition, were eventually diverted to St. Louis, Missouri, after limited financial resources and vocal opposition from powerful American athletic officials scuttled the Chicago Olympic Games Association’s organizational efforts. The choice of St. Louis, a city already in the midst of preparing a vast centennial celebration of the Louisiana Purchase, hardly
provided the baron with a cosmopolitan cultural capital in which to cloak the third celebration of his Olympic festival. \(^9^5\) Unenthusiastic about the prospect of a long and expensive transatlantic voyage followed by a thousand-mile train ride to what they perceived as a backward outpost in the American western frontier, British athletes, like many of their European rivals, decided to stay away from an event that had still failed to capture the imagination of the sporting world. The inconvenient schedule, once again spaced out over a five month period, provided another deterrent for a nation hardly teeming with Olympic spirit. A lone entry in the minutes of the AAA on May 28, 1904, reveals the organization’s “regret that they were unable to send a team officially to the Olympian games at St. Louis.” \(^9^6\) Despite the strong athletic links with America’s elite universities, Harvard and Yale, even Oxford and Cambridge athletes opted to stay at home. As further testament to the nation’s indifference, the British press largely ignored the St. Louis games, with its bizarre assortment of pseudoscientific anthropological sporting events, altogether. \(^9^7\)

While Britain’s athletes abstained, Irishmen John Daly and Thomas Kiely did make the long transatlantic voyage to St. Louis, where they were accompanied by John Holloway of the Greater New York Irish Athletic Association in forming a three-man Irish team. \(^9^8\) This small band of Irish athletes relied solely upon Irish funding and made a concerted effort to distinguish themselves as representatives of the Emerald Isles; a fact that strongly contradicts contemporary claims of a British presence in St. Louis. \(^9^9\) Irish appeals for distinct national representation can be traced back to the inaugural modern Olympic Games held in Athens. Writing in the aftermath of his double-Olympic first place performances, John Pius Boland proudly celebrated his victories in the lawn tennis
event as victories for Ireland rather than Britain. “I refuse to forswear my ‘Hibernian origin’ and the green flag in the field of sport,” the Oxford University graduate brazenly proclaimed. Boland’s attempt to renounce his status as a British competitor led university colleague and Olympic teammate, George S. Robertson, to angrily accuse him of “‘pure English’ heresy.” The question of national representation would soon come to dominate Olympic affairs in Britain, especially since a small cadre of English elites endeavored to establish a national Olympic committee.

**British Olympic Association**

On May 24, 1905, in a private meeting held in Committee Room Number 12 of the House of Commons, a small group of English elites founded the British Olympic Association (BOA), signaling the first real awakening of British interest in the international Olympic movement. Sir Howard Vincent, Conservative MP for Sheffield Central and a recently appointed British representative to the IOC, presided over the meeting in which William H. Grenfell, shortly elevated to the peerage of Lord Desborough of Taplow, was appointed the inaugural Chairman of the BOA. The decision to finally establish a national Olympic committee in Britain, nine years after Pierre de Coubertin’s revival of the Olympic Games, resulted from London’s hosting of the annual IOC session, June 20-22, 1904. Organized under the patronage of his Majesty King Edward VII, the London meeting united some of the nation’s leading amateur sporting officials behind the vision of heightening Britain’s role in the organization and governance of the Olympic movement. In light of his strong predilections for British sport and cognizant of his own flagging Olympic movement, the
passionate anglophile Coubertin keenly welcomed Britain’s entry into the Olympic fold on the pages of his own publication, *Récue Olympique*. ¹⁰⁵

The appointment of Lord Desborough, a high-ranking and charismatic sportsman and politician, to front the nascent BOA appeared an astute move, particularly in a nation seemingly so indifferent to Olympic competition. Lord Desborough, a prominent member of the intellectual set “The Souls,” a debating society comprised of distinguished English politicians and social elites, gained his first introduction to the international Olympic movement during the 1904 IOC meeting in London. Desborough seized the immediate attention of Coubertin who soon after awarded him the *Olympic Diploma of Merit* for his numerous contributions to sport, only the sixth Briton to ever be bestowed with such an honor in Olympic history. ¹⁰⁶ As a graduate of Harrow School and Balliol College, Oxford, Desborough boasted a reputation for his incredible sporting prowess, earning university colors in athletics, fencing and rowing. The BOA chairman was also known for enjoying conspicuous leisure activities, swimming across the base of Niagara Falls twice, scaling the Matterhorn by three different routes, rowing across the English Channel, and hunting big-game in Africa, India, and North America. Desborough also occupied prominent positions on some of the nation’s leading recreational and constitutional institutions, including the Thames Conservancy Board, the London Chamber of Commerce, and the Royal Agricultural Society. His sporting roles were even more varied, serving as President of the Épée Club, Royal Life Saving Society, Marylebone Cricket Club, and All England Lawn Tennis Club, amongst others. In fact, Desborough boasted a redoubtable public service record, serving, at one point, on over one-hundred committees simultaneously. He also turned to the political realm in order to
cultivate further modes of paternalistic behavior, standing successfully as the Liberal M.P. for Salisbury in 1882, before serving as the private secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir William Harcourt. After losing his parliamentary seat in 1886, Desborough returned for a brief stint as a Gladstonian Liberal for Hereford in 1892, before resigning in opposition to Irish Home Rule. Upon his return to political office in 1900, Desborough switched party affiliation as part of a Unionists defection, joining the Conservatives as an M.P. for Wycombe.\textsuperscript{107}

Desborough’s appointment as the inaugural Chairman of the BOA and his remarkable propensity for public service typified the “culture of voluntarism” that played a prominent role in Victorian and Edwardian British society.\textsuperscript{108} The BOA, like modern British sport in general, had been founded on volunteerism.\textsuperscript{109} The leading clubs and bureaucratic organizations that governed British, and in some cases, international sport, such as the Marylebone Cricket Club and the Football Association were free enterprises, independent of governmental intervention. The BOA replicated this model of volunteerism, operating on the basis of personal endeavor, ingenuity and private membership. Acting in accordance with its own agenda and regulations, the BOA constituted an autonomous—at least officially—non-governmental sporting organization charged with furthering the spread of Olympism throughout the British Isles and ensuring the participation of British athletes in future cycles of international Olympic competition.\textsuperscript{110} The non-interventionist stance of the British government, however, would become a root source of frustration for the BOA, particularly in light of future disappointing Olympic performances.\textsuperscript{111}
The voluntary tradition that sustained sporting, as well as political and occupational associations in Britain reproduced, as historian Neil Carter has put it, “dominant relationships of status and power.” Membership to the BOA offered a viable network for social and professional mobility, an avenue for members of the same social ilk to fraternize together. Self-recruiting voluntary sporting associations such as the BOA were also a strictly masculine domain, confining women to benevolent and social service organizations. As an institution of remarkable homogeneity, the BOA drew its members from exclusively aristocratic and middle-class circles, tethered together on the basis of a public school education and a strong proclivity for competitive elite amateur sport. Theodore Andrea Cook, a graduate of Wadham College, Oxford, a rowing blue, and a prominent journalist for the *St. James Gazette* and the *Daily Telegraph* served as an archetype of the pro-establishment gentlemen who comprised the early BOA. Describing himself as a devout muscular Christian and a “crusted Tory,” Cook considered his membership to the BOA as a measure of patriotic duty, a contribution to the social, moral and athletic development of the entire nation. As a long-serving member of the Amateur Fencing Association (AFA) and the recipient of a degree in *Literae Humaniores* (classics), Cook naturally gravitated towards a voluntary position within the British Olympic movement.

Raised in the late nineteenth-century English public school system, “Old Boys” (alumni) such as Desborough and Cook embodied a Victorian and Edwardian “games ethic” that connected competitive sport with national and imperial interests. The use of sport as a medium for shaping the abilities, values and character of a British governing class had long cultivated a belief that sport played a crucial role in the acquisition and
consolidation of British hegemonic power. The Reverend J. E. C. Welldon, headmaster of Harrow School from 1881 to 1895, confirmed the connection that sport, imperialism, and national prowess held in the British imagination when he boasted that “England has owed her sovereignty to her sports.”

Given the organization’s public school composition and inherently nationalistic and pro-establishment worldview, the BOA attracted high-ranking military and political elites with strong conservative leanings. As the party of permanence, stability and tradition, the Conservatives were committed to the maintenance of monarchy; the House of Lords; the union with Ireland; consolidation and grandeur of Empire; and the pre-eminence of British military power—an attempt to showcase and promote British prowess in a major international sporting event appeared a natural extension of conservative ideology.

The Conservative Party established a long-standing relationship with the British Olympic movement. Combining their work within the state structure, four Tory MP’s, including Sir Howard Vincent (Sheffield Central), and Sir James Lees Knowles Bart (West Salford) attended the inaugural meeting of the BOA in the House of Commons. Two of the BOA’s first three Chairmen, Lord Desborough of Taplow (1905-1913) and Lord Downham of Fulham (1919-1920), and its inaugural President, the Duke of Sutherland (1923-1936), also held prominent positions within the Conservative Party.

For Britain’s Conservative Olympic leaders the early decades of the twentieth century proved to be a period of remarkable change and uncertainty. The rising tide of liberal radicalism and democratization; the growing assertiveness of the suffragette movement; the liberal assault on the propertied order and the decline of the aristocracy; American and German military and economic expansion; the quest for Home Rule for
Ireland; the gradual dissolution of Empire; the founding of the Labour Party; and a violent and devastating European war triggered a grave sense of crisis and impending disaster amongst British Conservatives. Even in the international sporting arena Britain’s monopolistic position as leader of modern sport came under serious assault. Britain’s historical sporting supremacy—similar to her imperial and economic power in general—was relative, not absolute; a position predicated more on the weaknesses of her opponents rather than her own strengths. In fact, Britain was neither superpower nor superfluous, but simply the first nation to enter the field. Like the example of industrialization, a “catch-up” phenomenon quickly occurred. As foreign nations gained experience and established sporting institutions and customs of their own, free from the restraints of Victorian notions of “true” amateurism and often with direct governmental assistance, British prowess diminished at an alarming rate.

Perceiving an unwelcome deterioration in their country’s relative position as a military, economic, imperial, and sporting power, the predominantly conservative members of the BOA naturally embraced the Olympic Games as a platform for promoting British interests both at home and abroad. Throughout the two decades following the establishment of the BOA, Britain’s Olympic leaders pursued an administrative policy designed to stem the tide of British decline, both perceived and real. Within the framework of the Olympic movement, BOA chiefs fought bitterly to maintain a sporting union with Ireland, endeavored to foster a greater sense of imperial identity with her white dominions, and even undertook an ambitious policy of athletic specialization designed to reverse the nation’s waning fortunes in international sport. The BOA’s nation-building efforts faced strong opposition in the face of political squabbling.
between the constituent parts of the British Isles, the rising political independence of the dominions, and staunch British public and governmental aversion to the Olympic Games.
Chapter One

*Lighting the Olympic Flame*

After a decade of unwavering apathy the establishment of the British Olympic Association (BOA) provided the formal organizational structure that promised to unite the constituent parts of the British Isles into one official and representative Olympic team. As a bastion of elitism and conservatism, however, the BOA proved unsurprisingly Anglocentric in its composition. Of the nineteen men invited to attend the inaugural meeting of the BOA, every one of them hailed from England.\(^\text{121}\) The Council of the BOA, the organizational arm of the newly constituted association and the body trusted with raising future British Olympic teams,\(^\text{122}\) was comprised of fifteen Englishmen representing only English governing bodies of sport.\(^\text{123}\) In fact, not one single individual working within the framework of the British Olympic movement in the immediate years following its establishment (1905-1907) came from outside of England. Evidently, the title “British Olympic Association” was really a misnomer, as Irish, Scottish and Welsh sporting governing bodies and officials were completely excluded at all levels of administration and governance.

Under the leadership of Lord Desborough, the newly founded all-English BOA was represented at both the International Athletic Congress in Brussels in June, 1905, and the Olympic Conference of Sport and Arts in Paris, held in May, 1906. The BOA’s first real task, however, would come in the wake of the news that Athens, Greece, would host the Intermediate Games from April 22 to May 2, 1906.\(^\text{124}\) The 1906 Intermediate Games, or Intercalated Games as they are also known, were the by-product of a long series of
political squabbles between Pierre de Coubertin and both the Greek royal family and leading Greek sporting officials. During the course of the inaugural Athens Olympic Games in 1896, the Greek hosts, led by King George I, began making plans to secure support to make Athens the permanent site of all future Olympic competition. Coubertin, fearing for his dream to hold the Olympic Games in various capitals and cultural centers of the world, immediately went on the offensive. In an article to The Times, the baron forcefully dismissed Greek attempts to “monopolize the Games in their favor.”\textsuperscript{125} A stance he also maintained during the 1896 IOC session held in Athens. Demetrios Vikelas, the Greek-born IOC president at the time, attempted to reconcile the warring factions by proposing two separate series of Olympic competition that would be celebrated alternately between Athens and other major international cities on a two year rotation.

By 1897, in the backdrop of continued political posturing, Greece went to war with the Turkish-Ottoman Empire in support of a Greek uprising in Ottoman-ruled Crete. The Ottomans easily repelled Greek offensives initiated by nationalist groups and the Empire achieved a convincing victory. The embarrassment and financial burden of their botched military campaign temporarily took the wind out of Greek attempts to host the Olympic Games on a permanent basis. By 1901, however, the Greeks put their plans back on the agenda during the IOC session held in Paris. Count Alexandros Merkatés, a Greek representative to the IOC, furtively began trying to rally support in favor of Vikelas’ earlier proposal. Led by Willibald Gebhardt, three German IOC members revived the proposition and placed a written motion before the IOC. Despite obvious reservations from Coubertin, whose own position as president of the IOC became
increasingly tenuous following the disasters of Paris and St. Louis, members unanimously accepted the German proposal and plans were gradually put in place for Athens to host the Olympic Games in 1906.¹²⁶

By the fall of 1905, with the marble construction of the Panatheniac Stadium already completed, Crown Prince Constantine gave the Hellenic Olympic Committee (HOC) the signal to begin sending out invitations to foreign national Olympic committees (NOCs). With the assistance of Greek embassies around the world, the HOC established Olympic Games Committees in fourteen countries in an effort to ensure the widest possible international participation.¹²⁷ In the case of Britain, the secretary of the Greek Olympic Committee in London, Mr. Marinaky, personally delivered an invitation to the BOA.¹²⁸ Unlike previous Olympics, whereby athletes could register personally to compete, the HOC proposed new regulations stipulating that all entry applications “must pass through the hands” of officially recognized NOCs.¹²⁹ Under the new guidelines, the BOA began consulting with the various governing bodies of British sport about the possibility of raising a unified team to compete in Athens.¹³⁰

**Making the British Team**

In his position as a voluntary member to both the BOA and the Amateur Fencing Association (AFA), Theodore Andrea Cook seized the opportunity to send a British fencing team to compete on Greek soil. As the non-competing captain of the British team, Cook composed a five-man squad that included BOA chairman Lord Desborough, a renowned collegiate swordsman and a previous winner of the Royal Military Fencing Tournament; Charles Newton Robinson, the only man to win the British Championship at
all three weapons on two occasions; Edgar Isaac Seligman, the reigning British fencing champion in both the épée and sabre disciplines, a veteran of the Boer War, and a future five-time Olympian; Sir Cosmo Duff Gordon, a prominent Scottish landowner and years later a fortunate survivor of the RMS Titanic disaster; and Lord Howard de Walden, a Welshman and a future participant in the motorboat event at the 1908 Olympic Games. Over the course of the next few months both the National Cyclist Union and the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) joined the AFA in agreeing to send a strong British contingent. The Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) also appeared to revive their interest in the Olympic Games. At a meeting of the AAA on January 20, 1906, members resolved that the forthcoming Intermediate Games in Athens were a “bona fide International competition within the meaning of the AAA,” and duly recommended the selection of a team to represent Britain.

Unlike their wealthy aristocratic countrymen who comprised the British fencing team, Britain’s predominately collegiate and middle-class Olympic athletes needed sizable financial support in order to make the long and expensive journey to the Greek capital. Acting in accordance with the true spirit of British amateurism, however, many of the nation’s leading governing bodies of sport refused to offer financial assistance. The AAA rejected a proposition from Mr. H. W. G. Haslegrave, of the Blackheath Harriers, to approve “a sum not exceeding £150” towards the expenses of the British team in Athens. Establishing an historical precedent, the BOA, led by its honorary secretary the Reverend Courcy Laffan, endeavored to raise the necessary funds themselves. After issuing a private appeal for subscriptions, the BOA secured donations totaling £170 from a variety of London based retailers such as Goldsmith’s Company, Merchant Taylor’s
Company, Grocers’ Company, and the Clothworkers Company—a diminutive sum, especially when compared to the $15,000 raised by the American Olympic Committee (AOC) to send its athletes to Athens, thanks to the receipt of sizable contributions from industrial titans J. Pierpont Morgan, August Belmont, George J. Gould, and S. R. Guggenheim. Curiously, the most significant financial donation came from the Greek, not British, government, who generously donated £80 in order to ensure Britain’s participation in Athens.

The question of a government subsidy for Britain’s Olympic campaign in Athens did actually pass before the House of Commons on March 24, 1906. Speaking on behalf of the Liberal government, Chancellor of the Exchequer Herbert Henry Asquith, a future British Prime Minister (1908–1916), firmly rejected the award of a grant towards the expenses of British competitors at the Olympic Games. “I see no reason for granting any subsidy from public funds,” the Chancellor resolved. Asquith’s ruling appeared indicative of the government’s laissez-faire approach to international sporting events during this period, a stance that the historian Peter J. Beck has argued was predicated on both a general aversion to cultural propaganda and a fear of public reproach for purposefully being seen to politicize sport. While Britain’s Liberal government maintained an apolitical role in international sport, the nation’s Olympic rivals enjoyed the benefits of lavish governmental subsidies. The Swedish government appropriated 5,000 kroner towards their nation’s Olympic campaign, while the German government put up 12,000 marks. The governments of France, Norway and Austria also recognized the political utility of international Olympic competition by contributing generously to their nation’s preparations for Athens.
The British government’s indifference towards the Olympic Games manifested itself most clearly following the receipt of an invitation from the Greek Ambassador to London, D. G. Metaxas, asking His Majesty’s Government to send an official representative to the forthcoming Intermediate Games in Athens. Remarkably, even ten years after its inception, the Foreign Office remained painfully unaware of the Olympic Games’ existence. An official memorandum confirmed, “We have never had such an invitation before. The nearest thing to it was an Archaeological Congress at Athens last March.” The uninformed official who handled the Greek request was equally obtuse as to the actual roles and responsibilities that a governmental representative was expected to fulfill. “It is not clear whether he is to take part in the games or merely to sit as a spectator in the front row,” the official mused. After making its way up and down the inter-governmental ladder, the Greek request for British representation eventually reached the desk of Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, a former football and tennis blue during his time at Oxford. Grey’s handling of the Greek requests further illustrates the ignorance of the British government in Olympic affairs. Uninformed that a NOC had recently been established in Britain, the Foreign Secretary sought the advice of Sir Francis Elliot, the British Ambassador to Athens. Stationed in the Greek capital, Elliot proved naturally more enlightened on Olympic matters and duly recommended the selection of “one or two members of the British Committee who may be coming out, or competitors, of good social standing.” As the chairman of the BOA and a fully fledged member of the British fencing team scheduled to compete in Athens, Lord Desborough emerged as the government’s obvious choice, a position he was “deeply honoured” to
The Foreign Office also appointed R. C. Bosanquet, the Director of the British School in Athens, to serve as the second British delegate to the Intermediate Games.\footnote{147}

**Onwards to Athens**

In the face of governmental apathy and limited financial resources, the BOA selected an impressive forty-man squad to compete in Athens. The Anglocentrism and elitism of the British Olympic movement naturally transferred to the Olympic arena, as evidenced by the twenty-eight English athletes who comprised the British squad—six Scotsmen, three Irishmen, and three Welshmen filled the remaining roster positions. The two leading bastions of elite English education, Oxford and Cambridge University, also featured predominantly. Seven Oxbridge blues, including Sidney Abrahams, older brother of future British Olympic gold medalist Harold, spearheaded the nation’s athletic team.\footnote{148} The British would also be well represented in positions of leadership, as the Greek organizers selected five Britons, including George Stuart Robertson, a third place finisher in the tennis doubles event at the inaugural Athens Olympic Games, to serve as official judges over the course of the games.\footnote{149} Competing under the auspices of a NOC for the first time, the press expected Britain’s leading athletes to put forth a strong showing in Athens. The *Daily Mail* took the most optimistic tone, viewing the games as a two-horse race between Britain and the United States.\footnote{150} That hypothesis was also shared by newspapers on the opposite side of the Atlantic.\footnote{151}

With limited financial resources at their disposal, Britain’s athletes endured a long and exhausting journey to the Greek capital. On August 16, 1906, the British team left Victoria Station, London, traveling south to Dover where they caught a boat across the
English Channel to the French port town of Dieppe. Over the course of the next four
days, British athletes traveled across continental Europe in “overcrowded” trains via
Paris, Turin, Brindisi and Bari. From the Italian port city, the weary British contingent
boarded the Baron Call, where they sailed via Corfu to Patras, a city in the northern
Peloponnese. After a final 180-mile train journey, the “travel-weary” British team finally
arrived in Athens on August 20, only two days before the commencement of Olympic
competition. Arriving on Greek soil to great fanfare, Britain’s Olympic medal hopefuls
were greeted by the HOC and other competitors with banners, trumpets, and light
refreshments. The British competitors were joined by a royal presence in Athens.
Accompanied by a host of leading British dignitaries such as Sir Charles Hardinge, the
Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, King Edward VII, Queen Alexandra,
and the Prince and Princess of Wales made a fleeting visit to the Olympic Games as part
of a goodwill tour to Greece and Italy. A large number of British tourists vacationing in
the Mediterranean also arrived in the Greek capital for the duration of the games, thanks
in part to the affordable package deals offered by Thomas Cook, a leading British travel
organizer and official Olympic agent.

Favoring a more luxurious mode of transportation than their less privileged
countrymen, the British fencing team arrived in Greece on August 21, aboard Lord
Howard de Walden’s yacht, the Branwen R.Y.S., an impressive 135-foot, two massed
vessel. For this small band of wealthy aristocrats, the idea of a cramped four-day train
and boat journey across continental Europe was not very appealing. Departing Naples,
Italy, on August 17, the journey to Athens represented a Homeric adventure, an
opportunity for classically educated public school “Old Boys” to retrace Odysseus’
arduous steps across the Mediterranean. “The Knights,” as Lord Desborough, Theodore Andrea Cook, Sir Cosmo Duff, and Lord Howard de Walden playfully labeled themselves, sailed around the boot of Italy, through the Straits of Messina and towards the Gulf of Corinth, before finally dropping anchor in the Phaleron Bay, eight kilometers southwest of Athens. The two remaining British fencers, Charles Newton Robinson and Edgar Isaac Seligman, traveled separately aboard an Austrian Lloyd Steamer.156 Despite the twin calamities of the Great San Francisco earthquake and the eruption of Mount Vesuвиuѕ, a volcano off the west coast of central Italy just south of Naples, in the months leading up to the games, an impressive roster of 847 competitors (841 men, 6 women) from twenty nations joined the British contingent in Athens to compete in seventy-four events across thirteen different sports.157

Against the back-drop of an impressive Olympic program, the HOC scheduled a series of special cultural events aimed at underlining the historical role that Greece had played in the Olympic movement, all the way from antiquity through to the modern era. Most notably, the Greek Royal Theater put on a performance of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* at the Panatheniac Stadium, while a “Venetian Festival” was held near the port of Piraeus. The Greek organizers arranged guided tours to a number of ancient sites such as the Acropolis, as well as a lecture series boasting such distinguished speakers as Colonel Viktor Balck, a Swedish representative to the IOC and an expert on Nordic sports.158 The more affluent and socially prominent representatives attending the Athens games were treated to a number of lavish social engagements. Lord Desborough, for one, received a considerable number of invitations to private luncheons and dinners hosted by such high-ranking individuals as King George I, Crown Prince Constantine, and Madame
Heinrich Schliemann, the Greek-born widow of the late German archeologist and excavator of Mycenae and Troy.\textsuperscript{159}

**The 1906 Intermediate Games**

The opening ceremony of the Athens games took place at the Panatheniac Stadium on Sunday April 22, 1906. Watched by a crowd of 60,000 spectators, including the British royal family, Lord Desborough, draped in a top hat and frock-coat, led the forty-man British contingent in procession around the newly refurbished horse-shoe marble stadium. A cadre of leading British military officials was also in attendance, as several British warships were docked in the Phaleron Bay.\textsuperscript{160} For the first time in modern Olympic history, athletes marched together in a Parade of Nations, lowering their respective national flags in honor of King George I of Greece and King Edward VII as they passed the royal box. Even the U.S., which would go onto to pursue a policy of refusing to dip their national flag to earthly kings, lowered the Stars and Stripes in front of the Greek and British monarchs.\textsuperscript{161} A series of athletic demonstrations, including a gymnastics routine by a group of Danish schoolgirls and a feat of athletic endurance by Britain’s John E. Fowler-Dixon, a renowned long-distance runner and an athletic judge in Athens, marked the high-point of the opening ceremony.\textsuperscript{162} Celebrating the success of the commencement of the Athens games, the special correspondent to The Times insisted that the Olympics should now no longer be viewed as an “experiment.”\textsuperscript{163}

Following American objections against the staging of official competition on the Christian Sabbath, the formal Olympic program began on Monday April 23. Over the course of the next nine days, British athletes contested for medals in athletics, cycling,
diving, fencing, gymnastics, shooting, and swimming. Britain achieved its greatest success in the Neo Phaliron Velodrome, thanks largely to the surprise gold medal performance of the new and untried pairing of John Matthews and Arthur Rushen in the 2,000-meter tandem match sprint. In the 20-Kilometer track race, William Pett, a runner-up in the 1904 World Championships, secured another British victory finishing thirty-seconds ahead of his nearest challenger, France’s Maurice Berdonneau. British cyclists also earned three silver medals in the 1,000-meter sprint, one-lap time trial, and 5,000-meter track race. In the swimming events held in the open sea at Phaleron Bay, Britain’s Henry Taylor, a 21-year old mill worker from Lancashire, won the one-mile freestyle race, beating his fellow countryman John Jarvis into second-place. Taylor, who would go onto become Britain’s most successful ever Olympian with eight Olympic medals, also earned a silver in the 400-meter freestyle. Elsewhere, in the shooting competition Britain’s leading marksmen, the family pairing of Gerald and Sidney Merlin, won two gold medals in the clay trap single and double shot events. Led by BOA chairman Lord Desborough, Britain’s fencers had to settle for a solitary silver medal in the épée team event following an epic fence-off against the eventual gold-medallists France.

In the athletic portion of the Olympic program, the United States dominated proceedings clinching a remarkable eleven gold medals out of the twenty-one events. Salvaging some British pride, Henry Hawtrey, a former AAA one-mile champion, claimed the nation’s only gold medal on the track in the five-mile race, comfortably beating Sweden’s John Svanberg. In the 400-meters, Scotland’s Wyndham Halswelle, a Lieutenant in the Highland Light Infantry and a decorated hero of the Boer War, finished second behind the USA’s Paul Pilgrim, a late addition to the American team after making
his own way to Athens. Remarkably, Pilgrim, a member of the New York Athletic Club, stunned the crowd again by storming to victory a day later in the 800-meter event, finishing ahead of third place finisher Halswelle. Following an injury to Britain’s top hurdler, Robert Stronach, AAA champion in 1905 and 1906, Alfred Healey represented Britain’s best medal hope in the 110-meter hurdles. American athletes again got the best of the British, as Robert Leavitt, a student at Williams College, narrowly beat Healey to the gold medal. A similar story unfolded in the 1,500-meters as American James Lightbody, the three time Olympic gold medalist from the 1904 St. Louis games, won the gold ahead of Scotland’s John McGough. In the field events, Britain secured gold in the high-jump thanks to an impressive performance by Ireland’s Cornelius “Con” Leahy—besting his brother, Pat Leahy’s silver medal in the same event at the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris.166

_Erin Go Brágh_

The exemplary performance of Con Leahy in the high-jump raises a broader question surrounding the inclusion of three Irish athletes in the British team. Upon their arrival in the Greek capital, Peter O’Connor, Con Leahy, and John Daly were reportedly “shocked” at the news that they had been listed in the official program under the banner of Great Britain.167 As representatives of the Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA), both O’Connor and Leahy relied solely on Irish funding in order to finance their trip to Athens, thanks to a public subscription set-up on the pages of the _Irish Field_. The Emerald Isles third representative, John Daly, a runner-up in the steeple-chase at the 1904 St. Louis games, reportedly defied a Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) ban on foreign
competition to compete in the marathon event in Athens at his own expense.

Furthermore, the Irish athletes had also gone to great lengths in order to distinguish themselves from the rest of the British contingent. The IAAA issued O’Connor and Leahy with special green blazers and caps adorned with a gold shamrock, the ceremonial emblem of Ireland, as well as a large Irish flag embroidered with the words *Érin Go Brágh* (Ireland Forever), the popular maxim of the Irish Home Rule movement.¹⁶⁸

Lacking an NOC of its own at this time, however, the Irish were officially subsumed into the Great Britain team. Incensed by the official ruling, Irish athletes arrived in Athens determined to renounce their status as British competitors by proudly asserting their own distinct Irish identities.

Irish attempts to seek full recognition as an independent athletic entity reflected the nation’s broader historical struggle to achieve “Home Rule” from Britain. Resentment towards a political union with Britain can be traced all the way back to the passing of the Act of Union in 1801, when King George III incorporated Ireland into the British kingdom. Over the course of the next few decades, the calamity of the Great Famine and the rising forces of Anglicization fueled heightened waves of violent and political insurrection. By the late 1800s, the Irish Parliamentary Party, led by their young and dynamic leader Charles Stewart Parnell, rose to political prominence revitalizing nationalist attempts to achieve self-government from Britain. In spite of the support of the “Grand Old Man” of Liberal politics, Prime Minster William E. Gladstone, Irish ambitions met stern resistance from protestant-dominated Ulster Unionists in the North, who strongly opposed Home Rule on the grounds that it would adversely affect their economic prosperity and bolster the position of the Roman Catholic Church, a stance also
shared by their political allies in Britain, the Conservative Party. In the midst of overwhelming political opposition the first Home Rule Bill failed to even make its way beyond the House of Commons, while a second Gladstonian Bill seven years later met its demise in the Conservative dominated House of Lords. By 1906, however, the restoration of the Liberal government—following the resignation of Conservative Prime Minster Arthur Balfour—and their subsequent landslide victory in the general election, which also saw significant gains for the Irish Parliamentary Party, elevated expectations that the passage of Home Rule for Ireland was finally in sight. At the time of the Intermediate Games, however, Ireland remained a part of Great Britain in the eyes of both the international community and the IOC.

The IOC demonstrated an ambiguous and arbitrary historical attitude towards the attempts of non-independent nations seeking to achieve full representation. Due to the absence of a clear-cut regulatory standard in-place by 1906, the IOC, led by its president, Pierre de Coubertin, determined the status of nations on a case-by-case basis. On the one hand, the Baron fervently defended the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire state of Bohemia’s (the current Czech Republic) claims for national autonomy at the 1906 Athens games. Writing in response to a protest led by the Austrian representative to the IOC, Solms Braunfels, after the Intermediate Games, Coubertin unequivocally asserted: “If there was in your country another such ‘province’ which trained such number of gymnasts, we would love to have its representatives among us. We have to take into account the athletic autonomy of a country . . . we did not consider it a state but a centre of sport.” The Scandinavian nation of Finland, an autonomous Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire following Alexander I successful conquest during the Finnish War in
1809, also achieved separate representation at Athens for its small band of four athletes. The participation of an independent Irish team proved to be a different case altogether, as Coubertin, an intimate companion of leading BOA officials, appeared to be unwilling to risk upsetting a powerful ally and souring personal friendships by granting Ireland permission to compete as a separate entity. The BOA, a politically conservative organization, strongly opposed Home Rule for Ireland, as exemplified by Lord Desborough’s decision to switch party affiliation to the Conservatives in response to Liberal support for Irish independence.

In the case of the 1906 Intermediate Games, both Coubertin (who did not even attend the games due to his hosting of the Olympic Conference of Sport and Arts in Paris at the same time) and the IOC held no official jurisdiction—that responsibility fell to the Hellenic Organizing Committee. Waterford native and triple-jump world record holder Peter O’Connor led the protest against Ireland’s incorporation into the British team. On the advice of James Edward Sullivan, a powerful Irish-American athletic official who never shied away from expressing his contempt for the English, O’Connor wrote to the International Jury expressing his desire to see both himself and his fellow Irishmen rightfully acknowledged as representatives of the Emerald Isle, but their appeal was turned down in accordance with official regulations. Seemingly undeterred, the long-jump world record-holder took his appeal to a higher authority, Prince George of Greece. After briefly considering the Irish case, the Crown Prince allegedly resolved: “When Ireland has a Parliament of its own you can hoist the flag, but not before . . . . Perhaps there will be an Irish Parliament by the time the next Olympian games come round.”

As a close relative of the British royal family—King Edward VII’s wife, Queen
Alexandra, was his aunt—and a personal friend of high-ranking BOA officials such as Lord Desborough, Prince George’s decision was not very surprising. Ruling in favor of the Irish contingent would have been widely regarded as a personal affront to King Edward VII, his uncle-in-law and a special guest of the Greek royal family during the Athens games.

Back on Irish soil, the Crown Prince’s ruling triggered an avalanche of condemnation. The leading Irish daily broadsheet the *Irish Independent* led the charge, labeling the monarch’s decision as a “distinct injustice,” especially since Britain’s white dominions were each granted independent status. Intruding into the debate from across the Atlantic, the diaspora Irish-American weekly the *Gaelic-American* refused to even acknowledge the ruling of a “Greco-Danish Prince” who was merely voicing “the wishes of the rulers of England.” The separatist New York City weekly ensured its readers that despite the insistence of their despotic overlords, Eire would never give up her struggle for independence: “Ireland is an unwilling partner in the blood-stained Empire, the nations are aware of her sorrows and of her many struggles for freedom, and the struggle will continue until Ireland takes her place among the nations.”

Irish animosities were elevated even further following the release of a number of English press reports celebrating Irish victories throughout the course of the Athens Games as victories for “England.” The habit of subsuming Britishness (including each of its constituent parts) under Englishness, whether purposefully or not, served as another serious point of contention for the Irish. The *Irish Independent* claimed to speak for the entire nation by expressing their disdain at the manner in which Irish successes were being “filched from us.” Even the Unionist *Irish Times*, a staunch proponent of Home-
Rule, voiced their irritation at the use of the appellation “English” for describing Irish athletes. “‘English’ is as inaccurate in this connection as ‘British’ would have been accurate. Our men were the Irish contingent in the British team, and, we think, ought to have been labelled as such,” the pro-British daily reasoned. The Gaelic-American took a far more combative tone, interpreting the English media’s oversight as characteristic of the general “venom and prejudice” of the entire English nation. The notorious Irish nationalist Rodger Casement, a man later charged and executed for high treason following his part in the Easter Rising in 1916, also expressed his contempt at English conflation in a bitter invective:

Anything notable or noble that Irish soil, Irish feeling, Irish blood and Irish sympathies may evolve is simply annexed as a “British” or more probably as an “English” achievement. This remarkable English quality of annexing what is good and fameworthy has in no respect been more strikingly illustrated than in frequent purloinment of Irish athletic success . . . . Ireland may be credited with her ‘crimes’ and ‘paupers,’ . . . but when she gains by strength, skill, or valour, a right to praise, her identity is simultaneously merged in that of her ‘sister’ island.

Irish frustrations manifested themselves most visibly in the aftermath of Peter O’Connor’s controversial second place finish in the long jump competition. In one of the most eagerly awaited contests of the entire games, American Meyer Prinstein, a three time Olympic gold medalist and the reigning Olympic champion in the long jump event, surprised everyone inside of the Panatheniac Stadium by narrowly out-jumping O’Connor to clinch the gold medal. O’Connor, the world record holder in the event and the heavy pre-tournament favorite, reacted angrily to his defeat, launching an immediate protest against the outcome on the grounds that Prinstein had jumped out-of-turn and that his best effort was witnessed by only one impartial judge, American team manager Matthew Haplin. Conscious of upsetting a powerful American ally, the International
Jury led by its President Prince George of Greece unanimously upheld Haplin’s ruling. Despite seeking revenge over his American counterpart Prinstein by leaping to gold in the triple jump competition three days later, O’Connor seized the opportunity to vent his spleen during the official medal ceremony where the Union Jack was cast overhead in recognition of the Irishman’s first place finish.\(^{180}\)

The specific nature of O’Connor’s actions needs some deconstruction, especially in light of the fact that the only detailed account of the events that unfolded during the medal ceremony come from O’Connor himself, fifty-years after the fact. In an interview with the *Limerick Leader* on August 25, 1956, O’Connor, then aged eighty-four, recollected:

> I was an accomplished gymnast in my youth and my active climbing of the post excited the spectators. At a height of about 20 feet I unfurled my big green flag and remained aloft for some considerable time waving it vigorously. Con Leahy assisted in the demonstration by keeping fighting guard at the foot of the pole, meanwhile waving his green flag and defying every effort of the officials to prevent the demonstration which caused a great sensation.\(^{181}\)

Curiously, none of the leading British, Irish (national and ethnic), or American newspaper reports can verify O’Connor’s account.\(^{182}\) Even James E. Sullivan and Theodore Andrea Cook failed to make any note of it in their detailed reports of the games.\(^{183}\) Most contemporary accounts overlook the incident altogether, while a small minority such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Gaelic-American* confirm that the Irishmen did wave their national flag, but make no mention of O’Connor climbing the flag pole or Leahy standing guard below.\(^{184}\)

Whether O’Connor climbed the pole or not, his actions represented an act of political defiance, a nationalistic demonstration aimed at drawing the world’s attention towards Ireland’s claims for political emancipation from Britain. As the *Gaelic-American*
intoned, “The thousands of spectators from all parts of the world know now, if they did not know it before, that Britain’s blood stained banner is not respected or recognized by the Irish people.”¹⁸⁵ Not all sections of the Irish public were equally as enthused by O’Connor’s behavior. The Unionist Irish Times condemned the actions of their “hot-blooded fellow countryman,” and were left to muse, “Is there any part of the world into which the troublesome genius of Irish politics has not obtruded itself?”¹⁸⁶ Interestingly, O’Connor’s actions represented one of the first political demonstration in modern Olympic history, and served as a precursor for future expressions of nationalism by both native-born and diaspora Irish athletes in their quest for securing national independence.

A “United” Kingdom?

Irish claims for political autonomy from Britain raise much broader questions surrounding the exact identity and make-up of Great Britain during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The idea of “Britain” can be tenuously traced all the way back to Roman occupation during antiquity (AD 43-410). Over the course of the next eleven-hundred years, turmoil, distrust, and forced occupation would gradually give way to more peaceful co-existence and interaction between the disparate cultural and ethnic groups that originally inhabited the British Isles. King Henry VIII’s annexation of Wales with England in 1536 and the ascent of King James VI to the thrones of both England and Scotland in 1603 represented the first palpable steps towards the realization of a unitary British state. In the aftermath of a bloody Civil War, King James VII’s passing of the Act of Union in 1707, joining the kingdoms of Scotland and England (including Wales) into a political union, followed by the addition of Ireland in 1801, ensured that the idea of
“Great Britain” became an enduring reality. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, rampant commercial and colonial expansion and the acquisition of a vast overseas Empire positioned Britain and the British at the forefront of a new world order.\textsuperscript{187}

The establishment of Great Britain, an Anglo-Celtic multinational state, was not an easy process. As contemporary scholarship has demonstrated the prevalence of insular geopolitics, fueled by competing ethnic and national identities, traditions, ideas, languages and institutions, long hampered the development of a shared sense of “Britishness.”\textsuperscript{188} This is not an historical phenomenon either, as Britain’s entry into the European Union, the passing of devolution in Scotland and Wales in 1997, continued civil-strife in Northern Ireland, and the resurgence of the Scottish separatist movement currently testify.\textsuperscript{189} In the United Kingdom, “Britishness” entailed a kind of a dual identity for each of its constituent parts. For instance, the Welsh perceived, and continue to perceive themselves primarily as being “Welsh,” but in relation to foreigners they were “British.” The same certainly remains true for both the Irish and the Scots. Unlike their Celtic neighbors who repeatedly asserted their own distinctiveness both politically and culturally, the English have traditionally identified themselves as being British. As the largest, wealthiest and most powerful partner in the unitary British state, the English were less inclined to trumpet their own national identity out of fear that it would threatened the “unity and integrity” of the union.\textsuperscript{190}

The complexities and peculiarities of British identity hold particular pertinence in the world of international sport. Since the inception of competitive international sporting fixtures at the end of the nineteenth century, England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales
proceeded to compete as individual representative nations. Sports such as association 
football and rugby union offered the “Home-Nations” (England, Ireland, Scotland and 
Wales), particularly the Celtic fringe, an avenue for reaffirming and reveling in their own 
distinct national identities. In Wales, participation in international rugby union can be 
viewed as an allegorical expression of Welsh nationhood. Victory on the rugby field was 
translated as a symbol of a vibrant, self-confident and independent Welsh nation, free 
from the orbit of English influence.191 Similarly, Scottish participation in association 
football also contributed to a heightened sense of national self-consciousness.192 The 
Irish, at least the Roman Catholic dominated southerners, also harnessed the enormous 
nation-building potential of sport, but in a somewhat different manner. Organized under 
the auspices of the politically motivated GAA, the Irish revived their own traditional 
sports of hurling and Gaelic football as an act of resistance against the rapacious forces of 
English cultural imperialism.193

Paradoxically, international sport also served as a vehicle for fostering a broader 
British national identity. In a number of sports the Home-Nations have joined forces in 
competing under the banner of “Great Britain” (or deviations thereof). By the late-
nineteenth century, the British shared a military, a parliament, a monarchy, a legal and 
judiciary system, an economy, political parties, a unified ruling class, and through British 
participation in the Olympic Games they also shared a sports team. The earliest 
representation of a British team, however, actually predated the 1896 Athens Olympics 
Games. As early as 1888, an unofficial “British Isles” rugby union team comprised of 
English, Scottish, and Welsh players, toured Australasia. The inaugural 35-match tour 
against the leading provincial, city and academic teams in Australia and New Zealand

51
laid the foundations for the future quadrennial British and Irish Lions rugby union tours to the southern hemisphere.\textsuperscript{194} In tennis, the creation of the Davis Cup in 1900 provided another early sporting example of solidarity and collaboration between England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.\textsuperscript{195} Given the limited scope and international appeal of these events—particularly in their infancy—the Olympic Games provided the largest platform for the Home-Nations to compete under the colors of the Union Jack.

Following their earlier muddles in Athens (1896), Paris (1900), and St. Louis (1904), the 1906 Intermediate Games represented the first real participation of an organized and sizable British team. The preponderance of English athletes and officials, aligned with the anti-British sentiments of Irish athletes reveals just how far an overarching sense of Britishness prevailed amongst the camp. Did the British athletes share a sense of a common consciousness and a common identity despite admitted differences of region within the British Isles? Or was Britishness merely a state-identity, sitting on top of more meaningful national affiliations? Unlike their Irish teammates who vociferously protested their incorporation into the British team, Scottish and Welsh athletes expressed no public disapproval of the new national combination. Nevertheless, one can only speculate as to how they felt privately about either competing under the banner of “Great Britain” or singing the British (and English) national anthem rather than those of their respective homelands. A photograph of the British contingent in Athens appears to offer some insight, as the majority of athletes favored their own national emblems rather than the unifying insignia of the Union Jack on their athletic jerseys.\textsuperscript{196} In appearance at least, there was a conflict between the acceptance of a British identity and a continuing identity as English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh.
Incidentally, attempts to foster a greater shared sense of Britishness proved especially difficult during this period as the Celtic nations experienced an intensive national reawakening or renaissance. Through the literary, religious, educational and political realms, the Irish, Scottish and the Welsh promoted their own distinct national and ethnic heritages, a process that distinguished them even further from the dominant people of the United Kingdom, the English. The Irish led the charge, establishing organizations such as the Gaelic Union (1880) to promote the Gaelic language, the Gaelic League (1893) to advance the nation’s cultural heritage, and the Gaelic Athletic Association (1884) to revive traditional Irish sports. The Welsh underwent a similar cultural transformation, but with a less political anti-English overtone. Buoyed by the expansion of the South Wales coalfields that fired the British Empire, the Welsh revived their flagging National Eisteddfod—the festival of the arts in Wales—, founded a national university (1893), established a Welsh Parliamentary Party, and promoted their own native tongue. The cultivation and expression of a resurgent Welsh national identity was solidified even further through the creation of distinct cultural emblems such as the leek, the daffodil, the dragon of Cadwaladr, and the three plumed motif of the Prince of Wales, and through the composition of a national anthem, “Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau” (Land of My Fathers). Early twentieth century Celtic claims for national distinctiveness have led some to question the very existence of a British nation or a shared national identity during this period.

The prevalence and persistence of conflicting national identities and allegiances roiled the BOA’s early attempts to foster a deeper British reverence for the Olympic Games. Unlike their foreign rivals such as the United States, who effectively united their
“melting pot” citizenry behind a cogent and encompassing American sporting nationalism, the Home-Nations, particularly the Irish, clung tenaciously to their own distinct identities. The use of the designation “Great Britain” for international Olympic competition failed to overlay the deeper cultural differences that existed between the Home-Nations. As the contemporary debate surrounding the raising of a unified “British” football team for the forthcoming 2012 London games confirms, individual national loyalties still continue to trump any allegiance to a broader political union. The Football Associations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have repeatedly snubbed English calls for twenty-first-century collaboration in order to ensure the preservation of their own distinct national identities within the eyes of Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and to temper the ever virulent strains of Celtic nationalism.

A Weary Titan

Amongst the furor surrounding Irish claims for independence and the ensuing debate over the exact identity of “British” competitors, Britain finished fourth in the final medal standings, behind the United States, host nation Greece, and overall champions France. For a nation accustomed to claiming the laurels of victory and effortless superiority, Britain’s twenty-four medal (eight gold, eleven silver, and five bronze) Olympic campaign was viewed as a source of national embarrassment. Olympic apologists complained that British athletes had underachieved due to a combination of poor organization, public apathy, and governmental indifference. The special correspondent to The Times led the charge, expressing his exasperation with the “total absence of organization” of British representatives. In a condemnatory report, the
correspondent further complained, “there were no arrangements at all, and the traditional English principle of leaving everything to individual effort and initiative was rigidly adhered to.”202 The *Sportsman* also bemoaned the dilettantish British approach. “To call the British athletes a ‘team,’” the London sporting weekly groused, “is to make a melancholy jest. . . . It is absurd to entrust the athletic reputation of this country in this haphazard fashion.”203 A prostrated Theodore Andrea Cook conceded that, in contrast to their foreign rivals, British athletes suffered from a noticeable lack of “careful organization.”204

At first glance, claims that British athletes were unorganized and unscientific in their approach to sport appears almost paradoxical. After all, *Royal Society* British scientists such as Sir Isaac Newton and Sir Francis Bacon laid the foundations for the birth of the Western scientific order. During the early twentieth century, the British were still at the forefront of scientific discovery, splitting the atom, developing radar, creating Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), and boasting the world’s second largest automobile industry, a record hardly reflective of a purportedly unspecialized and scientifically backward nation. In a sporting context, however, the British could be rightfully labeled unscientific. The Victorian restraints of amateurism prohibited the British from applying their scientific acumen towards achieving athletic success. From the British perspective, sport was ultimately an autotelic endeavor—the reward resided purely in the doing. In accordance with the traditional British dictum, “sport for sports sake,” amateur sport was conducted in a very nonchalant and haphazard fashion aimed at producing a good “all-rounder.” Practicing too much undermined natural grace and talent, and put an athlete on the nefarious path towards professionalism.205 As one contemporary foreign observer
remarked, “love of sport, of the game, not the player is the marked characteristic of the average British subject . . . . He plays fast and hard, but he does not lose sight of the fact that it is play, not a competition in which he must win even at the sacrifice of pleasure.”

In practice, the British interpretation of how to “play the game” proved overwhelmingly idealistic, not to mention hypocritical. The Olympic Games, similar to all international sporting events between nation-states, provided a means to measure national vigor. As the British finally came to realize in the wake of an ignominious defeat, victory in Olympic competition was deemed a testament to the strength and vitality of a nation, while failure was considered symptomatic of national decadence and decline. Regardless of Britain’s insistence to the contrary, victory in international sport mattered. Behind the high-minded veil of British amateurism and indifference, the nation’s athletic leaders became increasingly concerned regarding Britain’s inexorable decline in the world of international sport. As Theodore Andrea Cook confirmed somberly on the pages of Baily’s Magazine of Sports and Pastimes, “England no longer stands alone, as she once did, as the apostle of ‘hard exercise’ . . . . We have had to see our best pupils beat us.”

Cook’s deflated tone was fueled by an assumption of British infallibility combined with a sudden discovery that the “student” had eclipsed their erstwhile “teacher.”

By the early decades of the twentieth century a succession of high profile defeats away from the Olympic arena offered conclusive evidence that the gilt had been firmly knocked off Britain’s reputation as the leader of modern sport. After an initial period of unrivalled dominance, the zenith of British sporting supremacy appeared to be coming
towards an abrupt end. Indicators of decline were ubiquitous. In 1905, the New Zealand All-Blacks rugby union team swept virtually all before them on a tour to the British Isles, confirming that the centre of rugby power had shifted to the southern hemisphere. In the America’s Cup, British yachts continued their seemingly interminable run of twelve straight defeats to the New York Yacht Club. In rowing, foreign crews increasingly overcame stringent entry restrictions to pose a serious challenge to British hegemony in the annual Henley Regatta. In 1906, Royal Club Nautique de Grand of Belgium became the first foreign crew to win Henley’s most prestigious prize, the Grand Challenge Cup. English performances in cricket offer another insight into the severity of Britain’s declining competitiveness, losing four of the last six Ashes test series’ against their imperial cousins, Australia. By viewing the international sporting arena as a “Darwinian” struggle for national expression, as many in the British Isles and the around the world did, Britain’s sporting performances appeared to project an unfavorable image of the nation to the rest of the world, elevating fears that that the sun was beginning to set on the British Empire.208

The nation’s waning fortunes in international sport were further exacerbated by fears concerning the general physical well-being of the British public. Britain’s involvement in the Boer War of 1899 to 1902 elevated fears of national decadence, as legions of ill-prepared and poorly marshaled British troops suffered a series of humiliating defeats against the vastly outnumbered Boer rebels. Although the British eventually quelled the Boer advances, the war came as a devastating shock to British imperial pride and raised the question of, as historian David Reynolds has put it, “how Britain would fare in a ‘real’ war against a great power?”209 Britain’s sporting and
military atrophy spurned sub-Darwinian fears of racial suicide, a concern that obsessed the Edwardian Age. In a heightened climate of social doubt, cultural commentators diagnosed and explicated the “symptoms of national decay,” blaming Britain’s physical malaise on industrialization, mass-urbanization, and increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Post-war findings heightened British anxieties even further when it was revealed that over one-third of all military conscripts were rejected on the basis of poor physical fitness, an alarming figure that prompted the War Office to begin prescribing a national syllabus in physical training in order to rectify the problem. Robert Baden Powell’s, a buccaneer imperialist and a lieutenant-general in the British army during the Boer War, establishment of the Boy Scout movement in 1908 represented another important remedy in the quest for “national efficiency.”

Even in the broader imperial realm, the tenuous nature of British power became increasingly more ominous as international rivals sought a place in the sun. Russia and Japan led the “scramble for China,” France asserted its claims in North Africa, while Germany secured an Empire three times larger than the Reich, stretching from the Cameroon’s to East Africa. Even smaller European powers such as Italy and Belgium joined the great imperial race, carving out their own African kingdoms. Across the Atlantic, the United States announced its imperial ambitions with the acquisition of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, following a stunning victory in the Spanish-American War. As British leaders fought to maintain their imperial panoply, domestic and economic pressures conspired to undermine the nation’s global position even further. Irish nationalist fury continued to rage, the women’s suffragette movement gained political momentum, and British industries faced increased competition from innovative
and highly-specialized American and German rivals. For the self-styled modern-day Romans, an impending fear of national decline and imperial ruin weighed heavily on the British mindset throughout the Edwardian era.\textsuperscript{213}

Aggrieved by Britain’s dwindling position in international sport and determined to exorcise the specter of racial and imperial deterioration, \textit{The Times} proposed a series of dramatic organizational reforms aimed at improving their nation’s fortunes in future cycles of Olympic competition. Impressed by the “excellent provisions” made by their foreign rivals such as the United States, the traditionalist daily broadsheet called for the introduction of professional coaching, comfortable accommodation, improved travel arrangements, and a sizable pool of funds needed to cover projected costs. As a major organ for elite amateur athletics, the progressive and Americanized attitude of \textit{The Times} reflected the growing sense of urgency and despair amongst the leaders of British sport. In their clamor for ensuring future British victories, \textit{The Times} called for an end to the prevailing “apathy” in Britain towards the Olympic Games, demanding that the nation’s leading athletic clubs and universities play a far greater role in creating a truly representative and superior British Olympic squad.\textsuperscript{214} BOA chief Theodore Andrea Cook shared \textit{The Times} opinion that competitive sport could be used as a useful make-weight in the international balance of power. Eager to secure much needed nationwide support, Cook moved to assuage the potential fears of Britain’s amateur sporting authorities, who fervently opposed an American model of athletic specialization. He insisted that in their quest for athletic excellence Britain would “never either desire or obtain the £5,000” spent by the United States in Athens; rather a mere “£200” towards future Olympic expenses would suffice.\textsuperscript{215} Cook’s modest financial projection would provide an
overwhelmingly stark measure of just how seriously the BOA would soon begin to approach international Olympic competition, especially in light of continued disappointing British performances.

**Olympic, or not Olympic?**

The exact status of the 1906 Intermediate Games in Olympic history is somewhat perplexing. Are the games to be recognized as an official Olympics, or alternatively, as a Greek athletic festival? Discussing the issue at length during the annual IOC session in Rome in 1949, a special ad-hoc committee headed by IOC president Avery Brundage unanimously rejected a motion to acknowledge the 1906 event in Athens as an official cycle of Olympic competition. The IOC’s official stance was especially confusing in light of the fact that the 1906 Intermediate Games were widely considered at the time by its organizers, the participants, the media, and the public to be an official Olympiad. The IOC themselves, at the 1901 annual IOC session in Paris, had earlier resolved that the Athens games would form part of the official Olympic cycle, alternating every two years with other major international cities. Even in the immediate aftermath of the 1906 event, a small band of IOC members spearheaded an attempt to designate Athens the permanent site of all future Olympic Games. Yet, curiously, over the course of the next few decades the 1906 Athens “Olympic” Games were reduced to the mere status of “Intermediate,” an aberration that was incongruent with the official quadrennial cycle of international Olympic competition. Coubertin, ever the shrewd tactician, was keen to distance his movement from self-perceived Greek attempts to wrest control of the Olympics. 216
Coubertin’s efforts to marginalize the Athens games were aided by a series of political and military entanglements that rendered the Greeks powerless to stage another edition of Olympic competition in 1910. Eleutherios Venizelos’ ascent to power in 1909, following a successful military coup, ushered in a new drive towards modernization and territorial expansion in Greece. The Olympic Games, so it appeared, were not compatible with Venizelos’ radical modernizing plans as his new government only apportioned 80,000 drachmas towards hosting costs, a third of the original amount requested by the HOC. Renewed Greek attempts to stage the games in 1914 met a similar fate, as the nation was plunged into depths of the Balkan War of 1912-1913. Any further Greek initiatives to revive the Athens Olympic Games were completely squashed following the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

The ongoing debate surrounding the exact status of the 1906 Athens Olympic Games should not take away from the crucial role they played in ensuring the survival and future success of the international Olympic movement. Following the farcical outcomes of Paris (1900) and St. Louis (1904), where the games were reduced to mere athletic sideshows, the 1906 Athens games appeared to restore a sense of legitimacy to Coubertin’s faltering Olympic movement. For the first time NOCs sent officially sanctioned athletes to compete, gold, silver and bronze medals were awarded to successful participants, and a Parade of Nations became the centerpiece of the opening ceremony. Lord Desborough and R. C. Bosanquet, in their roles as official representatives of the British government, issued a glowing eulogy to Spyridôn Lambros, the general secretary of the HOC: “The memory of the great Olympic festival which has just terminated so successfully in your
historic and beautiful city will ever remain one of our most prized and happy possessions.”

The British press took a far less congratulatory tone, accusing the Greek organizers of glaring maladministration. *The Times* led the attack by questioning the use of the Panatheniac Stadium as a suitable venue for hosting a modern international athletic gathering: “The shape of the track with sharp curves at either end is described as ‘impossible.’ The runners frequently collided with each other, some were pushed into the space within the track, and others slipped when rounding the curves.” Questions were also raised regarding the unwieldy size of the athletic program, especially since non-British inspired events such as gymnastics “seemed scarcely worthy of such dignified company.” The root cause of British condemnation rested with the inability of the international jury to successfully oversee the execution of the athletic program. The *Daily Mail*, amongst others, accused the Greek organizers of placing a number of unqualified men, an “athletically ignorant polyglot tribunal,” in charge of events for which they knew very little about. In a scathing attack, the *Daily Mail* derided the Athens games an example of “How Not to Manage an Athletic Meeting,” sneering “It was a comic business.” The British would soon get the opportunity to put their self-perceived organizational expertise to the test. Following the recent eruption of Mount Vesuvius reports mounted that the BOA had offered to come to the IOC’s and the city of Rome’s late rescue by agreeing to host the forthcoming 1908 Olympic Games.
Chapter Two

A British Olympics

During the 1904 IOC session held in London, committee members voted unanimously to award the Games of the IV Olympiad to the city of Rome. For Coubertin, the choice of the Eternal City over rival bids from Berlin and Milan presented an opportunity to revive his flagging international Olympic movement following two failed excursions to Paris and St. Louis, as well as to combat the growing threat of Hellenization from Greek rivals. The IOC president believed the Olympics would benefit by a connection to antiquity, albeit a historically murky association with classical Rome rather than classical Greece. “I wanted Olympism . . . to don once again the sumptuous toga, woven of art and philosophy, in which I had always wanted to clothe her,” Coubertin admitted. The Rome Organizing Committee, boasting such notable luminaries as King Victor Emanuel II, Pope Pius X, and Prince Prospero Colonna, quickly set to work drawing up ambitious plans to stage automobile races in Milan, boxing and wrestling bouts in Rome’s Coliseum, and nautical events in the Bay of Naples. Rome’s hopes of successfully hosting the 1908 Olympic Games faced strong opposition from Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti. In the midst of a massive governmental building project, which included the Simplon Tunnel between Switzerland and Italy and an aqueduct in the Puglia region, it grew increasingly unlikely that Giolitti’s Liberal administration would honor their initial pledge to underwrite the cost of the games.
Over the next few months, the Rome Organizing Committee’s inactivity began to raise concerns amongst IOC members. By the time of the 1905 IOC session held in Brussels, it became strikingly apparent that no preparations were being made in Rome for the 1908 Olympic Games. Unable to conceal the obvious truth, Count Eugenio Brunetta d’Usseaux, an Italian representative to the IOC, wrote “despondingly” to the Reverend Courcy Laffan, expressing his concern regarding Rome’s ability to fulfill its obligation to host the games. Upon the receipt of d’Usseaux’s letter, Laffan immediately notified Coubertin of this latest development, and inquired “whether possibly England could fill the gap.” Despite the brevity of time in which to prepare, the honorary secretary of the BOA assured the baron that although “It would be difficult . . . I am inclined to think not impossible.” Laffan requested an estimate of projected costs before he would be willing to put the matter before the BOA and potentially submit an official British candidacy. Laffan’s letter, dated January 5, 1906, marked the first phase of British interest in hosting the 1908 Olympic Games.

Rome officially relinquished its obligation to host the Games of the IV Olympiad over the course of the 1906 Intermediate Games held in Athens. Attempting to detract attention away from his government’s unwillingness to subsidize the games, Count Brunetta d’Usseaux, who also served as the secretary general to the IOC, blamed the recent eruption of Mount Vesuvius as the principal motive behind Rome’s late withdrawal. Faced with the dilemma of finding a suitable host at such short notice, the IOC, likely aware of Laffan’s earlier interest, offered Lord Desborough and Great Britain the seemingly impossible task of salvaging the games during the 1906 IOC session held in Athens. The IOC’s offer came as no surprise to the BOA chairman, who had earlier
expressed his desire for Britain to “ask for the Olympiad of 1912 or even that of 1908 if Rome senses a failure.” Nevertheless, unsure whether such an endeavor was feasible at this late point, the BOA chairman promised to seek the opinion of the leading sporting authorities in Britain before making an official decision. In fact, Desborough immediately consulted with his fellow British fencers aboard Lord Howard de Walden’s yacht, the Branwen R.Y.S., as well as seeking royal approval from King Edward VII who was in Athens for the Intermediate Games. On May 14, 1906, while traveling back from his silver medal performance in Athens, Lord Desborough penned a short letter to Coubertin expressing his delight that the King had given his “acquiescence” to staging the Olympic Games in London. Queen Alexandra, sister of King George I of Greece, proved more obstinate, refusing to support the British proposal on the grounds that the IOC and BOA “were taking away the games from Greece, or rather copying the Greeks.”

As Desborough arrived back on British soil determined to win support in favor of a London Olympics, his own role within the framework of the international Olympic movement was enhanced following his appointment as a British representative to the IOC—filling the position recently vacated by Charles Herbert, an IOC member since its inception in 1894. Herbert, a long-serving secretary of the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA), was forced to relinquish his seat on the IOC after a near fatal fall from a London omnibus. The newly appointed IOC member immediately embarked upon the task of securing the cooperation of all of the leading governing bodies of English sport. On October 27, 1906, the BOA scored a major coup as the powerful AAA offered its full consent to stage the 1908 Olympic Games in London. A host of other British governing bodies of sport quickly followed suit, including the Amateur Rowing
Association, National Cyclists Union, Amateur Fencing Association, National Rifle
Association, National Physical Recreation Society, and the Hockey Association. The
Reverend Courcy Laffan updated Coubertin on the string of latest endorsements, assuring
the IOC president that “we shall carry the English associations as a whole.” Laffan
insisted that the BOA were now in a position to make a definitive decision in the
forthcoming weeks.233

On November 19, 1906, at a Council meeting of the BOA, members passed an
official resolution in favor of hosting the 1908 Olympic Games in London.234 After
months of secrecy and internal discussions between the IOC and the BOA, Lord
Desborough issued a nationwide press release informing the British public of the
upcoming games.235 Mindful of the nation’s historical disinterest in the Olympics,
Desborough reassured the public that the BOA had received the full backing of many of
England’s leading amateur governing bodies of sport. Desborough shrewdly played upon
Britain’s reputation as the leader of modern sport in a ploy to win public favor, stressing
the importance of carrying out the Olympic Games “in a manner worthy of a great
athletic nation.”236 The Evening Standard celebrated the BOA’s decision to host the
Olympian spectacle, but warned that Britain “will suffer lasting disgrace if the Games of
1908 are not only equal in extent and interest to those which have preceded them, but so
far superior as to develop a vast increase of zeal for these international gathers.”237
Remarkably, after a decade of unwavering apathy Britain had come to the IOC’s late
rescue by agreeing to stage the 1908 Olympic Games in London, much to the relief of
Coubertin who watched on as the homeland of his own personal athletic philosophy
embraced a more prominent position within the international Olympic movement.
The Franco-British Exhibition

With the British sporting public seemingly in favor of a London Olympics, Lord Desborough and the BOA moved promptly to secure a suitable venue for hosting a major international athletic gathering. By a fortunate coincidence, the Franco-British Exhibition was to be held concurrently in London during the summer of 1908. Under the organizational expertise of Imre Kiralfy, a Hungarian-born Jew and an established entrepreneur in the exhibition field, the Franco-British Exhibition in industry, commerce, and culture showcased Britain and France’s self-appointed positions as the arbiters of Western civilization. After centuries of incessant Francophobia and Anglophobia, the exhibition signaled a new page in Franco-British relations. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Kaiser Wilhelm II’s aggressive policy of German naval construction dictated a dramatic shift in British foreign policy. Overextended and desperately in need of an international ally on the European Continent, Britain moved towards ending its “splendid isolation” by negotiating the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902, as well as signing the Entente Cordial with France in 1904, settling a long-standing colonial dispute over the official jurisdiction of both Egypt and Morocco. Aiming to exploit this new Anglo-French relationship, the sagacious Kiralfy, a master of showmanship and spectacle, in conjunction with the French Chamber of Commerce, planned a colossal 140-acre display of imperial might in the new White City exhibition site in Shepherd’s Bush, west London.238

Plans for the Franco-British Exhibition were well advanced by the time Lord Desborough returned from Athens to sell the London games to the British public. Sensing an opportunity to make the Olympics a centerpiece of Kiralfy’s lavish imperial display,
the BOA chairman opened provisional negotiations with the exhibition authorities throughout the early weeks of November, 1906. During a Council meeting of the BOA on December 20, 1906, Imre Kiralfy, acting on behalf of the organizing committee of the Franco-British Exhibition, pledged to underwrite total advertising and construction costs, including an 110,000 capacity stadium (projected to cost £44,000), running and cycling tracks, lawn tennis courts, a swimming pool, dressing rooms, and convenience stands. In addition, the exhibition authorities would advance the BOA £2,000 towards preliminary expenses, as well as guaranteeing one-fourth of total gross profits from the games.239 This was an extremely enticing offer. Not only was the BOA free from all financial responsibility if the games carried a heavy deficit, as had been the case on previous occasions, but they also acquired a new venue and state of the art sporting facilities. Unwilling to enter into direct competition with the Franco-British Exhibition by setting-up a rival event, the BOA keenly accepted the liberal terms proposed. The contract was officially executed on January 14, 1907.240 Surprisingly, after the debacles of Paris and St. Louis, Coubertin’s Olympics were once again aligned with a world trade exhibition. Lord Desborough moved quickly to reassure the IOC president that history would not repeat itself in London: “France, in your person, re-started the Olympic Games; Great Britain is an athletic country, so no sport could be more fitted for the next Olympiad than that consecrated to a Franco-British Exhibition of Art, Science and Industries.”241

**An Olympic Effort**

Groundbreaking for the new stadium took place on January 3, 1907, and other building work commenced over the following weeks and months. With no governmental
financial assistance and less than seventeen months in which to prepare, the BOA, operating out of their temporary offices at the Bath Club, in Dover Street, London, faced a monumental task. In reality, a small coterie of influential sporting elites, in association with representatives from the leading governing bodies of English sport, endeavored to stage the largest international sports gathering, at that time, in modern history. The BOA quickly set to work, drafting a detailed program of sporting events, along with the regulations that would govern the various contests. Provisional drafts were sent out to all affiliated IOC member nations, with the final schedule of events for the London games to be determined during the 1907 IOC session in The Hague. The BOA also approved the establishment of a number of sub-committees to work in union with the exhibition authorities in designing and overseeing the construction of sporting facilities. Led by T. W. Britten, of the National Cyclist Union, the “Cycle Track Committee” traveled throughout continental Europe, inspecting the best tracks for suitable designs. The “Running Track Committee” looked a little closer to home, acquiring the services of Charles Perry, the acclaimed London Athletic Club grounds man at Stamford Bridge—Perry had laid the running tracks at both the 1896 and 1906 Athens games. By March 11, 1907, the respective sub-committees submitted their detailed specifications to the exhibition authorities, sanctioning the construction of a 660-yard oval cycling track enclosing a cinder running path one-third of a mile in circumference. A 110-yard outdoor swimming pool with a collapsible tower to allow for high diving competitions was also earmarked for the infield of the Shepherd’s Bush arena. Plans were also put forward for staging football, field hockey, lacrosse, and rugby union matches, an archery competition, and gymnastic and wrestling events inside of the stadium.
As the principle medium between the IOC and the numerous national Olympic committees, the BOA was inundated with correspondences in the build-up to the London games. In fact, the BOA received over ten thousands letters, with issues ranging from a Scottish appeal to approve “broken-time” payments for Olympic swimmers,\textsuperscript{245} to a Canadian inquiry concerning the “admission of coloured competitors.”\textsuperscript{246} The Reverend Courcy Laffan, the honorary secretary of the BOA and a noted linguist, took up the task of responding to all national and international queries, processing official entry applications and translating Olympic correspondences in both German and French. Despite Laffan’s assiduous efforts the feat proved impossible, forcing the BOA to approve the appointment of an assistant secretary, Captain F. Whitworth Jones—the first salaried employee in the organization’s history.\textsuperscript{247} The BOA also moved into more spacious and permanent offices in 108 Victoria Street, Westminster.\textsuperscript{248} With only a skeleton staff at their disposal, the BOA wisely adopted a system of devolution, delegating the official management of each branch of the games to the corresponding English governing body of sport. The associations were charged with arranging their specific portion of the Olympic program, providing officials, and upholding the proper conduct of competitors.\textsuperscript{249} The BOA also requested the use of suitable preexisting facilities for staging Olympic events. Ending its apathetic stance towards the Olympic Games, the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) answered the BOA’s call by agreeing to host an Olympic regatta on the Thames, the site of their prestigious annual Henley regatta. Other splendid and well-established venues such as Wimbledon for tennis, Bisley for shooting, and the Hurlingham Club for polo were also made available to the BOA for use during the London games.\textsuperscript{250} Setting a precedent by which future Olympic host
nations would follow, the BOA spread the events throughout the British Isles.

Southampton water, on the southern coast of England, provided the site for the motorboat event, while Hunter’s Quay, Glasgow, Scotland, and the Royal Victoria Yacht Club, Ryde, on the Isle of Wight, co-hosted the yachting event.\textsuperscript{251}

Unfortunately for the BOA, not all of the leading governing bodies of British sport proved as cooperative. In January, 1908, a quarrel broke out between the BOA and the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews over a proposed Olympic golf tournament. The BOA had allegedly written to the Royal and Ancient in July, 1906, to inquire about the feasibility of staging such an event under the club’s patronage. By January 20, 1908, a letter written by the Reverend Courcy Laffan appeared in \textit{The Scotsman} announcing that owing to absence of a reply from the home of world golf, the BOA had proceeded to obtain the services of Mr. W. Ryder Richardson, honorary secretary of the Amateur Golf Championship Committee, to oversee a 108 hole (six rounds) individual and team stroke-play event to be staged in Kent, England, on June 1-3, 1908.\textsuperscript{252} C. S. Grace, honorary secretary of the Green Committee of the Royal and Ancient, reacted angrily to Laffan’s letter, asserting that his club had never received a “circular on the subject from the Olympic Council.”\textsuperscript{253} John L. Low, a leading authority on British amateur golf, reiterated Grace’s claim, while expressing his disbelief that the BOA would ever have expected the Royal and Ancient to consider a proposal “quite new to the spirit of the game.”\textsuperscript{254} Low’s message underlined a recurring British criticism of the Olympic Games: they are not British, and they do not represent the purest interests of amateur sport. \textit{The Scotsman} confirmed: “golfers generally have displayed little or no interest in the proposal, those with a keen sense of the traditions of the Royal and Ancient
game have quickly perceived that no good can come to the fine old pastime by including it in the list of Olympic contests.” In the face of widespread opposition, including public denunciations from leading amateur golfers such as Johnny Laidley and Robert Maxwell, the BOA was forced to scratch golf from the final Olympic program. Remarkably, golf has not officially appeared on an Olympic program since.

**Designing the Olympic Program**

The Olympic program for the London games was actually determined during the annual IOC session in The Hague, May 21-23, 1907. Committee members approved the BOA’s proposal to stage the games in two distinct parts. The summer games, comprising the principle events such as athletics, rowing, swimming, and fencing, were to commence with the opening ceremony on July 13, 1908. Despite provisional plans to host the second portion of the games in Easter, the winter games, including association football, rugby union, hockey, boxing and lacrosse, were eventually scheduled for October 19-31, 1908. A number of sports achieved Olympic status for the first time. Pre-dating the first Winter Olympic Games held in Chamonix by sixteen years, the IOC approved figure skating to make its Olympic debut in London. The IOC also sanctioned military riding, golf, automobile racing and flying machines, but for various reasons these events were never held. Baseball, cricket and pelota were excluded due to their parochial appeal. In total, one-hundred-and-ten events across twenty-three different sports were scheduled for the London games. Meanwhile, in an effort to revive the cultural fusion of art and physical activity from ancient Greece, the IOC commissioned competitions in architecture, literature, music, painting, and sculpture. Led by
Theodore Andrea Cook, the BOA established an “Art Committee” and began making preliminary arrangements, but was forced to “abandon” plans owing to the scarcity of time in which they had to prepare and the impossibility of finding enough qualified individuals to judge the various contests. The BOA’s preliminary work did form the basis for the arts competitions at the 1912 Stockholm games. Under Cook’s leadership, the Art Committee continued to oversee the production of gold, silver, and bronze Olympic medals, special diplomas for meritorious performances, and commemorative medals for all participants.

The IOC’s decision to award judging responsibilities to the British organizers emerged as the most significant outcome of The Hague session. In contrast to the 1906 Intermediate Games, where judges were selected evenly between all participating nations, the English governing bodies would act as the sole authority in all Olympic sports. For F. A. M. Webster, a renowned athletic coach and prolific Olympic writer, the IOC’s ruling proved that the British love of “fair play” was beyond reproach. In practice, however, the belief that the British judges could remain immune to the forces of nationalism appeared overwhelmingly myopic, as evidenced by their alleged partisanship throughout the London games. Surprisingly, not only did the IOC grant the British permission to enforce the rules, but they also gave them permission to write them. Under the leadership of Lord Desborough, the BOA compiled the first comprehensive international rule book for sport ever produced. Containing rules for over twenty forms of sport and translated into three different languages, the BOA’s codification efforts highlighted the nation’s pioneering role in the modernization 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. Theodore Andrea Cook recognized the importance of the new international code of rules, noting that if the BOA had achieved nothing else in 1908, “this result would alone have justified its labours.”

In spite of the BOA’s efforts to craft a universal consensus on rules, the IOC still lacked a clear-cut definition of amateurism. At the International Athletic Congress held in Brussels in 1905, IOC members resolved that an amateur:

Is a person who has never taken part in a professional race or at a meeting open to all comers, nor has raced for any form of monetary prize of for money, or for any part of money provided by the admission fees to the ground, or against professionals, and who has never at any period of his life been a professor or teacher for a salary of physical exercise.

The IOC acknowledged that this definition was not definitive, but hoped that it would assist national governing bodies of sport in determining their own amateur standards. For the 1908 London games, the IOC, in the absence of an all-encompassing regulatory definition, approved the various interpretations of amateurism upheld by England’s leading governing bodies of sport. As BOA chairman Lord Desborough explained: “The definition of an amateur is a delicate and complicated matter. A universal definition of an amateur, indeed, being at the present moment impracticable, a definition applicable to each sport has been drawn up, and fully set forth in the published regulations which deal with each of the competitions.”

This decision created a quandary, as twenty-three governing bodies published widely contrasting amateur definitions. For instance, in rowing, arguably the most socially divided of all British sports, the highly exclusive ARA enforced their prohibitive “mechanic’s clause,” which denied amateur status to any oarsman “who has ever been employed in or about boats or in manual labour for money or wages,” and “who is or has
been by trade or employment for wages a mechanic, artisan, or labourer, or engaged in any menial duty.” 

Contrastingly, in yachting, another distinctly aristocratic pastime, the Yacht Racing Association granted permission for professional crew members to compete under amateur captaincy. The complexities and peculiarities of amateurism dismiss contemporary beliefs that the advent of professionalism in the Olympic arena was a modern reality, ushered in by the retirement of IOC president Avery Brundage in 1972. Disparities in the interpretation of amateurism reveal not only the experimental and piecemeal development of the early international Olympic movement, but also its blatant aristocratic bias.

With The Hague session concluded, Britain’s Olympic chiefs turned their attentions back towards preparations in London. On July 31, 1907, Lord Desborough presided over a special ceremony to mark the setting of the first stanchion for the Shepherd’s Bush Stadium. The Duke of Argyll, the president of the Franco-British Exhibition, was in attendance, accompanied by Sir William Bull, Conservative MP for Chelsea, and Imre Kiralfy—the mastermind behind the forthcoming exhibition. Looking ahead to the completion of the new stadium, Kiralfy, a former business partner of the American impresario Phineas T. Barnum of the Barnum and Bailey Circus, boasted that it will be the “largest” and the “most complete sports ground in the world.”

Moving to justify the lavish new facilities at the BOA’s disposal, Lord Desborough rationalized that it is of “supreme importance that everything should be done to justify the position upon which we have prided ourselves both as sportsmen and as hosts.” With the first girder in place, the BOA, in cooperation with the authorities of the Regent Street Polytechnic (now the University of Westminster), established a “Reception Committee”
to oversee the lodging and transportation needs of the thousands of athletes, officials, and tourists who were due to descend on the British capital during the course of the games. Hundreds of booklets listing recommended hotels, boarding houses, and preferred modes of transportation were produced and sent out to all affiliated IOC member nations.\textsuperscript{273}

**Uniting the Kingdom**

As building work on the new Shepherd’s Bush Stadium continued to progress, the BOA found itself thrust into the middle of a political skirmish with representatives from the athletic authorities governing sport in Ireland and Scotland. As early as December 20, 1906, the BOA received letters from the honorary secretaries of both the Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA) and the Irish Amateur Rowing Association seeking a position for one of its members on the Council of the BOA.\textsuperscript{274} The BOA soon fielded a similar request from the Scottish branch of the AAA. Determined to remain a bastion of Anglocentrism Britain’s Olympic chiefs rebuffed all requests for Celtic representation, tersely responding “that it is unable, owing to the necessity of limiting its numbers, to ask them to appoint representatives.”\textsuperscript{275} The BOA demonstrated imprudent policy-making in this matter. After all, these were moderate, independent minded-bodies with unionist leanings; hardly the purveyors of strident nationalism such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). In reality, the BOA’s claims that they were confined by limited availability appeared a spurious excuse, especially since the Council of the BOA currently boasted twenty-three members, everyone one of them an Englishmen representing strictly English governing bodies of sport.
On February 14, 1907, Mr. David Scott-Duncan, honorary secretary of the Scottish Amateur Athletic Association (SAAA), reacted angrily to the BOA’s intransigence, threatening to withhold all Scottish support for the London games; a stance also shared by their respective Irish body. In an inflammatory dispatch, an irate Scott-Duncan forewarned the BOA that unless they altered their position, “the Olympic Games would simply be an English event, so far as Great Britain was concerned.”276 Failing to recognize the severity of Scott-Duncan’s threat, the BOA only made a halfhearted effort to allay Celtic animosities by issuing an apology to the SAAA, noting that they “extremely regretted that the Association should suppose that any slight was intended either to Scotland or the Association by the recent decision as to the constitution of the Council.” Refusing to completely succumb to Scottish pressure, the BOA reiterated their initial stance that Celtic representation was not feasible owing “to the necessity to limit the numbers of the Council.”277

Eager not inflame the sensitivities of the Celtic nations any further, the BOA eventually took a more conciliatory stance in an attempt to head-off threats of withdrawal or, if they should arise, appeals for separate representation. By the beginning of March, 1907, the BOA proposed a system of proportionate representation for the forthcoming London games: “While the British Isles would count as one country . . . the Associations representing the different portions of the Kingdom would be requested to arrange with each other the athletes who should be selected to represent the county in each branch of sport.”278 In effect, the BOA’s proposal guaranteed a far greater Celtic presence in London, while simultaneously curbing the predominance of English athletes within the British Olympic fold. The BOA’s attempts to ensure the representation of a unified
British Olympic team were bolstered by the introduction of a new regulatory definition for a “country” during the 1907 IOC session held at The Hague: “A ‘Country’ is any ‘territory having separate representation on the International Olympic Committee,’ or, where no such representation exists, ‘any territory under one and the same sovereign jurisdiction’.”

Under the new guidelines, any future Celtic aspirations for independent representation were completely squashed. As non-independent governed nations without their own representatives to the IOC, Ireland, Scotland and Wales were now “officially” subsumed into the Great Britain team.

Interestingly, the BOA applied the IOC’s new definition for the London games quite subjectively as evidenced by their successful attempts to obtain separate representation for Britain’s dominions, Australasia (Australia and New Zealand), Canada, and the incipient Union of South Africa. In the period leading up to the London games, the BOA actively rallied dominion participation. In the case of Canada, the BOA personally requested Canadian Governor-General Earl Grey to exert his influence in establishing a NOC and selecting an Olympic team. Grey passed on the responsibility to his secretary, John Hanbury-Williams, a decorated hero of the Boer War, who soon after founded the Canadian Olympic Committee and ensured that an eighty-four man Canadian squad competed in London, the first organized team in the nation’s history. Similarly, after mustering the support of the Honorable L. S. Jameson, the Prime Minister of Cape Colony, the BOA successfully ensured the establishment of the “South African General Olympic Committee” on January 3, 1908, and the subsequent participation of a fourteen-man South African Olympic team. Under the leadership of Leonard Alfred Cuff and Richard Coombes, Australasia had already established a long and intimate relationship
with the international Olympic movement at both the administrative and sporting level. Through aggressive lobbying, however, the BOA guaranteed antipodean independence in the eyes of the IOC, allowing Australasia to send a thirty-man team to compete in London.283 With the participation of Greater Britain thus guaranteed, the BOA moved to appease their Celtic neighbors even further by rescinding their initial ruling favoring English domination and granting representation on the Council to “bodies governing sports in Scotland, Ireland and Wales which were recognized by the corresponding governing bodies in England.” 284 This was a calculated move aimed at assuaging Celtic threats of a withdrawal while guaranteeing that only moderate or unionist governing bodies could attain representation on the Council. The BOA clearly prohibited politically-motivated nationalist groups such as the GAA under this new ruling.

By May 8, 1907, the appointments of David Scott-Duncan, representative of the SAAA, and Dr. Michael J. Bulger, representative of the IAAA, onto the Council ensured that the British Olympic movement no longer remained an exclusive English preserve.285 The BOA soon granted additional seats on the Council to James A. Blair (Scottish Cyclist’ Union), W. J. Leighton (Irish Amateur Swimming Association), and E. J. O’Reilly (Irish Cyclists’ Union). The BOA made an extra conciliatory gesture to their Irish colleagues by adopting the geographical designation “Great Britain and Ireland,” instead of the traditional sporting labels, “Great Britain” or the “United Kingdom.” Plans were also put in place to produce a badge containing in each quarter the respective emblems of the Home-Nations, the Rose (England), Shamrock (Ireland), Thistle (Scotland), and Prince of Wales Feathers (Wales), for use by British athletes during the
track and field portion of the Olympic program. \textsuperscript{286} The choice of a more representative emblem instead of the traditional unifying insignia of the Union Jack illuminates just how far Britain’s Olympic chiefs were now willing to go to placate their Celtic neighbors in an effort to foster a far greater shared sense of Britishness.

In the backdrop of strained relations between the Home-Nations, Britain’s most vocal Olympic proponent, Theodore Andrea Cook, called for an end to all political squabbling in the interest of achieving a “British” Olympic victory. “The United Kingdom must be content, for the time, to be mere geographical expressions; for it is only by the most sincere and enthusiastic union that we can hope to withstand the combined onset of the picked athletes of every other nation,” Cook pleaded. \textsuperscript{287} As a product of the English public school system, Cook was imbued with a Victorian and Edwardian “games ethic” that connected competitive amateur sport with national and imperial interests. \textsuperscript{288} Like his colleagues on the BOA, Cook embraced the idea that struggle and competition between nation-states resided at the core of Social Darwinism, the dominant intellectual paradigm of the age and the “secular reality” of the public schools, and reveled in Britain’s natural sporting superiority. \textsuperscript{289} Through his elitist and ethnocentric lenses, Cook boasted that “athletic traditions are in our blood, and athletic framework is constantly being bred into the best of our boys.” \textsuperscript{290} Nevertheless, he feared that this advantage was being significantly eroded by public apathy, governmental indifference and internal squabbling amongst the constituent parts of the British Isles. Overseas news reports from Finland, France, Sweden, and the United States chronicling those nations own Olympic preparations for London heightened Cook’s anxieties. \textsuperscript{291} Cognizant of the broader nationalistic importance attached to the Olympic Games, Cook
was determined to ensure an improved British performance in London, insisting that “It will . . . be a serious (I was about to say desperate) endeavour on our part to hold our own against all-comers. Cook warned that “it would be something of a disgrace if we did not come up to the high standard of efficiency expected of us by the rest of the world.”

“Irish athletes are ‘Not’ British”

Cook’s plea for reconciliation and collaboration failed to resonate amongst certain sections of the Irish public and media, who issued a renewed call for separate representation for its athletes. The political revolutionary and nationalist Roger Casement emerged as the leading advocate of a unified Irish Olympic team. In the build-up to the London games, Casement warned that it would be a “disgraceful exhibition of Irish disunion or subservience” if the nation’s athletic authorities could not unite in forming a distinctively Irish squad. “Let the Englishman, the Scotsman, and the Welshman stand each for himself and his own land, and let the Irishman enter himself in the name of and for the fame of Ireland,” Casement demanded. Calls for the creation of a unified Irish team betrayed not only an understanding of the long political rivalry that existed between the IAAA and the GAA, but also of the new regulatory standard introduced at the 1907 Hague session, limiting full athletic autonomy to territories represented directly by seats on the IOC. Still lacking a NOC of their own during this period, Irish athletes once again found themselves integrated into the “Great Britain and Ireland” team. Curiously, two notable exceptions to this policy popped up. In field hockey, the BOA granted Ireland permission to compete as a nation after their national Field Hockey Association rejected a proposal from their English counterparts to compete as a unified, Great Britain and
Ireland team. As further evidence of the BOA’s subjectivity and aristocratic bias, Ireland’s polo team garnered the go-ahead to compete as a separate entity—a move that whetted Irish appetites for full sporting independence.294

The BOA’s and IOC’s suppression of a distinct Irish identity caused the greatest uproar across the Atlantic. As the most dedicated Anglophobes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Irish-Americans led the struggle for Irish independence from British tyranny. Concentrated in America’s major urban areas, descendents of the Emerald Isle fought against the privations of urban living and native jingoism in order to uphold their dream of achieving Irish autonomy.295 The Gaelic-American expressed the ambulatory sentiment of Irish nationalism, condemning the inclusion of Celtic athletes into the Great Britain team as a shameful “English” attempt to protect its sporting reputation from further damage and humiliation: “England is going downhill in athletics and keeps up some semblance of vigor by classing Irishmen and Scotchmen as British.”296 The Irish-American took a similar stance, lamenting the injustice of lumping Irish athletes “with the rif-raff from England” in an effort to “swell the records of victories attributed to a nation which has no real claim to them.”297 Even the powerful Irish-American sports chief, James E. Sullivan, recently elevated to the presidency of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), expressed his disgust at the fact that Ireland has been forced to “hide its identity behind the geographical description of the United Kingdom.”298 Back on Irish soil, the Munster Express ensured its readers that despite the presence of Irish athletes in the Great Britain team, “England will never succeed in Anglicising the Gael.”299
Incensed by the absence of an independent Irish team the GAA, long a bulwark of Irish nationalism, went of the offensive issuing an official decree prohibiting Irish athletes from competing under the colors of the Union Jack unless Ireland received special recognition as a separate entity. M. F. Crowe, secretary of the Dublin-County Board of the GAA, outlined the details of the ban on the pages of the Irish nationalist newspaper *Sinn Féin*, the leading organ of the Home Rule movement:

The members of the GAA were not disposed to allow Ireland to be treated as an English shire in the athletic interests of England, and decided to take no part in the games. I may add that it was also decided to suspend such spiritless Irishmen as may be mean enough to abjure their nationality by competing under the conditions mentioned above.\(^{300}\)

The New York branch of *Sinn Féin* commended the GAA’s actions, warning that athletes who contravened the ruling would face the “severest condemnation of all Irish-Americans who believe in Ireland’s rights to separate nationhood and in the principles of *Sinn Féin.*”\(^{301}\) The *Gaelic-American* also supported the GAA’s ban on Irish athletes competing under the colors of the Union Jack. “If Irishmen would only keep out of the British army and navy the rulers of England would not only be upset, but every game that England is playing in every part of the world would also be upset and the end of the rotten Empire would be in sight,” the diaspora Irish-American weekly predicted.\(^{302}\) In reality, however, the GAA’s authority in athletic affairs had significantly diminished during this period. Despite the establishment of a separate Athletics Council in 1905 and a recent upsurge in the number of sponsored athletic meetings, the GAA experienced widespread dissatisfaction amongst its athletes who claimed that “they were not being properly catered for or their view heard.”\(^{303}\) Boasting no credible Olympic medal hopefuls, the GAA’s threat largely went unheeded, as evidenced by the large Irish
presence, totaling fifty-three athletes, in London.\textsuperscript{304} Nevertheless, Irish, or more specifically, Irish-American resentment towards England threatened to spill over once the London games got underway.

**An Olympic Appeal**

In the build-up to the London games, the BOA faced more pressing concerns than Ireland’s continued animosity towards a British sporting union. By the end of 1907, the nation’s Olympic chiefs began expressing concerns that the organization and management of the London games would be significantly hampered owing to the scarcity of funds at their disposal. Even though the organizing committee of the Franco-British Exhibition generously promised to cover construction and advertising expenses, the BOA still needed to raise a considerable sum to off-set the cost of publishing programs, regulations, and personal correspondences in several languages; producing gold, silver, and bronze Olympic medals; and organizing an extensive social calendar for athletes, officials, and governmental representatives. Unable to rely on the financial support of the British government, who maintained their historical non-interventionist stance towards international sport, the Finance Committee of the BOA took matters into their own hands by commissioning the publication of 30,000 copies of an “Olympic Appeal.”\textsuperscript{305} Aimed at high-ranking sportsmen, politicians, and personal friends of Lord Desborough, the BOA’s appeal circular called for urgent financial support in order to carry-out the Olympics “in a manner worthy of Great Britain”\textsuperscript{306}

Following the initial receipt of a small number of generous donations, the Finance Committee, led by its chairman Charles Newton-Robinson, a member of the British
fencing team at the 1906 Intermediate Games, began formulating schemes in order to carry the BOA across their projected £12,000 fundraising threshold. A number of imaginative proposals were considered, including a privileges scheme that would reward Olympic donors with incentives based upon the size of their beneficence. For donors pledging upwards of £5, the BOA would offer a commemorative medal and a ten shilling seat to the opening ceremony; for gifts of £5 to £10, donors would receive a commemorative medal, two tickets to the opening ceremony, and invitations to official banquets and receptions. For the highest donation bracket of £50 or more, the BOA offered a season ticket to the entire summer and winter Olympic program. Plans were also put in place to consult the various governing bodies of British sport about claiming a percentage of their future gate receipts. Unfortunately, despite the ambitious proposals subscriptions trickled in at an alarmingly slow rate, elevating fears that the highest echelons of British society remained fervently opposed to Coubertin’s Olympic idea. C. B. Fry, a renowned English cricketer, politician, diplomat and educator, captured the general aversion of high society towards the Olympic Games, when he remarked haughtily, “The reasonable function of the Olympic idea is to foster nationalism; as a means to cosmopolitan understanding it is of doubtful value.” Sir John Astley Cooper, the passionate imperialist and promulgator of a rival “Pan-Britannic” athletic festival, echoed Fry’s sentiment, dismissing the forthcoming London games as “nothing more nor less than a sideshow to the Franco-British Exhibition.” The humorous pages of Punch regularly captured these aristocratic sentiments.

On March 5, 1908, Lord Desborough decided to take more affirmative action by writing a desperate plea to The Times in an effort to stimulate interest in the BOA’s
Olympic Appeal. The BOA chairman called upon the British public to uphold the nation’s “reputation for hospitality” by subscribing generously towards the fund. A number of London based businesses such as Goldsmith’s Company and the Grocers’ Company, answered Lord Desborough’s call by renewing their support to Britain’s Olympic campaign. Even the French government, the primary sponsors of the Franco-British Exhibition, generously voted the sum of £680 towards the Olympic Games fund. In reality, the BOA’s organizational plans were solely reliant on the munificence afforded by a relatively small circle of private individuals and businesses. By the end of June, with the London games less than two weeks away and with only £2,840 received in donations, the BOA finally decided to cast their nets a lot wider by circulating an official nationwide appeal throughout the British press. Under the leadership of press baron Lord Northcliffe, a pioneer of popular journalism and a staunch nationalist, the Daily Mail emerged as the leading benefactor of the Olympic Games fund. Calling upon the wider British public to raise the outstanding £10,000, the popular daily tabloid demanded to know if Britain was going to give “a shabbier treatment to the world’s youth than little Greece gave it a year or two ago?” The Pall Mall Gazette warned its readers that “our national credit and the reputation of our country as the home and the cradle of sport are at stake.”

What followed over the next two weeks was unprecedented in the early history of the British Olympic movement. Driven by the marketing savvy of Lord Northcliffe, the Daily Mail collected funds from all-across Britain. The Prince of Wales, the Marquis of Anglesey, the Duke of Sutherland, and Lord Jersey were just a few of the more prominent members of British society who made substantial donations. Some of Britain’s
most prestigious sporting governing bodies and clubs such as the Football Association, the Corinthian Football Club and the Lawn Tennis Association, also came forward with their support. Classical actor, dancer, and choreographer, Maud Allan, best demonstrated the beneficence of the readers of the *Daily Mail* by donating £300, the total proceeds of a special matinee performance, to the Olympic Appeal. The BOA also received subscriptions from abroad. The American millionaire Cornelius Vanderbilt offered £500, a figure also matched by the Maharaja of Cooch Behar. The largest single individual contribution came from another foreigner. The self-proclaimed “strongest man in the world,” Prussian-born strongman and London-based entertainer Eugen Sandow generously donated £1,500. Remarkably, by July 9, 1908, the *Daily Mail* proudly announced that the BOA’s Olympic Appeal was now “over-subscribed” and urged the public not to send any further donations. During a Council meeting of the BOA, relieved members expressed a “hearty vote of thanks” to Lord Northcliffe for his generous intervention “in a case of great national emergency.”

Thanks to the spirited appeal issued by the *Daily Mail*, combined with Lord Desborough’s own personal fundraising endeavors, the BOA’s coffers overflowed with total donations of £15,851. The BOA’s Revenue Accounts reveal that a large proportion of the money was dedicated to administrative expenses such as salaries, printing, and stationary. They spent a further £2,200 on covering the costs of Olympic medals, badges, and diplomas. Following the historical precedent established at the 1906 Intermediate Games, the BOA also awarded supportive grants, totaling £2,231, to the various governing bodies of British sport. The BOA apportioned the most significant share of total donations to entertainment. Left with only a few days before the start of the
London games to make definitive arrangements, the BOA scheduled an extensive social calendar, including five separate banquets for Olympic competitors and officials to be held in the King’s Hall of the prestigious Holborn Restaurant; a banquet sponsored by His Majesty’s Government for sporting and diplomatic representatives in the Grafton Galleries; and drives and excursions to Hampton Court and numerous sightseeing destinations around London.³²² The British public had saved the BOA’s blushes, but whether such generosity was an indication of a fresh appetite for international Olympic competition or, rather, an attempt to safeguard the nation’s reputation for hospitality remained to be seen. Awaiting their first real Olympic experience, the 1908 London games would go a long way to solidifying British attitudes towards Pierre de Coubertin’s international Olympic revival. The Star confirmed: “The whole conception of the Olympic Games is so new and strange that we have not that we have not yet grasped its significance . . . . It is true that our experts and specialists in sport have thrown themselves into the organising work with ardour, but the people themselves have still to be educated.” ³²³

The First British Olympics

On May 14, 1908, the Franco-British Exhibition officially opened. Under leaden skies, the Prince of Wales was accompanied by over 123,000 spectators at the White City exhibition grounds to revel in the imaginary wonders of Indian style pavilions, lavish gardens, industrial and machinery halls, decorative art displays, native villages, and fairground amusements. With less than one month in which to prepare for the formal opening of the London games, Britain’s leading governing bodies of sport set out to
compose a formidable Olympic team. The Amateur Swimming Association planned a “mammoth” Olympic trial for June 6, 1908, while the Amateur Fencing Association scheduled a series of Olympic try-outs to be held at the salle d’armes of the Sword Club.324 In other sports, the AAA, in union with their representative bodies in Ireland and Scotland, scheduled an Olympic trial for May 30, 1908.325 Held in the newly constructed Shepherd’s Bush Stadium, the AAA trial ran through the complete Olympic program, with the exception of the marathon—a separate marathon trial had been held earlier, on May 1, 1908.326 Reflecting on the performances of British athletes during the AAA championship, Baily’s Magazine of Sport and Pastimes projected a resounding British victory in the forthcoming games, celebrating that both the “sprint” and “intermediate distances” will “go to England.”327 Lord Desborough proved equally confident, assuring the public that “we shall do much better than in previous Olympic Games.”328 Other observers were not quite so optimistic. Theodore Andrea Cook, a man more than familiar with the severity of Britain’s recent decline in international sport, tried to dampen unrealistic expectations: “It will not, I fear, be a victory for the United Kingdom, or even for the British Empire, for we have taught the rest of the world so long that our pupils are beginning to better their instructors,” Cook lamented.329 Taking a more buoyant stance, The Times called upon Britain’s athletes to show the rest of the world that “we have not lost our cunning.”330

Following an extensive series of Olympic try-outs, the BOA announced the selection of a staggering seven-hundred-and-thirty-six person (697 men and 39 women) Great Britain and Ireland team.331 With 2,023 athletes from twenty-three IOC member nations scheduled to compete in London, the bloated British team accounted for thirty-six
percent of the total competitors. The second largest Olympic squad was France, with two-
hundred-and-eight athletes. Three countries—Argentina, Iceland, and Switzerland—had
solo competitors. Despite Theodore Andrea Cook’s gloomy Olympic forecast, British
athletes seemed certain to enjoy a superior home advantage.  
Commenting on the
impressive roster of participating nations, the Evening Telegraph celebrated the
unprecedented cultural unifying power of the international Olympic movement. “As an
instrument of international civilization and peace, international contests ought never to be
underrated,” the Scottish daily tabloid asserted. During a speech given at an official
Olympic banquet, Lord Desborough cautioned that the humanistic mission of the
Olympics movement was still a work in progress. He called upon competitors and
officials to further the bonds of international harmony and mutual respect. “In the stress
of great contests that were to take place in the next few days” Desborough noted, “many
points must arise on which there would be strong difference of opinion . . . But as
sportsmen we must be willing to give as well as take.”  
Despite the BOA chairman’s
impassioned appeal, athletic harmony and international understanding gave way to a
heated, chauvinistic battle between the host nation Britain and their trans-Atlantic cousin,
the United States. As the American publication the World-To-Day sensationalized: “Not
since the blood spattering days of 1812 have England and America clashed in a more
desperate struggle for mastery.”
Chapter Three

The Battle of Shepherd’s Bush

On Monday July 13, 1908, the London games officially opened to great fanfare. A number of sporting events including polo, shooting, and tennis had been staged over two months prior to this date, but the opening ceremony signaled the start of the main portion of the summer program. Inside the impressive new Shepherd’s Bush Stadium a disappointingly sparse crowd of 30,000 spectators watched on as King Edward VII, accompanied by his wife Queen Alexandria and the royal children, officially declared the “Olympic Games of London open” beginning two weeks of competition and controversy.335

The London games opened amidst an intense Anglo-American rivalry. Recriminations between the two leading sporting nations began during the opening ceremony and “the firing didn’t die down until years after.”336 Upon arriving at the Olympic Stadium, the American team appeared visibly angered by the absence of the “Stars and Stripes” flying within the stadium, a feeling heightened by the fact that the flags of China and Japan, two teams not even competing in London, were flying in their apportioned places.337 Regardless of Lord Desborough’s claims of an administrative oversight, U.S. athletes and officials were not appeased, as American Olympic Committee (AOC) member Gustavus T. Kirby later lamented: “The carelessness was gross.”338 Frictions were further elevated, when American shot-putter Ralph Rose, a prominent member of the Irish-American Athletic Club (IAAC) despite holding no Irish ancestry, purposely refused to dip the American flag as an honorary gesture to King
Edward VII. Rose’s actions held a nationalistic connotation, a manifestation of the “Spirit of 1776” where the U.S. denounced British pro-hierarchal imperialism in favor of republican constitutionalism and egalitarianism. Rose’s refusal to honor the British King can also be viewed as a popular Anglophobic demonstration, a common Irish-American phenomenon at the time to disregard the “traditions of English royalty.”

Remarkably, this controversial expression of American exceptionalism failed to draw the attention of the British press, which ignored the incident altogether.

The London games quickly escalated into an open athletic battle between British and American athletes, officials and spectators. The tug-of-war preliminaries were the site of the next demonstration of Anglo-American squabbling. In a quarter-final match-up between the U.S. and Britain, represented by officers from the Liverpool police force, American team manager Matthew Haplin launched an immediate protest after British athletes easily overpowered the Americans in the first of three pulls. Haplin accused the British team of sporting spiked footwear, contravening the Olympic rule that: “No competitor shall wear prepared boots or shoes with any protecting nails, tips, springs at points, hollows, or projections of any kind.” The British rejected such an accusation, claiming that the Liverpool officers wore “ordinary ammunition boots.” Incensed by the ruling, the American team manager directed his athletes to complete the final two pulls without exerting any effort, granting the British team an effortless victory and leaving one British official to sarcastically announce through a megaphone, “the Americans retired because they have had enough of it.” The Liverpudlians eventually progressed to the finals, where they lost to another British team from the City of London police force.
Over the proceeding days of Olympic competition American officials launched a string of further protests against the British organizers, with complaints ranging from the system of drawing heats, the absence of a hole for the pole vault competition, and the open coaching of British athletes by officials.\(^{347}\) James Edward Sullivan, the son of an Irish-born construction worker and one of the most powerful men in American sports during this period, appeared at the forefront of all U.S. attacks. Sullivan, the head of the American team in London, was a highly polarizing figure within Olympic circles, revered by some for his many contributions to American athletics, but in most cases disliked for his unrefined and brash manner. Sullivan’s relationship with Coubertin was tumultuous at best, captured by the baron’s refusal to award him a coveted membership to the IOC.\(^{348}\) Even at the highest echelons of the AOC, William Milligan Sloane held serious reservations about Sullivan’s character, breed, and background.\(^{349}\)

As an ardent nationalist and supporter of Ireland’s long-struggle for Home Rule from the “enemy country,” Sullivan appeared to encourage, rather than restrain, British and American animosities. In a series of hysterical press reports, Sullivan accused the British of blatant partisanship. “They taunted us in every conceivable way. They ridiculed our flag . . . Their conduct was cruel, unsportsmanlike, and absolutely unfair,” Sullivan growled.\(^{350}\) The Irish-American firebrand was not alone in voicing charges of foul play. H. F. Porter, a member of the IAAC and the gold medal winner of the high-jump event in London, corroborated Sullivan’s accusations: “In nearly every event the boys had to compete not only against their competitors but against prejudiced judges. The judges may not have been intentionally unfair, but they could not control their feelings which were antagonistic to the Americans.”\(^{351}\)
Angered by American accusations of biased officiating, the British press rushed to defend the nation’s tarnished reputation. The *Daily Mail* forcefully denounced Sullivan’s charges as “frivolous or ill-founded,” a stance also maintained by BOA chairman Lord Desborough. Reaffirming the British devotion to fair play, the *Times* insisted that the judge’s would rather “give the benefit to a foreigner than to an Englishman.” Ultimately, American charges of biased British officiating hinged upon national interpretation, but clearly the complete monopoly that the hosts held over the games appeared a considerable source of contention. The expectation that the British, the most celebrated purveyors of “fair play,” would remain impartial in the midst of a desperate clamor for Olympic victory appeared somewhat naive.

**Ticketing Fiasco**

The heated British and American exchanges unfolded in front of only sparse British crowds, a turn-of-events that alarmed the BOA. Tickets for the Olympic Games formally went on sale nationwide on June 22, 1908, but confusion surrounding their distribution began nearly two months before this date. As early as April 30, the BOA, in accordance with exhibition authorities, commissioned a number of London based agents to begin selling tickets for the forthcoming games. Difficulties quickly became apparent as the BOA was inundated with reports from local residents, complaining that they were unable to purchase “day-tickets” until all “season-tickets” were sold. Aiming to clear-up the confusion, the Reverend Courcy Laffan wrote to the exhibition director, Imre Kiralfy, recommending the immediate establishment of a “Central Office” to deal exclusively with the sale of tickets for the London games. Laffan also called upon the
exhibition authorities to issue all day, weekly, and seasonal tickets simultaneously in order to avoid future difficulties and maximize sales. Over the forthcoming weeks, the BOA reported that tickets sales for the London games were alarmingly slow. With tickets ranging from £8, 8 shillings for a box to 1 shilling for any of the cheapest upper row seats, the exhibition authorities had clearly set the prices far too high, excluding a large portion of the British sporting public. In light of the Franco-British Exhibition’s huge capital outlay on the London games, Imre Kiralfy called upon the BOA to agree to a drastic reduction in prices in a push to stimulate ticket sales. The BOA, standing to receive one-fourth of all gross profits from the games, rejected Kiralfy’s proposal out of fear that it would “reduce their share of the profits of the admissions to the Stadium.”

Remarkably, the BOA, the body trusted with cultivating a national passion for the Olympics, appeared more motivated by profit than they were by filling the Shepherd’s Bush Stadium, heightening the Olympic spectacle and exposing the largest number of Britons to international Olympic competition.

Heavy downfalls during the opening week of the 1908 Olympics dampened Kiralfy’s hopes for improved ticket sales. The traditional watery staple of British weather marred the first seven days of the competition. As empty seats became an ominous feature throughout the early Olympic exchanges, with crowds averaging just over 19,000 for the first five days of competition, the British press launched an aggressive campaign for “Free Seats and Cheap Seats for the Olympic Games.” The Star led the charge, warning that “there is a grave danger that the whole festival may end in a depressing fiasco, and that our foreign guests may tell all over the world a dismal tale of British apathy and indifference.” The popular working-class, evening daily contended that the
current ticket prices were too expensive, and called on the BOA to offer free admission to
the poorest classes. Speaking of behalf of the thousands of working men’s clubs across
the country, Mr. G. Pragnell, chairman of the City of London Athletic Club, expressed a
similar sentiment, arguing that even the lowest admission fee of one shilling was “beyond
their means.” Lord Desborough moved to justify the BOA’s price structure by
emphasizing the historical significance of the games, a stance also shared by Sir Arthur
Conan Doyle, a special Olympic correspondent for the Daily Mail. By July 18, 1908,
with attendance figures still depressingly low, the seemingly avaricious BOA eventually
put profit motivations aside and agreed to slash ticket prices in half. The Star
celebrated the introduction of “popular prices,” and urged the British public to turn out in
the thousands to watch the London games for as little as a “sixpence.” Over the
remaining six days of competition, the British public slowly answered this call as stadium
attendances rose steadily with crowds averaging over 50,000 spectators; yet hardly an
impressive figure when you considered that London, the world’s largest city during this
period, boasted a population of over seven million residents.

For BOA chief Theodore Andrea Cook, slow ticket sales and sparse crowds
revealed the extent of the nation’s “true apathy” towards international Olympic
competition. While highlighting the problems caused by high ticket prices and inadequate
advertising, Cook blamed poor attendance figures on Britain’s long parochial attitude
towards foreign sporting events. “The truth is that the average Englishman would far
rather see Oxford beat Cambridge, or Surrey fighting Yorkshire . . . than any amount of
Czechoslovakians squaring up to a South American Republic,” Cook later
hypothesized. The nation’s rejection of the Fédération Internationale de Football
Association (FIFA), football’s world governing body, and their latter denigration of FIFA’s World Cup tournament, best illuminated this insular and haughty British attitude. Unlike their foreign rivals who embraced the Olympic Games, owing, in part, Cook alleged, to an absence of their own rich sporting heritage, the British sporting calendar was simply too full to add international Olympic competition. “We were offering only one more entertainment to a public already nearly sated with such shows,” the prominent BOA official reasoned. The Athletic News supported Cook’s assertion, noting that at least thirty-two separate sporting contests were being held concurrently over the Olympic fortnight. From the British perspective, the Olympic Games were considered a trivial and debased French festival of athleticism, inferior to the nation’s own prestigious sporting competitions such as tennis at Wimbledon, cricket at Lord’s, and rowing at Henley. A contributor to the London Opinion confirmed: “Personally, I do not care about the Olympic games in England, because no process of imagination can persuade me that they are like the original thing . . . . Neither do I believe that the larger world has much concern for pedestrians from France, Hungary, Finland, and Holland, and so on.” The British critic continued condescendingly, “a reproduction of the old Roman amphitheatre with a mock Nero sitting in judgment and real gladiators fighting real combats with real plebeians thrown as food to the lions would draw a finer ‘gate.”

The Anglo-American War

The British public did not need to look to a Roman gladiatorial contest for entertainment because a real battle unfolded before their very eyes inside the Shepherd’s Bush Stadium. The Anglo-American Olympic rivalry mirrored the battle being played out
between the two nations for global economic and cultural supremacy. As the world’s first
industrialized nation, the British enjoyed decades of commercial, economic, and military
hegemony—a Pax Britannica. Producing half the world’s iron and steel and accounting
for forty percent of world trade in manufactured goods, Britain boasted the highest GNP
in the world and its population enjoyed the highest average per capita income. Britain
was the world’s greatest creditor nation, the Pound Sterling was the world’s major
currency, and the nation’s finance houses stood at the center of a global system of
investments and payments. The advantages of an early start soon faded as the United
States, possessing abundant natural resources, booming population growth, technological
innovations and specialized management and working practices, caught up. Breaking
free from Britain’s economic orbit and encroaching directly on her commercial interests,
American goods saturated British home markets. Growing international competition set
off waves of panic amongst journalists who warned in lurid terms of an “American
invasion” and the impending “Americanization” of every aspect of British society.

While British capitalism remained innovative and resilient, thanks to strong performances
in textiles and shipping, American tycoons, such as John D. Rockefeller and Andrew
Carnegie, moved to monopolize the heavy industries of oil and steel and establish the
U.S. as the new “workshop of the world.”

Anglo-American rivalry proved endemic. Even in the Olympic arena the United
States threatened to eclipse Britain as the leader of modern sport. On July 23, 1908, a
controversial conclusion to the 400-meter final elevated British and American tensions to
a feverish pitch. Scotland’s Lieutenant Wyndham Halswelle, a silver medalist in the same
event at the 1906 Athens games, led the line in a four man race that also included the
American threesome of John B. Taylor of Cornell, William Robbins of Harvard University, and John C. Carpenter of the IAAC. Approaching the final turn in what was a fiercely competitive race, Carpenter reportedly impeded Halswelle’s advances before striding to victory. Arriving at the finish line, Carpenter learned that he had been disqualified. British officials claimed that the American had fouled Halswelle on the last turn, violating the Olympic rule that stated, “Any competitor willfully jostling, or running across, or obstructing another competitor so as to impede his progress shall forfeit his right to be in the competition.”

British officials then ordered a re-run for two days later. Incensed by the judge’s decision the remaining two American runners, Taylor and Robins, refused to compete, leaving Lieutenant Halswelle unopposed to claim victory—the only “walk-over” in Olympic track history.

The British ruling left American representatives infuriated. Gustavus T. Kirby scolded the judges, insisting that “If Halswelle was elbowed by Carpenter it was because he ran into the American.” James E. Sullivan, a man of Olympian pretensions who was never bashful about offering his opinion, vowed that Carpenter “simply out-ran Halswelle . . . Without the slightest hesitation I say that this race was deliberately taken away from us.” In a letter to the Sporting Life, Lieutenant Halswelle offered a personal account of the incident, revealing that “Carpenter’s elbow undoubtedly touched my chest, for as I moved on the outwards to pass him he did likewise, keeping his right arm in front of me . . . he bored me across two-thirds of the track, and entirely stopped my running.”

The high-brow British journal, Academy, corroborated the Scottish runner’s report, while castigating Carpenter for a “disgraceful exhibition of foul running.” Angered by repetitive scenes of American boorishness, Academy threatened that U.S. athletes should
be “debarred from taking part in athletic contests in this country, which are supposed to be reserved for gentlemen.”

On October 3, 1908, during a General Committee meeting of the AAA, members partially answered Academy’s call by voting to permanently suspend Carpenter from competing against British amateurs ever again. Like all of the incidents that marred the London games, British and American officials chronicled charges and counter-charges in minute detail in a series of pamphlets and reports published after the close of Olympic competition. From the BOA’s perspective, American complaints seemed facile since they knew the rules well in advance and expressed their willingness to adhere to them. Nations that agreed to “compete under our laws cannot in the same breath appeal to any local code differing from them,” Theodore Andrea Cook countered.

If the 400-meter final had not done enough to ensure British-American disharmony, then the furor that was to follow the conclusion of the marathon event certainly did. Held on July 24, 1908, the marathon brought the curtains down on the “summer” program of the London games. Under sunny London skies—a rare feature throughout the Olympic fortnight—Dorando Pietri, a renowned marathon runner from Mandrio, Italy, and former pastry cook, headed an international field of fifty-five athletes from sixteen nations—the largest international line-up for a marathon event at the time. The impressive roster included the Canadian runner, Tom Longboat, a member of the Onondaga tribe from Ontario, who had successfully evaded American attempts to have him disqualified on the grounds that he earned a small fortune from professional marathon racing. At 2:33 p.m., Lord Desborough fired the opening shot as the runners began the arduous 26-mile, 385-yard trek from the East Terrace of Windsor Castle to the
Shepherd’s Bush stadium—a distance that would eventually become the standard mark for Olympic and international marathon events.384

Leading entering the grandiloquent marble surroundings of the White City that marked the finish of the course, Dorando “appeared dazed and confused,” falling onto the soft cinder track in exhaustion. The Italian, who had been earlier forced to retire from the marathon race at the 1906 Intermediate games due to stomach cramps, rose to his feet and bravely tottered forward, then collapsed again. The exhausted Italian repeated that processes three more times. The passionate British crowd urged him to continue each time he fell. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle captured the melodramatic scenes from within the stadium. Writing in the popular British newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, Doyle reported, “Amid stooping figures and grasping bands I caught a glimpse of the haggard, yellow face, the glazed, expressionless eyes” of Dorando.385 “Bewildered as to how to proceed,” Jack Andrew, the chief supervisor of the race, and Dr. Daniel Bugler, the chief medical officer, assisted the Italian across the finish line in first place, just thirty-two seconds ahead of second place runner, Irish-American Johnny Hayes. As attendants whisked the incapacitated runner away on a stretcher, officials hoisted the Italian flag to signal Pietri’s victory.386

In the light of the succour offered to Pietri by British officials, American representatives lodged an immediate protest. AAU president James Sullivan denounced the interference of British officials, charging “Dorando should have been taken from the track and the tape left for Hayes, the actual winner, to break.” Sullivan asserted that “Hayes was the winner under all of the rules of racing. It was inhumane to drive that man around the track in the condition he was in.”387 Gustavus Kirby issued a similar
compliant. “Could Dorando have won?” Kirby asked. “Would he have won if left to himself? No, never; he would more likely have died.” As was the case with most contretemps during the London games, the British fired back at their American accusers. Theodore Andrea Cook countered American complaints of biased officiating. “They could not leave a man who, for all they knew, was dying, to perish on a cinder-track in the full-view of 80,000 people,” Cook retorted. In the midst of the Anglo-American recriminations that plagued the London games, British officials, following prolonged deliberation, reversed their initial decision. An official statement announced the disqualification of Pietri and the subsequent award of the gold medal to the twenty-two-year-old American champion Johnny Hayes. Despite a late Italian protest, South Africa’s English-born runner, Charles Hefferon, and John Forshaw from the U.S. were elevated to second and third place respectively.

Ranking as one of the most dramatic races in modern sport history, the 1908 Olympic marathon final established Dorando as a recognizable international athletic hero. Despite his disqualification, the enthralling climax forever canonized the plucky Italian in athletic folklore. His tragedy ensured his fame. Endeared to Britons’ for his display of courage and perseverance, Queen Alexandria presented Dorando with a special silver cup. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle remarked, “The Italian’s great performance can never be effaced from our records of sport, be the decision of the judges what they may.” American composer and lyricist Irving Berlin further enhanced the Italian’s popularity during the time period. Berlin’s first published song was entitled “Dorando.” In the coming months, the highly dramatic conclusion of the marathon event in London ignited a “marathon craze” that swept throughout North America. Lured by the offer of huge race
purses, Pietri, Hayes, and other leading marathoners such as Tom Longboat, made the switch from the amateur to the professional ranks—marking the first attempt made by early twentieth-century Olympians to transfer their athletic fame into monetary rewards. The peerless Italian would eventually seek revenge against his Olympic nemesis, Johnny Hayes, defeating the Irish-American on three separate occasions. 393

Back in London the fallout from the controversial climax to the Olympic marathon continued to rage. The American journal, *The Bookman*, questioned the integrity of British officials, musing, if it had been an “English runner who was following Dorando into the stadium at the end of the Marathon,” would the English officials have “rushed out on the track and carried the Italian over the finishing line?” 394 The British took a somewhat different view of the situation. *Academy* thought it unfortunate that an American came into the stadium behind Dorando, predicting, “If he had been an Englishman it may be safely assumed that he would have brought no objection against Dorando.” *Academy* claimed that by making a protest, Hayes passed on a righteous opportunity: “If he had been a sufficiently good sportsman to allow Dorando to retain the prize he would have been the most popular man in England, and he would have done much to wipe out the feeling of disgust which had been generated by the conduct of the American athletes and their rowdy supporters.” 395 From the British perspective, the Americans had transgressed the “spirit of sport” by refusing to let the “best man” win. As Henry J. Whigham, a renowned Scottish golfer and two-time U.S. Amateur Champion, explained, Britain’s sporting philosophy encompassed not only adhering to the actual rules of the game but also immutable social principles referred to as the “spirit of sport.” 396
The Battle of the Systems

Much of the ongoing Olympic controversy stemmed from radically different interpretations of how to “play the game.” Unlike the British who remained wedded to their dilettantish, unmethodical sporting methods, the Americans took a “business-like,” scientific approach to sport. American teams attempted to discover the most efficient, specialized methods for achieving Olympic victory. Efficiency, specialization, organization, precision, and strategy, the American apostle of scientific management Frederick Winslow Taylor’s watchwords for producing thriving American industries, were embraced as the guiding principles of American sport.397 The Los Angeles Times explained: “Training in England is a very hit or miss affair. America trains her athletes as she does her race horses. Our athletics are filled with technicalities and minute points of which British athletes do not dream.”398 Reflecting upon his experiences at two of the leading bastions of elite Anglo-American education, Harvard and Oxford, the acclaimed American author and dramatic critic John Corbin, reaffirmed that the differences in approach to sport on both sides of the Atlantic “are as clear as kinship.” Under the guidance of professional coaches, Corbin recounted how “training is a matter of loyal duty, almost religion” at Harvard, while at Oxford there was “no professional trainer” and “the only incentive to keep fit was a series of games given by the several colleges.”399 The presence of professional coaching in early American intercollegiate athletics reveals how a professional model was applied to all aspects of the endeavor, save direct cash payments to players.400

From the British perspective, the American model of “win, tie, or wrangle” violated the traditional British dictum of “sport for sports sake” by elevating victory to a
position of dangerous precedence. G. K. Chesterton, a renowned English author and Christian apologist, denounced the zeal in which Americans approached sport: “We must look into the American sportsman not for the light vices of vain or sensual loungers, but . . . for the sins of men inflamed by patriotism or religion. He can not shake hands after the fight . . . . The American is a bad sportsman because he is a good jingo.” 401 Even some American observers took umbrage at their nation’s seemingly insatiable lust for victory. G. Upton-Harvey, a regular contributor to the American Monthly Review of Reviewers, scolded American athletes for their “win at all cost” attitude. “If we can’t win we drop out of the game and join the ranks of spectators . . . . We do not play for the sake of playing, or for the betterment of our physical condition, we play to win, to come out first, to excel our neighbors,” Upton-Harvey grumbled. 402 Other onlookers in London, such as Sherlock Holmes’ creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, admired the Americans desire for victory and their “remarkable appearance of all-round excellence.” 403 As Conan Doyle’s comments indicate, the British appeared conflicted in trying to find the right balance between “playing the game” and achieving Olympic victory through athletic specialization. The Times pondered: “If we are to compete against the world and especially against such business-like athletes as the Americans, we must be business-like too . . . . But then the question arises whether it is worth while to make a business of sport.” 404

Casper Whitney, the long-serving president of the AOC, acknowledged the role that a “variance in custom” played in heightening Anglo-American animosities. In his position as editor of the popular American organ, Outing Magazine, Whitney emerged as one of the more objective observers in London. In the midst of verbal mud-slinging
Whitney dismissed claims that British officials behaved subjectively, preferring to label them “incompetent not dishonest,” and even apportioned blame on his nation’s own athletes for their failure to “take defeat gallantly.” The AOC president, an outspoken apostle of British style amateurism, further lectured his fellow countrymen for “trying to bulldoze umpires and judges” and “sulking” when an unfavorable decision went against them. In a private correspondence to Lord Desborough, Whitney moved to reconcile the warring factions even further by praising the BOA chairman for his “individual effort” and “unswerving sportsmanship” and forcefully rebuking the “highly colored and sensational newspaper stories” that had been making their way back and forth across the Atlantic. “We have here in America the same fault-finding, suspicious and bickering classes that you have in England,” the AOC president conceded.

Interestingly, Whitney also revealed to Lord Desborough a surreptitious plot to reorganize the IOC, an “impracticable” and “perfectly ridiculous organization,” under American and British control. “It is idiotic that England and America, who supply seven-eighths of the athletes of the world, should be at the pleasure of such a foolish organization as this present International Committee,” Whitney contented. The AOC president also expressed a desire for Lord Desborough to replace Pierre de Coubertin, “a well-meaning, fussy, and incompetent little Frenchman,” as the leader of the new organization. Whether or not Lord Desborough supported Whitney’s proposed coup is unknown, but his close friendship with Coubertin would have likely prevented any personal involvement. Either way, Whitney’s proposition marked another in a long series of American attempts, dating as far back to their support for a permanent Greek Olympic Games in 1896, to wrestle control of the IOC from the baron’s clutches.
weary of “American Ambitions,” sought to solidify his own position as president of the IOC by publishing a stinging diatribe against the U.S. efforts on the pages of Révue Olympique.409

“John Bull and His True Colors”

Despite Casper Whitney’s appeal for reconciliation, the bitter scenes of Anglo-American squabbling sparked a torrent of criticism within the Irish-American press. Unsurprisingly, the Gaelic-American carried the most caustic anti-English commentary of the London games. In a series of inflammatory articles, the popular Irish-American weekly perceived “the utter disregard for the rights, interest and feelings of others” and the “violations of the rules of ordinary fair play” as John Bull showing “His True Colors.” “Where ‘British interests’ are concerned, either in politics, religion or sport, John Bull knows no law but the intense selfishness and inordinate opinion of his own importance,” the Gaelic-American lambasted.410 Daniel F. Cohalan, a prominent member of the IAAC and an American representative in London, expressed an equally combative tone, accusing the BOA of plotting to steal Olympic victory from the Americans: “The English had this all framed up ahead of time. Our team hasn’t any chance; it never did have any chance . . . . It’s quite typical of the English, who are always talking about fair play, that they really don’t know the meaning of the word.”411 The Irish-American Advocate also condemned the “poor sportsmanship” shown by the English hosts,412 a stance further delineated by one of the most acclaimed Irish-American athletes, James B. Connolly, the first modern Olympic champion for his 1896 victory in the triple jump.413
Amongst the barrage of Irish-American anti-English condemnations, William Milligan Sloane, a long-serving U. S. representative to the IOC and the founder of the AOC, offered a countervailing interpretation. In a private correspondence to Pierre de Coubertin, Sloane, a prominent Columbia University history professor and noted Anglophile, identified Irish nationalism as the root cause behind the controversies that unfolded within the Shepherd’s Bush Stadium. “It’s jealousy of the Irish, whether native born or of Irish descent” Sloane lamented, “We have to make the best of their bitterness towards the English.” Sloane reassured Coubertin that efforts were being made to bring “our adopted fellow citizens to clearer and clearer comprehension of what their new allegiance means,” but cautioned that “we make very slow progress in eradicating ideas they have brought from their old homes.” When placed within the backdrop of Ireland’s desperate struggle for political emancipation from Britain, the well established pattern of outspoken support for the creation of an independent Irish Olympic team, and the staunch anti-English posturing of James Sullivan, Sloane’s belief that Irish-American nationalism stoked the flames of Anglo-American discord gains extra credence, especially when one considers “that the pick of American athletes” were “of Irish stock.”

Martin Sheridan, a native of County Mayo, Ireland, and a double-Olympic gold-medalist in London, captured the virulent anti-English sentiments of some Irish-American athletes. In a series of candid interviews, Sheridan, a prominent member of the New York branch of *Sinn Féin*, openly expressed both his support in favor of Irish Home-Rule—considering military force a more viable means for achieving independence than parliamentarianism—and his opposition to more cordial British and American
international relations. “There can be no hands across the sea, nor a union of hearts between England and the United States—not as long as we can prevent it: and tell your people here in Ireland that we can prevent it and are preventing it,” Sheridan reassured trenchantly.\textsuperscript{417} Sheridan, the most successful Irish-born Olympian of all–time—with his six medals in the throws and three in the standing jumps—also turned his attention to “shoneens” (Anglophiles) such as Con Leahy and Denis Horgan, who defied the GAA ban and competed under the colors of the Union Jack: “Why, we Irishmen in the States cannot understand how it is that any Irishman should wear 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.”\textsuperscript{418}

\textbf{A “Special” Relationship}

Fueled by Irish-American nationalism, biased British officiating, competing sporting ideologies, sensationalist reporting, and heated jingoistic publications, such as Thomas R. Burlford’s \textit{American Hatred and British Folly}, British and American Olympic squabbling drew the attention of political figures at the highest levels of diplomacy.\textsuperscript{419} On August 20, 1908, in a private letter to the U.S. ambassador to Great Britain Whitelaw Reid, President Theodore Roosevelt waded into the fray, admitting that the London games served as an unwelcome menace to Anglo-American harmony. President Roosevelt, a champion of the strenuous life and a keen sportsman, even went as far as to question the wisdom of future international athletic competitions. “I do not believe in these international matches . . . . Where the feeling is so intense it is almost impossible that there should not be misunderstandings,” the President asserted.\textsuperscript{420} Ambassador Reid
echoed his President’s sentiments, admitting that the controversial scenes dealt a debilitating blow to British and American international relations. “There has been bitterness enough developed in a day over these races to come near to counterbalancing the diplomacy of years,” Reid bemoaned.\footnote{421}

President Roosevelt’s involvement in the Olympic controversy would become even more pronounced following the receipt of a pointed letter, dated September 8, 1908, from Theodore Andrea Cook. Writing to Roosevelt, the honorary president of the AOC, Cook offered his own personal insight into the Anglo-American Olympic debate. Cook singled out James Sullivan for particularly sharp condemnation. He warned that if “some of the incidents that occurred in our games are not forgotten, is it not likely that American athletes will be welcomed again on English tracks.”\footnote{422} Incensed by the “offensiveness” of Cook’s letter, an irate Roosevelt launched a scathing counterattack, arguing that “your evident ignorance . . . if shared by your colleagues who had charge of the Olympic Games, goes far to explain much of the trouble that occurred.” Roosevelt took time to dismiss a proposed British ban on American athletes, assuring Cook that he would “protest in any event against them going.” With his nationalism evidently aroused, the American President proceeded to submit his own personal analysis of the 400-meter and marathon incidents, condemning the “gravely reprehensible conduct” of the British judges on both occasions.\footnote{423} Roosevelt’s return letter to Cook signaled the elevation of what was essentially a sporting matter into the political realm.

Remarkably, an impassioned Cook failed to back-down from the U.S. president’s fusillade. On November 2, 1908, the prominent British journalist and author of the \textit{Official Report} of the London games wrote to Roosevelt again, criticizing the president
for his failure to denounce the successive waves of false American slanders against the BOA: “Your letter . . . convinces me that if, from its honorary president downwards, the American Olympic Committee still see no reason to disavow the public utterances of three of its members (Sullivan, Kirby, and McCabe)—if, from the President of the United States down to the million unknown readers of the papers, the American people still believe these misrepresentations—then, it is time to speak out on our side.”

Determined to defend the sullied name of English “fair play,” Cook submitted the “first rough proofs” of a sixty-page pamphlet titled, “The Olympic Games of 1908 in London: A Reply to Certain Criticisms Made by Some of the American Officials,” to Roosevelt in which he offered an exhaustive defense against the “storm of obloquy and abuse” emanating from the United States. In the coming weeks Roosevelt, fearful of the potential diplomatic fallout if his original letter ever became public, moved to defuse the situation and extricate himself from any future involvement in the controversy. In a far more composed response, the president stressed that he had long “striven for a better sympathy and understanding between the United States and Great Britain,” and thus, urged Cook not to draw to him any further into the matter “in any shape or way.”

Roosevelt even went a step further, penning a conciliatory letter to James Bryce, the British ambassador to the United States, in an effort to finally lay the argument to rest.

Roosevelt confessed to Bryce:

I thoroughly believe in athletics, but it is absurd to attach to them such portentous importance as would warrant the interference of the governments of the two countries to settle whether an American fouled an Englishman . . . . Not the slightest good can come . . . from what would in any event be the rather absurd course of getting the two governments embroiled in the effort to nicely apportion the rights and wrongs of various contests . . . . Time and silence are the only remedies.
Placed within the broader context of early twentieth-century Anglo-American relations, the 1908 Olympic Games provide support to revisionist historiography that downplays the extent of an early twentieth century “rapprochement” between Great Britain and the United States.\(^{429}\) Pointing to a fierce cultural and economic rivalry, a decline in beliefs in Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, and the wide prevalence of Anglophobic sentiments, long perpetuated by Irish-Americans, Populists, Midwesterners, and rank and file Democrats, revisionist scholars maintain that it took until the Second World War for a “special relationship” to develop between Great Britain and the United States.\(^{430}\) From this perspective, the 1908 Olympic Games should be viewed analogously to a host of other international incidents that stymied the development of more cordial British-American relations during this period. The Venezuela Boundary dispute (1895-96), the British-Boer War (1899-1902), the Alaskan Boundary Dispute (1903), and the Swettenham Incident (1907) accentuated Anglo-American animosities and strained diplomatic ties. Even though the London games failed to produce the serious governmental consequences engendered by their other diplomatic confrontations, the transcendent power and universal appeal of sport ensured that the events within the Shepherd’s Bush Stadium had a substantial influence upon popular opinion on both sides of the Atlantic. Newspaper headlines castigating British “unsportsmanship” and American “rowdiness” reinforced negative national stereotypes and roused historical grievances. The American AAU’s decision to break off sporting relations with the English AAA, a ruling that was “officially” upheld until 1922, as well as King Edward VII’s refusal to preside over the official award ceremony at the conclusion of the London games owing to the “odious” behavior of the American team illuminates just how
strained Anglo-American relations had become—a situation not aided by the sight of American athletes, spurred on by the ever provocative influence of James Sullivan, parading a paste-board lion, emblematic of Great Britain around on a leash upon their arrival back in New York City.431

A British Olympic Victory?

On October 31, 1908, slightly more than six months after they began in April, the curtain finally came down on the London games. In the midst of ongoing British and American tensions, the “winter” portion of the 1908 Olympics culminated with an English victory over Ireland in the final of the field hockey competition. When the press tabulated the final medal standings, Great Britain and Ireland were crowned Olympic champions. In total, British and Irish athletes claimed 56 golds, 51 slivers, and 39 bronzes, the largest medal haul in British Olympic history. The United States finished as Britain’s nearest challenger, winning forty-six medals. A number of stellar British and Irish performers stood out from the crowd. In the swimming events, Henry Taylor continued his fine form from the 1906 Intermediate Games, storming to three gold medals in the 400-meter, 1,500-meter and 4x200 meter relay freestyle events. In cycling, Wigan-born Benjamin Jones proved to be Britain’s most successful rider of the games, clinching two gold medals in the 5,000 meters and team pursuit events, and one silver medal in the 20,000 meters endurance race. In tennis, forty-eight year old Major Josiah George Ritchie, a two-time Wimbledon doubles champion, won a medal of each color in the men’s singles, and men’s doubles indoors and outdoors events. On the track, Brighton police offer George Larner secured victory in both the 3,500-meter and 10-mile walking
events, despite only taking up competitive walking in 1903. Britain’s women also led the line, thanks to the gold and bronze medal performances of Florence “Madge” Syers in the singles and pairs figure skating events.432

At first glance, British and Irish athletes appeared to have achieved a resounding Olympic victory, but when examined more closely the medal standings are clearly not the objective statement of achievement they first appear to be. At the 1908 London games, the British and Irish team accounted for 736 of the 2,023 total competitors. Given the sizable home-advantage, British athletes provided the vast majority of participants in virtually every single event. In archery, 41 out of the 57 competitors were British, as were 32 out of the 42 boxers, 9 out of the 11 Jeu de Paume (Royal tennis) players, 13 out of the 14 motorboat racers, and 40 out of 64 sailors. In field hockey, 4 of the 6 teams were British, as were 3 of the 5 teams in the tug-of-war. Polo, racquets, heavyweight boxing, B and C class motorboat races, 7 and 12-meter class yacht races, and the notorious 400-meter finals were strictly all-British affairs. In lacrosse and rugby union Britain clinched silver medals in one-game, automatic finals behind Canada and Australia. Without trying to diminish the admirable performances of British and Irish athletes in London, their one-hundred-and-forty-six medal haul appears to have been significantly inflated—providing an inaccurate yard stick by which future British Olympic performances were measured and deemed grossly inadequate.433

Despite the flood of Olympic victories, the British media felt somewhat despondent by the nation’s performances in the track and field events, the centerpiece of the Olympic program. Britain’s athletes finished in a disappointing second-place in the track and field standings behind the thirty-four medal feat of the U. S. squad. The Times
affirmed the nation’s sense of inferiority when it observed that “our men were as children besides the athletes of the United States.” The traditionalist daily newspaper continued: “We of the United Kingdom have learnt that in speed and strength we are far behind the Americans.”\(^4\) Reflecting on the British performance, the World urged the nation to abandon their increasingly antiquated methods in favor of the American model of “harder, more consistent, and properly controlled training.”\(^5\) That same position had been repeatedly aired during the course of the games by the Daily Mail.\(^6\) Even the BOA cited the need for greater athletic specialization, conceding that “in spite of the huge total of points which we scored, with the assistance of being the Home Country, our want of organization . . . was no less apparent.”\(^7\) British sport was not hermetically sealed but permeable to varying degrees of foreign influence. The sight of American Olympians sweeping the medal counts in track and field revived the debate following the 1906 Intermediate games in Athens concerning the need for greater efficiency and organization. As the Sportsman revealed, specialization appeared the key ingredient to achieving Olympic success: “Victory goes, and must go, to the nation which sends the most carefully picked and completely organized team.”\(^8\)

American press reports celebrating the decline of British sporting prowess renewed calls for a less conservative approach to sport. In a typically disparaging attack, the Gaelic-American translated the results of the London games into proof that “England is no longer an athletic country.” The diaspora Irish weekly mocked: “The degeneracy which first showed itself in the aristocracy has made marked progress among the lower ranks of the people . . . . . Her army, once composed of stalwart men, is now a laughing stock, largely composed of physical weaklings, and her athletes have to be borrowed
from Ireland and the Colonies.”\textsuperscript{439} The popular American humorist Peter Finely Dunne poured further scorn on the myth of British athletic supremacy. With the use of his fictional Irish-American prototypes, Mr. Dooley and barkeep Mr. Hennessy, Dunne satirized Britain’s effete band of athletes for their victories in “th’ tea-drinkin’ contest,” and “th’ stand-up while th’ Band plays Gawd Save th’ King” events. \textsuperscript{440} From the American perspective the London games served as a blazing portent of imperial decline, an ominous inversion of the old monopolistic order. The athletic standings indicated that Britain, an old-world decadent power boasting an antiquated athletic system, teetered on the brink of decline, ready to be eclipsed by a younger, more efficient and more specialized cousin.\textsuperscript{441}

The British hit back at American claims. Academy poured scorn on those “who on the smallest pretext bursts forth into dismal wailings about the degeneracy of the manhood of this country.”\textsuperscript{442} Blackwood’s, another high-brow British periodical, took aim at the American notion that international sporting success served as an accurate barometer of national well-being.\textsuperscript{443} Attempts to dismiss the connection between sport and national prowess betrayed the position that such a linkage held in both popular and intellectual discourse. As the Daily Mail acknowledged, “the Olympic Games were designed to test and did fairly test, the physical capacity of the civilized people.”\textsuperscript{444} Evidently, Britain’s Olympic leaders stood at a difficult crossroad. Would the nation that had long preached that her Empire had been won on the playing fields of Eton continue to remain wedded to their increasingly archaic methods while foreign rivals stole the laurels of victory? Or would the Conservative dominated BOA, comprised of men firmly entrenched in a public school “games ethic” that viewed sport as a test of courage,
strength and vitality, jettison the conservative Victorian restraints of amateurism and adopt a more progressive system of athletic reform in their quest to preserve British sporting hegemony?

“War minus the Shooting?”

During an official banquet to mark the conclusion of the 1908 Olympics, Britain’s most venerable Olympic apostle, the Reverend Courcy Laffan, waxed lyrical about the humanistic power of the international Olympic movement. Overlooking the bitter scenes of Anglo-American wrangling, the BOA’s honorary secretary heralded the London games as an example of the “truest chivalry, and the drawing together of all nations of the earth in the bonds of peace and mutual amity.” Laffan’s conviction that the Olympic Games served as source of inspirational internationalism, free from political interference, can be traced back to Pierre de Coubertin. Coinciding with the birth of other leading fin de siècle “idealistic” international movements such as the Red Cross (1863), and the Esperanto movement (1887), the uninhibited idealist Coubertin envisioned the Olympic Games as a universal platform for promoting pacifism and healthy democracy, a counterforce to the virulent strains of European nationalism and a modern utopian spin on the ancient Greek Olympic truce (Ekecheria). Currently boasting two-hundred-and-five member nations, thirteen more than the United Nations (U.N.), Coubertin’s Olympic Games would eventually grow to become an unprecedented culturally unifying force.

Paradoxically, the Olympics, similar to all international sporting events between nation-states, are also occasions for competitive national self-assertion. Although the Olympic Charter proclaims that the games are contests between individuals, not nations,
the IOC created an institutional structure based on national representation, a decision that opened the door to frequent displays of rabid nationalism. The Olympic Games provide a viable platform for inculcating national feelings and fostering an oppositional “us” against “them” mentality. National anthems, colors and flags are displayed as cultural artifacts to reinforce similarities and accentuate differences. Within the Olympic arena athletes become primary expressions of their “imagined communities,” a tangible representation of the nation incarnate. George Orwell, one the most celebrated English novelists of the twentieth century, in 1945 cynically denounced international sport, especially the Olympics, as “war minus the shooting.” “International sporting contests lead to orgies of hatred . . . . You play to win . . . and . . . at the international level sport is frankly mimic warfare,” Orwell thundered.

Orwell’s assertion that international sport is a source of harm rather than good is highly debatable, but clearly, in major events such as the Olympics, an irreconcilable tension exists between the forces of internationalism and nationalism. As the London games forcibly demonstrated, the IOC’s mantra of promoting international goodwill and heightening global stability through friendly competition was counterbalanced by an impassioned British and American desire to demonstrate their national sporting superiority. In reality, when the two leading economic, cultural and sporting powers, boasting competing interpretations of how to “play the game,” came face to face in the largest international sporting gathering of the time, nationalistic tempers easily became frayed. The London games represented more than a symbolic pseudo-struggle, but a vehicle for bringing British and American tensions—in all of their manifestations—abruptly to the surface. Even Coubertin was forced to concede the increasingly
chauvinistic tone of international Olympic competition, lamenting that both Britain and America “showed so much keenness and determination to win that one might have thought that all their historic rivalries had been roused and that their national honor was definitely at stake.”

For the British public, the scenes of nationalistic squabbling and bitter recriminations went a long way to shaping and solidifying their attitudes towards Coubertin’s international Olympic revival. In light of the disappointingly low attendance figures throughout the games, the vast majority of the British public relied on press reports in order to form an opinion. From the perspective of the British press, which strongly condemned the controversial scenes that unfolded within the Shepherd’s Bush Stadium, the 1908 Olympics undercut notions of “true sportsmanship” and tarnished Britain’s amateur ideal by fostering international disharmony rather than promoting the “spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play” espoused by the Olympic Charter. The sight of America’s team of highly specialized athletes reaffirmed the public’s suspicions that the Olympic Games were a modern French invention fronting as a purveyor of Britain’s coveted amateur sporting ideal. Ultimately, the London games soured the nation’s attitude towards the Olympics and laid the foundations for future decades of unwavering British antipathy. Writing in 1926, Brigadier General Reginald J. Kentish, a future British member to the IOC, confirmed this truism, blaming “what happened at the White City as far back as 1908” as the principal motive behind the current state of British “indifference” and “opposition” to the Olympic Games.

The bitter controversy and fallout from the London games should not diminish the impressive organizational role played by the BOA. With less than half the time that host
nations generally have to prepare, Britain’s Olympic leaders, operating without
governmental financial assistance, staged the largest and most successful Olympics up to
that time. After the debacles of Paris and St. Louis, the London games went a long way to
resurrecting Coubertin’s stuttering “international” Olympic movement, as well as
safeguarding it against American and Greek advances. A repeat failure in London would
have likely dealt a fatal blow to the IOC and opened the door to potential usurpers.
Instead, Coubertin and the Olympic Games lived to fight another day. During the 1909
IOC session held in Berlin, delegates elected Stockholm as the host city of the next
edition of the Olympic spectacle in 1912.457 Looking ahead to the Stockholm games, the
weary BOA turned their immediate attentions towards defending Britain’s Olympic
crown in the Swedish capital city.
Chapter Four

“A Tale of National Disaster”

As wrangling between British and American athletic officials gradually began to subside, the BOA turned their attentions firmly towards the 1912 Olympic Games. In an effort to expand their powerbase and influence, the BOA co-opted a number of high profile aristocrats as honorary life members. The Duke of Argyll, the Honorary President of the Franco-British Exhibition, and the Duke of Westminster, a participant in the motorboat event at the 1908 London games, headed a list of twenty-two new BOA delegates that read like a role call to the House of Lords. In practice, men like Argyll and Westminster were mere figureheads, providing a sense of legitimacy to a movement viewed suspiciously and indifferently by the British sporting public. The BOA further strengthened their position within the broader international Olympic movement following the appointment of Theodore Andrea Cook as the third British representative to the IOC, filling the vacant position created by the sudden passing of Sir Howard Vincent. Vincent, a long-serving British representative to the IOC and one of the founders of the BOA, died suddenly of heart failure in his home on April 7, 1908, in the run-up to the London games.

Cook enjoyed a relatively brief and tumultuous administrative career (1909-1915) within the framework of the international Olympic movement. Never bashful about expressing his opinion, the former Oxford rowing blue regularly incurred the wrath of Coubertin, who latter came to describe him as an “odious journalist.” On the pages of his numerous publications and in private correspondences, Cook railed against the
undemocratic, secretive club ethos of the IOC and their refusal to publish and disseminate committee minutes. When not highlighting the perceived fallacies of the IOC, Cook made many important administrative contributions, including an attempt to craft a definitive definition for amateurism. Calls for a universal consensus on the amateur issue gained extra momentum in the wake of the London games. Based upon evidence gathered from across the globe, the British weekly the *Sporting Life* compiled a voluminous report on the issue, which they turned over to the IOC for further consideration. The strong British push to impose a more stringent and encompassing amateur definition was not surprising, particularly following the flood of negative media reports condemning the presence of foreign “shamateurs” competing in London.

Coubertin found the Anglo-American fascination with amateurism “childish.” The baron wondered, “Why disqualify an amateur athlete because he had competed with a professional, because he had taken part in events open to all comers, or because he was a sports instructor.” Uninterested in the *Sporting Life*’s findings, the IOC president forwarded the one-hundred-and-fifty file document to Baron Bertier de Sauvigny, a respected French representative to the IOC, who, following the 1909 IOC session held in Berlin, commissioned the creation of a three man committee, comprising Cook, American William Milligan Sloane and Hungarian Jules de Musza, to investigate the issue further. Based upon the results of a detailed questionnaire sent out to all officially sanctioned NOCs, Cook reported “that a universal definition of amateurism for all sports is today impossible.” The British IOC member acknowledged the difficulties of trying to create an accord between national and international governing bodies that each adhered to widely contrasting interpretations. By this point Coubertin, who had lost even more
interest in the matter, proposed a seemingly futile solution: an “oath” to be sworn by athletes as a remedy against the lies and hypocrisy of shamateurism—a concept the Reverend Courcy Laffan believed “will create the impression that we are a body out of touch with the views and feelings of the athletic world.” In the absence of international sporting federations, the NOCs would once again be charged with the responsibility of ensuring the amateur status of their own respective athletes at the 1912 Stockholm games.

**Preparing for Failure**

While a conclusive, or, at least, coherent definition of amateurism remained in abeyance for future discussion, the BOA began making preliminary arrangements for Stockholm. A conscious effort to avoid the organizational pitfalls that marred their last overseas excursion to the 1906 Intermediate Games in Athens emerged as a discernible feature of the BOA’s early preparations. Council members proposed taking a direct sea link to Stockholm, a more efficient method than the seemingly interminable network of trains and boats that carried British athletes to the Greek capital, as well as guaranteeing the arrival of the British team fifteen days prior to the commencement of Olympic competition “to enable them to become to a certain extent acclimatized.”

Hoping to generate the same level of success as Lord Northcliffe’s appeal for funds, the BOA resolved that a similar appeal for public subscriptions should be launched to help defray the cost of training, transporting and housing a British team in Stockholm.

By November 28, 1911, a dejected Reverend Courcy Laffan reported to his fellow Council members that a preliminary appeal aimed at gauging the public’s receptiveness to Britain’s participation in Stockholm had only drawn in a meager £345. Based upon
Laffan’s bleak financial report, Council members wisely voted to abandon plans for a nationwide appeal. Early projections clearly did “not indicate any probability of a large response from the general public.” With less than £5,500 in their coffers, the remnants of revenue generated from ticket sales at the London games, the BOA were forced to expend nearly all of their financial resources, projected at £4,500, in covering the costs of Britain’s Olympic participation. This proved a risky strategy, since the BOA would only hold a little over £900 in reserve to carry out future administrative operations.

To the BOA’s credit they did search for funding through alternative avenues. Since they considered a public appeal out of the question, Britain’s Olympic leaders sent out 17,000 circulars to athletic clubs and businesses offering membership to the BOA. As a further testament to the nation’s staunch opposition to the Olympics, these circulars only brought in thirty-four subscribers and three lifetime members. Britain’s Conservative Olympic chiefs also solicited the British government for financial patronage, a noticeable irony given that the Tories were traditionally the party of small governmental and limited state intervention. George S. Robertson, a former British representative at the inaugural Athens games and the BOA’s newly appointed Legal Advisor, approached Charles Masterman, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, to ascertain whether the government would be willing to subsidize Britain’s participation in Stockholm. Reaffirming the government’s historical non-interventionist position, Masterman counseled that the BOA should “not hold out any hope of a grant from public funds towards the expenses of the British team.” The bitter scenes of Anglo-American wrangling at the 1908 London games and the high-profile involvement of President
Theodore Roosevelt heightened the government’s suspicions that the Olympic Games were a purveyor of international discord.

For the first time since the establishment of the BOA in 1905, Council members entertained the possibility of “dropping out of the Olympic Games” entirely after Stockholm. Devoid of public and governmental financial support, Britain’s Olympic leaders could envision no other way of generating sufficient funds to carry out their operations. As a BOA minute reasoned, “A sum of approximately £900 . . . will probably suffice to carry on the office organization for the next four years, or until the Olympic Games of 1916, but will leave no funds available for subsidizing schemes of training or for the transport and accommodation of competitors in 1916.” The failure of Lord Desborough and his fellow aristocratic peers on the BOA to incite public and governmental munificence offers further proof that the Olympic Games remained firmly on the periphery of British sporting interests.

For the Stockholm games, the BOA was forced to drastically curtail their organizational ambitions. Monetary grants to help assist the various governing bodies of sport were significantly reduced, while the BOA even voted not to release any funds until after the conclusion of the Stockholm games—a decision that left some bodies, such as the Scottish Cycling Union, struggling to muster enough money to get their athletes to the Swedish capital. Provisional plans to send a full British squad out to Stockholm a full fifteen days prior to the commencement of Olympic competition—to ensure proper acclimatization and recovery—were also scratched. The BOA reported that to minimize housing costs, British athletes would arrive on Swedish shores just two-days prior to the official opening of the Games and would be forced “to return by the first boat after their
competitions have concluded.” Athletes whose events did not start until towards the end of the Olympic program would travel separately a few days before their competitions.\textsuperscript{477} The decision not to “incur the expense of providing coat and straw hat for competitors,” further exemplified the BOA’s extreme cost cutting measures.\textsuperscript{478} Unbelievably, the British, the cradle of modern sport and one of the world’s leading economic powers, faced the ignominy of being the only competing nation not wearing matching attire during the Opening Ceremony.

Given the vicissitudes of financial planning, the BOA only spent £4,148 on sending the British team to Stockholm.\textsuperscript{479} This sum proved diminutive when compared to the £25,372 (\$123,564) spent by the American Olympic Committee (AOC).\textsuperscript{480} Adopting “American business methods,” the AOC collected Olympic funds from across the entire spectrum of American society. Wealthy industrialists such as Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller sr., Ivy League universities such as Dartmouth, Yale and Penn, and businesses and breweries such as Anheuser-Bush, joined local and regional branches of the AAU in contributing generous amounts of money. With a sizable war-chest at their disposal, the AOC ensured that their nation’s athletes enjoyed every competitive advantage. The U.S. team traveled to Stockholm aboard the \textit{Finland}, a luxurious Red Star line cruise ship, specially altered to allow the American team to train during the crossing. They arrived twelve days before the official Opening Ceremony of the Games.\textsuperscript{481} The dynamic, bureaucratic style management of the AOC, the army of methodically-trained American athletic specialists, and the nation’s seemingly overzealous appetite for Olympic victory provided a sharp contrast to the outmoded, inefficient voluntary structure of the BOA, the indifferent approach of British athletes,
and the seemingly ubiquitous public and governmental disinterest in international Olympic competition.

**Preserving the Kingdom**

In the midst of an organizational fiasco, the BOA faced a renewed political dilemma as the issue of separate Irish representation resurfaced. On April 25, 1911, at a Council meeting of the BOA, Dr. Michael J. Bulger of the IAAA pleaded that “the BOA as at present formed should be dissolved, and that the British representatives on the International Olympic Committee should endeavour to obtain separate representation for England, Scotland and Ireland on the Committee.” An independent voice on the IOC would entitle Ireland, under existing legal definitions of a “nation,” to register a separate team in future cycles of international Olympic competition, thus freeing themselves from the shackles of the BOA’s tutelage in London. Clearly, Ireland’s sporting authorities considered this a far more propitious route for securing the establishment of an independent Irish Olympic team than awaiting the passage of Home-Rule. Nevertheless, as expected, the BOA once again firmly squashed Irish ambitions, insisting “That by the constitution of the IOC the United Kingdom forms a single nation . . . and that it is not within the province of the Council of the BOA to propose alterations in the constitution.” The BOA’s recalcitrance was hardly surprising, especially given their conservative, pro-establishment world view, their overwhelmingly Anglocentric composition, and their staunch opposition to previous Irish appeals.

The work of Lord Desborough outside of the BOA clearly reveals the mindset of Britain’s Olympic chiefs. In his concurrent position as chancellor of the Primrose League,
a large-scale political movement founded in 1883 to trumpet Tory values and to “uphold religion, the monarchy, the empire and the estates of the realm,” Desborough spearheaded a conservative campaign against the momentum of the Irish Home-Rule movement.\textsuperscript{484} The recent passing of the Parliamentary Act, asserting the supremacy of the House of Commons by abolishing the legislation-blocking powers of the Tory controlled House of Lords, heightened Irish expectations that a liberal-backed Home-Rule Bill would finally succeed. For Conservatives, especially Britain’s aristocratic Olympic leaders, this was a period of remarkable change and uncertainty. Following three successive general election defeats, the Conservatives were overwhelmed by the rising tide of Liberal radicalism and socialism. Extensive land and social reform, collectivism, increased governmental bureaucracy, free trade, taxation on personal wealth, anti-landlordism and the founding of the Labour Party, made Conservatives even more fearful for the future. In a somber letter to his long-time friend, Pierre de Coubertin, the Reverend Courcy Laffan earlier confirmed such trepitation, noting that a “dangerous crisis” was afoot in Britain as the Liberals threatened to topple the propertied order, the traditional social hierarchy and the entrenched economic system.\textsuperscript{485}

In this context, the BOA’s efforts to preserve the unity of a British Olympic team signified a deliberate Conservative attempt to obstruct the Liberal assault on the established order, in a similar vein to the much malingned pursuit of tariff reform and the establishment of the Unionist Social Reform Committee. Remarkably, the BOA once again made a notable exception, granting Ireland’s cyclists’ permission to compete under the colors of the Emerald Isle—Scotland was also extended the same privilege.\textsuperscript{486} The BOA’s selectivity typifies how Britain’s Olympic officials chose to reward politically
reliable Celtic sporting bodies and how they asserted their influence within the IOC by arbitrarily insisting upon various national combinations.

**Greater Britain**

While the BOA remained fervently opposed to an independent Ireland, in both the political and sporting realms, they simultaneously continued to champion the separate representation of Britain’s dominions. After earlier facilitating the establishment of NOCs in both Canada and South Africa, Britain’s Olympic leaders now moved to secure the appointment of dominion representatives onto the IOC. As early as December 6, 1910, N. F. Crowe of the Canadian AAU wrote to the Reverend Courcy-Laffan to inquire whether Canada was eligible for representation on the IOC. Laffan reassured his administrative counterpart that Canada was “for Olympic purposes a nation and as such is entitled to a representative.” Over the ensuing months, Laffan and the BOA worked closely with Canadian sporting officials in trying to find a suitable candidate. The BOA honorary secretary regularly kept Coubertin apprised of ongoing developments, stressing the need for an independent Canadian representative on the IOC. The BOA does “not wish to represent the British Empire ourselves,” Laffan insisted. By April 15, 1911, John Hanbury-Williams, an Englishman by birth, education, and long time residence, and the founder of the Canadian Olympic Committee, emerged as the natural choice for the position. Urbane, politically conservative, and well-connected, Hanbury-Williams, as the historian Robert K. Barney observed, “perfectly fit the Coubertinian model for IOC membership.” Laffan reassured the IOC president of Hanbury-Williams’ suitability, noting that “he is a soldier of the highest class and I think you will be happy to see him...
proposed.” Coubertin confirmed the decorated Boer War hero’s membership during the 13th annual IOC session held in Budapest in May, 1911. As Hanbury-Williams’ appointment testifies, the BOA favored British-born pro-establishment types, with strong backgrounds working within the framework of the Empire. As ardent imperialists, men such as Hanbury-Williams and Australia’s English-born representative, Richard Coombes, would assist Britain’s Olympic officials to carry out their own imperial agenda within the broader international Olympic movement. The later appointment of British-born South African Sidney Farrar, a prominent gold mining magnate and financer, to the IOC in 1913 confirms this truism.

The ties between the “Mother Country” and her dominions were strengthened even further in the build-up to the Stockholm games. On July 18, 1911, during a Council meeting of the BOA, Lord Desborough revealed an Australian proposal to consolidate the forces of Britain and her dominions under one unified “Empire Team.” The concept of a Greater Britain squad revealed the loyalist sentiments of the BOA sponsored officials controlling dominion participation in the Olympic Games. Since the inception of modern Olympic competition, the Home-Nations had competed under the banner of Great Britain (and later Great Britain and Ireland), while the dominions, beginning with Australia in 1896, were each granted independent status by the IOC and entered as individual representative nations. In practice, however, the lines between Britain and Empire were far more fluid than it may first appear. At the inaugural Athens games in 1896, the London-born middle-distance star, Edwin “Teddy” Flack, claimed two gold medals in the 800-and-1500-meter events for Australia. In 1908 Newbury's finest, Charles Hefferon, competed for South Africa in the London games, clinching a silver medal in the
controversial marathon event. In turn, British-born athletes residing in the dominions sometimes opted to compete for the Mother Country. In the build-up to the Stockholm games, world-class walker Ernie J. Webb expressed a passionate desire to compete under the colors of the Union Jack rather than those of Canada, a country where he had long resided. The English AAA even agreed to underwrite the cost of Webb’s expenses to ensure that the Canadian resident participated for Britain, like he did previously at the London games four years earlier, winning two silver medals.

The idea of joining the Empire under one representative Olympic team originally germinated a few weeks earlier during an Inter-Empire sports championship held in May, 1911, as part of the “Festival of Empire” in London to commemorate the coronation of King George V. In the aftermath of a fiercely competitive athletic duel between the Britain and her white dominions, Richard Coombes, Australia’s most powerful amateur sporting official, and James G. Merrick, president of the Canadian AAU, raised the notion of a single team representing the Empire at future Olympic Games. Lord Desborough, acting in his position as president of the Council of the Festival of Empire, expressed his unanimous support for the proposal during a celebratory dinner to mark the conclusion of the athletic events. As Desborough noted, plans to create a unified Empire side would have ideally ensured an increased share of the medals in Stockholm, solidified dominion relations with the motherland, and enhanced imperial identity. Richard Coombes, writing under the pseudonym the “Prodigal,” reaffirmed this conclusion on the pages of the Sydney Referee: “This is surely the very ideal of Empire—the forces of the Mother Country and her children, and Colonies, congregating on the shores of Britain to concentrate the forces of Empire, and then voyaging to the battle-ground of Stockholm to
challenge in friendly warfare the best of the world’s athletes." The Melbourne Argus also revealed its support for a unified Imperial squad, citing the irrationality of “dissipating” the Empires strength “by breaking up into units.” Despite the ambitious plans proposed and the initial wave of dominion support, the BOA admitted that while the idea was “very interesting and attractive . . . it was too late to take steps to carry it out in the present Olympiad.” The notion of a consolidated Pan-Britannica team would soon remerge, however, in the aftermath of a dismal British performance in Stockholm.

**Play Up and Play the Game**

With discussions concerning a future British Empire team placed on hold until after the conclusion of the Stockholm games, the BOA came under increasing bombardment from various sections of the British sporting press for their failure to spend “money freely” in the training and preparation of the nation’s athletes. Calls for the increased specialization of British Olympic sport can be traced back to the 1906 Intermediate Games in Athens, and were intensified following the nation’s dismal performance in the track and field portion of the London program. The Times stressed the urgent need for athletic reform, warning that “the world has learned so much about the technique of training, and the Games are being taken so much more seriously in every country, that the competitions this year are likely to be vastly keener, and the performances conspicuously better, than at any former meeting.” Critics attacked the decadent leadership and moribund bureaucracy of the BOA, questioning whether they were even “competent . . . to secure the creditable upholding of British sport either at home or abroad.” Others took a more hard-lined approach, demanding the immediate
resignation of the BOA and the subsequent establishment of a new and less unwieldy committee.\textsuperscript{503} The Reverend Courcy Laffan attempted to downplay such “opposition and criticism” as emanating from “significantly ill informed” sections of the British press.\textsuperscript{504} From the perspective of Lord Desborough, a personal guest of King Gustaf V of Sweden during the forthcoming Stockholm games, if the public favored Americanized methods of athletic specialization then why did they not loosen their purse strings and support the BOA’s earlier fundraising initiatives.\textsuperscript{505} With limited funds at their disposal, the BOA was clearly not in a financial position to subsidize the cost of a progressive scheme of athletic reform. Battling on the brink of insolvency, the British Olympic movement edged closer to dissolution rather than revitalization.

Answering the demands for greater rationality and organization issued on the pages of a variety of British newspapers including The Times, the Sporting Life, and the Sportsman, the AAA opted to take matters into their own hands by creating a “General Olympic Committee,” a powerful signal that Britain’s most influential athletic body had finally begun to take international Olympic competition more seriously. Comprised of members of the leading English athletic clubs, along with one representative from both Oxford and Cambridge universities, this nascent body endeavored to assist the BOA in their preparations by ensuring the full participation of an organized British athletic team. In the months leading-up to the Stockholm games the AAA’s activities were indicative of the gradual British push towards a more specialized, “American” approach to athletic training. Throughout January, 1912, the General Olympic Committee appointed a cadre of part-time athletic coaches to supervise the nation’s various athletics facilities such as Stamford Bridge and Crystal Palace.\textsuperscript{506}
With a small training corps in place, the AAA sent out a nationwide survey in an effort to gauge current training and dieting habits amongst the nation’s leading athletes and to determine what level of coaching assistance may be needed to ensure their success in Stockholm. The results from the questionnaire presented a stark insight into the dilettantish, unprogressive and remarkably abject state of British athletics. The AAA reported despondently that a large number of athletes of repute claimed that they “had no regular system of training,” and that they were so deficient in such rudimentary coaching points that they needed “an essay on the ‘A.B.C.’ of training, dieting arm action and breathing.” The promising eighteen year-old sprinter James Barker, a future British representative in the 100-meteres in Stockholm, reported that he had received “no advice from anyone before, and had no system of training.” A number of well-known veteran athletes, such as Joseph A. Wells, another British representative in Stockholm, also revealed that they were forced to train in a grass-field owing to a lack of nearby facilities. Candidates in the field events registered equally grave complaints, bemoaning the unavailability of discuses, javelins, hammers, shot-puts, and vaulting poles. Devoid of standard facilities, equipment, coaching and basic training knowledge, the mediocre showings of Britain’s track and field athletes in previous cycles of Olympic competition can be viewed in a clearer light.

With the Olympic Games less than three months away, the AAA’s plans to revolutionize the state of British athletics proved an insurmountable task. The AAA’s General Olympic Committee did make a number of perfunctory gestures, however, distributing standard training manuals and increasing the number of athletic trainers in various regions of the country. The AAA’s efforts were aided by the 1911 establishment
of the Amateur Field Events Association (AFEA). Under the leadership of honorary president Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and its principle founder, F. A. M. Webster, a former English national javelin champion turned athletic coach, this new body aimed to transform the “truly deplorable” standard of British athletes in the various field events. British—or rather Irish—athletes had only won a solitary silver medal in the throwing events at all previous cycles of Olympic competition combined. In cooperation with the AFEA, the AAA organized an extensive British Olympic athletic trial. Held on May 18, 1912, in Stamford Bridge, London, the AAA ran through the full program of Olympic events with the exception of the marathon—the Polytechnic Harriers oversaw the staging of a separate Olympic marathon trial on the same day. Reflecting on the outcome of the athletic contests The Times discredited the nation’s chances of success in Stockholm: The “Olympic Trials seem rather to have been the occasion of a pleasant day’s sport for the ordinary club athlete . . . . It would scarcely have been considered first class in America.”

**Politics, Rivalry, and Dissension**

In the build-up to the Stockholm games the outbreak of bitter internal wrangling between the various governing bodies of British sport bedeviled the BOA’s preparations even further. An acrimonious split between the National Cyclists’ Union (NCU) and the AAA in 1910, over the perceived encroachment of the AAA into NCU affairs, ensured that a large pool of talented British Olympic medal hopefuls were unable to compete in Stockholm. Oxford and Cambridge University cyclists were considered ineligible for Olympic selection by the NCU after swearing an allegiance to the AAA. Similarly, the
Amateur Rowing Association’s (ARA) refusal to recognize the more democratic National Amateur Rowing Association prevented the participation of some of Britain’s leading oarsmen. In the case of rowing, the ARA had even threatened to abstain altogether from participating in Stockholm due to rising fears that they were compromising their own draconian amateur standards by competing against foreign crews—a similar debate had long been raging over the decision to grant permission to foreign entries in the annual Henley regatta. The highly exclusive rowing body did eventually back down, reluctantly granting permission for twenty-four British rowers to travel to the Swedish capital. The presence of Lord Desborough, a prominent Henley steward, as chairman of the British Olympic movement likely swayed the ARA’s decision.

Even the presence of a full-strength British football team hung precariously in the balance. In the run-up to the Stockholm games, the Swedish Olympic Organizing Committee, in adherence with Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) rules and regulations, expressed consent for the Home-Nations to compete as four representative teams. In spite of strong vocal support from F. J. Wall, the long-serving secretary of the Football Association (FA) and an inaugural member of the BOA, Britain’s Olympic officials quickly vetoed the idea in an effort to ensure the participation of a single, unified British team. The BOA’s legal expert George R. Robertson supported the decision on the grounds that “there was no National Football Association for the whole of the United Kingdom, and on the other hand England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales are not recognized as separate nations by the IOC.” Unwilling to jeopardize their independent status within the eyes of FIFA and determined to uphold their own distinct national identities, the Football Associations of Ireland, Scotland and Wales all
decided not to enter. Once again, the persistence of conflicting national identities and allegiances hampered the BOA’s attempts to create a homogenous British team. In a repeat of the 1908 London games, British participation in the Olympic football tournament remained an all-English affair.

Remarkably, the BOA’s plans towards ensuring the participation of the reigning “English” Olympic gold medalists hit a major stumbling block following the decision to award membership on their Council to the Amateur Football Association (AFA). Founded by public school and Oxbridge Old Boys, the AFA represented a large collection of southern-based amateur football clubs that split from the FA in 1907 in a stand against the perceived evils of professionalism and rising commercialization.Infuriated by the decision to award representation to a separatist body, F. J. Wall threatened to resign from the Council and permanently sever the FA’s affiliation with the British Olympic movement. Though Wall and the FA eventually rescinded their threat, following assurances from the BOA that they remained the primary football authority on the Council, the participation of a British football team in Stockholm hinged upon on the establishment of a cordial working relationship between the two rival factions. By September 1911, the situation took a new twist when the Swedish Olympic organizers announced that they would only accept a British entry submitted by the FA, the only governing body out of the two recognized by FIFA. With the balance of power shifted firmly in the FA’s favor, AFA President H. Hughes-Onslow moved to broker a peace deal. Fearing the exclusion of some of the nation’s most talented AFA registered players, including members of the prestigious Corinthian F.C., Hughes-Onslow, in conjunction with *The Times*, called upon the FA to ignore membership affiliation and select the
strongest British team. Unwilling to submit to the AFA’s request, the FA stubbornly selected an English football team comprised solely of FA registered players.

In spite of the prevalence of bitter internal squabbling between the various governing bodies of British sport, coupled with the noticeable lack of high-quality British athletes, the BOA announced the selection of a staggering two-hundred-and-seventy-one person squad (261 men and 10 women) to compete in Stockholm. Oxford and Cambridge Universities were once again well represented. Twelve Oxbridge blues comprised the men’s athletic team at the Swedish capital. The prodigious size of the British team masked the true extent of the squad’s weaknesses. In a number of events, the BOA was unable to find enough qualified athletes to compete. Despite the recent establishment of the AFNEA, no British representatives were selected for the shot-put (both-hands), discus (both-hands), Javelin, and Javelin (both-hands) events, as well as the two new additions to the Olympic program, the pentathlon and decathlon. British representatives were also conspicuously absent in the yachting and a number of shooting events (free-rifle 300-metres, individual and team; running dear, single-double and team). Meanwhile, due to the staging of Wimbledon during the same period as the Stockholm games, Britain did not send a single representative to compete in the lawn tennis events—reaffirming the British preference for their own prestigious national sporting events. In the summer of 1912, marred by limited funds, widespread apathy and dissension, internal politics, and competing national identities, Britain’s beleaguered Olympic team set sail for the Swedish capital.
“A public advertisement of British decay”

On Saturday July 6, 1912, King Gustaf V formally pronounced the Olympic Games “open.” An impressive 2,380 athletes from twenty-seven IOC member nations, including the Olympic debutants Chile, Egypt, Iceland, Japan, Luxemburg, Portugal, and Serbia, were scheduled to compete in one-hundred-and-five events across fifteen Olympic sports. In a deliberate attempt to curtail the unwieldy size of previous Olympics, the Swedish organizers dropped a number of events including archery, boxing, cycle-track racing, rugby union, hockey, lacrosse, motor-boats, polo, racquets, ice-skating, and real tennis. Swedish plans to scratch football, fencing, and rowing, traditionally British dominated events, from the Olympic program were eventually abandoned following strong resistance from the BOA. Reflecting on the Opening Ceremony, The Times expressed a deep sense of embarrassment at the “rather ragged” sight of the mismatched British contingent encircling the Olympic stadium.525 “Our happy-go-lucky ways and the ineffectiveness of our British Olympic Council is almost ludicrous,” the Times groused.526

Somber media reports forecasting a tough Olympic battle proved accurate as Britain’s athletes recorded a bitterly disappointing performance in Stockholm. Failing to attain the lofty standards set at the London games in 1908, Britain only won forty-one medals, leaving them third behind the United States and the host nation, Sweden in the final medal standings.527 The relatively abject performance of Britain’s sportsmen and sportswomen manifested itself most clearly in the track and field portion of the Olympic program, especially when compared to the impressive feats of the United States and Finland. On the track, a twenty-one-year-old Oxford undergraduate student, Arnold
Strode Jackson, provided a glimmer of joy for Britain. In the 1,500-meter final, Strode-Jackson, an Oxford blue in football and rowing, surprised the world as he narrowly clinched victory in a new British and Olympic record, beating out the heavily favored American duo of John Paul Jones and Abe Kiviat to become the youngest ever winner of the event. Britain’s 4x100-meter relay team, anchored by 200-meter bronze medalist William Applegarth, secured their nation’s only other track and field gold medal. In other events, England’s footballers—despite the absence of both Celtic and AFA affiliated players—romped to their second consecutive Olympic gold medal, overcoming Denmark 4-2 in the final. Britain’s water polo team also defended their Olympic crown in impressive fashion. After avoiding an ARA attempt to prohibit their participation in Stockholm British crews faired reasonably well, earning two gold medals in the single-scull and eights events. Led by Edith Hannon, British women performed better than their male counterparts. The Bristol-born Hannon, a finalist at Wimbledon the previous year, become the most successful female athlete of the entire 1912 Olympic Games, winning both the indoor singles and the mixed doubles events (with Charles Dixon). Meanwhile, Britain’s 4x100-meter women’s swim team clinched their nation’s solitary gold medal in the pool.528

Seen through a nationalistic lens, Britain’s Olympic campaign represented, as the Duke of Westminster bewailed, “a tale of national disaster.”529 Former Oxford University Athletic Club president W. Beach Thomas reiterated the sentiment that Olympic defeat served as a humiliating blot on the imperial escutcheon when he remarked, “We have been providing under British colours a public advertisement of British decay.” Thomas hypothesized that in order to restore British primacy, “It is necessary to bring home to the
national imagination that other nations seriously regard the performances at these games as symptomatic of the growth or decay of national vitality.”

Defeat signaled the decline of British sporting prowess, and confirmed the United States’ emergence as the leader of international sport. With the looming specter of the Great War and the award of the 1916 Olympics to Berlin, Britain’s athletic leaders turned their immediate attention toward reforming the state of the British Olympic movement in an attempt to recapture the nation’s lost sporting prestige.

A Nation Divided

The failure of the nation’s athletes at Stockholm produced a virulent wave of criticism from the British public and media alike. The traditionalist *Times* led the charge, attempting to ascertain, “Where Britain Failed at Stockholm.” The “deplorable” performances of British athletes were not due to an absence “of first-class material,” *The Times* averred, but rather the result of “pathetically farcical” arrangements in the training and preparation of British athletes. W. Beach Thomas proved equally apocalyptic: “We could not run, so it appeared, either long distances or short; we could not jump either broad or high; we could not throw the javelin . . . . The men accepted defeat as if the Olympic Games were a competition of parlor tricks in a provincial drawing-room.”

Another prominent British athletic coach, F. A. M. Webster, translated the nation’s defeat into a ruination of Roman proportions, lamenting the fact 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.” Reports recounted how British athletes were witnessed smoking and drinking in Stockholm cafes until midnight instead of keeping
“strict training,” and were forced to stay in two-star hotels, several to a room, next to which “electric trams began to thunder at 5 a.m.” The BOA attempted to quell the barrage of condemnation. In the *Official Report of the Olympic Games of 1912*, Council members bemoaned the fact that the “comparative failure” of the nation’s athletes, “could have been remedied if more money had been at our disposal.”

American perceptions proved more vituperative, as media scribes labeled Britain’s Olympic failure as representative of the general decadence of British society. The *New York Times* lampooned: “something really is the matter with the Englishman since they are no longer masters of the playground . . . the saying that Waterloo was won on the playing fields, once a boast, is now a bitter prophecy.” The *Independent* reiterated this viewpoint, noting that the performance “of the English is especially humiliating, because they were the first to insist that success in sports is a measure of national greatness.” Reflecting on the final medal standings, AOC secretary James E. Sullivan, gleeful rejoiced as America “wiped England off the map, athletically.”

*Blackwood’s* hit back at U.S. claims, insisting that the “Americans lead in the Olympic Games proves neither the decadence of English courage nor the supremacy of American wisdom. It is a triumph of professionalism and professionalism alone.” The fall-out from the Jim Thorpe scandal, in which the Native American was stripped of his two gold-medals in the pentathlon and decathlon events after he it was revealed he had received money playing in a summer professional baseball league, appeared to strengthen the high-brow British journal’s claims.

Regardless of *Blackwood’s* renewed attempts to discredit the linkage between athletic success and national well-being, the British media and public acknowledged that
British athletic primacy was a mirage and that the dilettantish nature of the British approach stood in stark contrast to the specialized methods of leading competing nations, most notably, the United States. As British Olympic long-jumper Sidney Abrahams remarked, “There has been a splendid assumption of British infallibility, and a sudden discovery (after an egregiously crushing defeat), that foreigners do not ‘play the game’ as the Briton understands it.”\(^542\) Collectively, the general national tone became clear: either Great Britain should begin to take Olympic competition more seriously or, alternatively, they should cease to compete altogether.\(^543\) Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote contemplatively: “The present time is a very critical one for British athletic sport . . . There are only two possible courses for this country to follow, the one being to cease to compete, and the other to take the matter more seriously and to adopt those scientific methods which are now used by the athletes of other nations.”\(^544\)

In light of the failure of British athletes at the Stockholm games and their earlier muddles in Athens and London, supporters of British athletics appeared to unite in favor of Olympic reform. In a correspondence to *The Times*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a distinguished patriot obsessed with fears of national deterioration since witnessing first-hand Britain’s shocking defeats in the Boer War, backed the BOA’s claim that inadequate financing had stymied the nation’s Olympic hopes. He proposed the availability of “liberal funds,” in order to secure more specialized organization at future Olympics.\(^545\) “No department of national life stands alone, and such a climb down in sports as would be involved by a retirement from the Olympic Games would have an enervating effect in every field of activity,” Conan Doyle warned.\(^546\) Arnold Strod-Jackson, one of Britain’s few shining lights on the track in Stockholm, echoed Conan Doyle’s support for an
elaborate scheme of progressive Olympic reform, querying “In these days when war is such a stupendous undertaking, shall not we be fitting ourselves for a place amongst the races?”

Casting their eyes ahead to the 1916 Olympic Games scheduled for Berlin, an event generating extra importance given the continued escalation of Anglo-German antagonism, Britain’s Olympic leaders organized a meeting to examine “The Lesson of the Olympic Games.” Held under the auspices of the Athletes Advisory Club and led by BOA chairman Lord Desborough, the meeting produced specific resolutions aimed at reforming future British Olympic campaigns. Significantly, calls for the establishment of an autonomous body to assist the BOA in undertaking the thorough organization and management of the nation’s Olympic effort were well received, along with the need for substantial revenue to cover necessary costs. Provisional plans indicated that a significant portion of the money raised would be used to support national governing bodies of sport develop schemes for effectively finding, training and preparing future British Olympic champions. Council members of the BOA insisted that were “anxious” to finally obtain “a real and intelligent national support” following years of apathy and outright opposition. Reflecting on the ambitious plans proposed, the Reverend Courcy Laffan, a man whose own role in the British Olympic movement would be temporarily reduced following the sudden death of his wife, forewarned that if a appeal for funds was not met by widespread public enthusiasm then the BOA would be left with no other choice than to fold: “If there is not an adequate public response, so far as I and my colleagues are concerned it is no use carrying on at all. We had better frankly say, ‘We can’t go on!’”
Despite Laffan’s stern admonition, Britain’s Olympic chiefs were busy entertaining new ideas and new practices to help restore the halcyon days of British athletic supremacy. Following public vocal support from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the BOA revived the notion of uniting the Empire under one representative Olympic team. *The Times* embraced the idea, rationalizing that since the U.S. “draws its athletes from a population of over ninety million, and compiles a winning total to which Negroes, red Indians, and Hawaiians all contribute a share,” we must enter as a “United Empire, and let us do our best, as sportsmen, to win.”\(^{552}\) Calls for the creation of a Pan-Britannic Olympic team appeared a defensive response to the shifting power structure of international sport, rather than as an exalting of imperial sentiment and solidarity. Interestingly, John Bull refused to extend an invitation to all of his overseas appendages. After all, the British Empire had been founded—in part— upon a strict ethnocentric hierarchal structure, a racist imperialism ensconced in the enlightened and chivalrous virtues of progress and liberty. Determined to preserve the myth of racial superiority, the British were only willing to compete alongside their “white” dominions—Maoris, Zulu’s, and Gurkha’s were not considered true “sportsmen” capable of “playing the game.”

While certain sections of the British press appeared enthusiastic, the idea of uniting the Empire for the Berlin games could potentially sour dominion relations with the motherland if the Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, and South Africans took umbrage at being drafted onto the “British” side. Citing its desire for separate national Olympic representation the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted its immediate opposition to the plan: “Apart from all questions of loyalty to the Empire, there is a narrower local patriotism for Australia.” The Olympic Games are a “tremendous advertisement to this
continent” the popular Australian daily objected. Plans for creating a Greater Britain team were cast in further doubt by Canadian AAU president James G. Merrick, one of the original progenitors of the idea. In attendance at the meeting of the Athletes Advisory Club, Merrick raised the improbability of the dominions agreeing to have their identity “completely extinguished” by the general Empire plan. In addition, given the years of British criticisms aimed at the United States for hiring a team of “foreign athletic mercenaries,” plans to create a unified imperial side left British Olympic officials open to charges of hypocrisy from across the Atlantic.

The BOA’s attempts to recapture Britain’s athletic glory revealed a highly polarizing discourse within the history of the British Olympic movement. Calls for the increased specialization of British athletics faced strong opposition from a large section of British society who opposed the Olympic movement and feared that change would erode the traditions of Britain’s amateur sporting culture. Liberal M.P. (Harborough) Rudolph C. Lehmann, speaking in an interview published in the Observer, fulminated that the Olympic scheme proposed to the public “means specialization.” Lehmann, a former secretary of the ARA and a vociferous champion of “true” amateurism, feared the schemes would ultimately lead to British sport being “ruined.” The Morning Post advanced Lehmann’s views, asserting, “We Britons are not either by nature or training specialists.” In fact, the elite London broadsheet explained, “We should be inclined to ridicule a man who spent his skill at throwing an ad hoc saucer or a pointed stick, both of which childish pastimes find a place in the Olympic programme.” “We have no use for the athlete who has specialized himself into a highly efficient piece of machinery for a single purpose” the Living Age added. Critics of the reform plan grounded their attacks
in the fear that Britain’s athletic leaders were willing to sacrifice the nation’s amateur sporting ethos in the pursuit of securing Olympic success. As a Mr. Hugh Legge, in a correspondence to The Times confirmed, “There are . . . many who do not care two straws who wins at the Olympic Games, but they are deeply concerned for the interests of amateur sport.”559

The debate over the future course of Britain’s Olympic participation continued to rage throughout the summer and autumn months of 1912. Baily’s Magazine of Sport and Pastimes lent its opinion to the debate over the necessity for Olympic reform. “We do not deny the obvious truth that a certain amount of specialism is necessary for success,” the British sporting journal reasoned, “but we do assert that excessive specialism is only likely to become the bane of what is now that fine sporting athleticism.”560 Sidney Abrahams refuted such claims, asserting that Britain is already “the greatest specializing country in the world.”561 Fellow Olympian Philip Noel-Baker (then Philip James Baker), a future Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and a finalist in the 1,500-meter event in Stockholm, reiterated Abrahams’ claims in a series of impassioned publications.562 Noel-Baker dismissed opposition to the BOA’s plans for athletic reform as sheer hypocrisy, insisting that “There is no one in the world who specializes more or devotes more time and trouble to his training than the English.”563 Nevertheless, critics remained unconvinced. Discussing the state of international athletics, the Morning Post demanded that either the nation uphold its amateur ideals, or alternatively, “retire altogether from the Olympic Games.”564 Blackwood’s took a more uncompromising stance, demanding “that the Olympic Games should never be held again.”565 IOC President Pierre de Coubertin,
intruding into the British debate from France, vehemently dismissed Blackwood’s stance as “too ridiculous to be seriously considered.”

With the 1916 Berlin games less than three years away, the country gentlemen’s magazine The Field, now under the editorialship of British IOC member Theodore Andrea Cook, trumpeted plans for Olympic reform, urging the nation to “strike while the iron is hot,” and to “make sure that with the beginning of 1913 the preparations for 1916 will be well on their way.” With Cook’s admonition ringing in their ears, the BOA prepared for what they believed would be a titanic global confrontation in Berlin. They proved prescient about the location if ultimately inaccurate about the true nature of the impending conflict.
Chapter Five

_The Empire Savers_

The year 1912 witnessed a series of symbolic disasters for the British. The *Titanic* sank on her maiden voyage to New York, Captain Robert Scott and his companions perished in Antarctica, and British athletes suffered a humiliating defeat at the Olympic Games in Stockholm.⁵⁶⁸ Fears of national decadence reached a deafening crescendo, hastened by widespread labor unrest, the immense burden of Empire, and the aggressive tone of German naval ambition. The gradual relinquishment of global economic supremacy compounded fears of British decline. Conceding first place to the United States in both annual economic growth and world manufacturing output, the diminishing trend of British power became conspicuous.⁵⁶⁹ In this context, the nation’s athletic leaders viewed the Olympic arena as a viable platform through which to restore British prestige. The location of the next installment of the Olympic spectacle in Berlin reinforced desires for an improved British performance in the quadrennial international competition.⁵⁷⁰

In the *fin-de-siècle* world, Germany, more than any other nation, threatened to shake the very foundations of British imperial, economic, and cultural hegemony. As a relatively new nation-state, forged in 1871 in the wake of a resounding victory in the Franco-Prussian War, Germany quickly emerged as a global colossus. Already boasting the most formidable landed military in Europe, Germany attempted to overcome the threat of European “encirclement” by issuing a direct assault on Britain’s control of the seas through mass naval construction. Britain’s security and prosperity were inextricably
linked with her naval supremacy; a German challenge to British naval power signaled a challenge to the “very essence of Britishness.”

Kaiser Wilhelm II’s Germany further represented a severe threat to British interests in numerous economic and cultural spheres. Supported by a rapidly burgeoning population, Germany stood at the forefront of new industries such as chemicals, optics, electricals and machine tools. In steel production, by 1914 Germany had even surpassed the combined output of Britain, France and Russia. The nation’s innovators and intellects spearheaded advancements in the fields of art, technology, science, architecture and design. German-speaking historians and philosophers led the assault on the idea of scientific inquiry in history, while nationalist movements encouraging alternative lifestyles and sexualities held a position of prominence in German society. From the British perspective, Germany represented a force for change, rebellion, self-assertion and innovation; a modernist threat to the established conservatism and moralist fabric of Victorian and Edwardian Britain.

Even in the Olympic arena, Germany mounted a serious challenge to British designs to achieve international dominance. Reports revealed that the German Olympic Committee (DRAfOS), led by their inspirational leaders Theodor Lewald and Carl Diem, were busy touring the United States studying American methods of athletic specialization. In previous Olympic cycles, the Germans had entered predominately in the swimming, diving, gymnastics and fencing events with great success, but were unable to mirror these achievements on the track. Aiming to improve their Olympic fortunes, German officials turned to a four-time U.S. Olympic gold medalist, Alvin Kraenzlein, a track and field coach at the University of Michigan, to train the nation’s athletes for
success in the forthcoming Berlin games. Under Kraenzlein’s guidance and backed by a 300,000 Deutschmark (£15,000) governmental subsidy, the Germans instituted a series of athletic initiatives aimed at training future Olympic medal hopefuls. Cognizant of German preparations, the “Empire Savers,” as the Conservative advocates of Britain’s Olympic participation were satirically labeled by the Daily Express, hoped to translate a strong British showing in the Berlin games into a symbolic blow to their German rivals, as well as propelling their nation back toward their “rightful” position as the leading power in international sport.

The “Special Committee” and Olympic Reform

Belated preparation, frantic effort, disappointment, recrimination, followed by inertia typified Britain’s response to previous Olympic disasters. The period building up to the 1916 Berlin games would finally break this recurring cycle. Far from being characterized by inertia, Britain’s Olympic chiefs made a determined effort to introduce significant organizational and athletic reform. The resignation of Lord Desborough from his long-serving position as chairman of the BOA owing to “excessive” voluntary duties delayed the reform effort. The loss of such a well-respected and influential leader came as a devastating blow to the BOA, particularly during a period of proposed reform. IOC president Pierre de Coubertin expressed his “deep regret” upon hearing the news of Desborough’s resignation, thanking the inaugural BOA chairman for “the great services which you have rendered to the Olympic cause.” Searching for a suitable replacement, the BOA approached Algernon St. Maur Seymour, the 15th Duke of Somerset, about filling the vacant chairmanship position. Somerset, a tall, athletic aristocrat, boasting a
decorated career in the Royal British Navy, accepted the position with alacrity, as well as agreeing to replace Desborough as a British representative on the IOC.  

Over the forthcoming weeks, further delays ensued as the proposed “executive committee” struggled to obtain the membership of “gentlemen of authority in sporting affairs.” By March 14, 1913, however, The Times welcomed the establishment of a “Special Committee for the Olympic Games of Berlin.” Composed in equal proportions of members and non-members of the BOA, The Times asserted that the Special Committee would act as the “trustees of the public fund.” J.E.K. Studd, a famed Middlesex county cricketer and future Lord Mayor of London, chaired the Special Committee, whose membership also included, amongst others, fellow Middlesex cricket star and inventor of the “googly,” B. J. T. Bosanquet; British member to the IOC, Theodore Andrea Cook; Conservative MP (Sevenoaks) and former president of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), Henry William Forster; and the creator of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.  

As the newly appointed custodians of Britain’s Olympic participation in Berlin, the influential elite and middle-class members of the Special Committee pursued plans for Olympic reform with a noticeable urgency and vigor. Approaching the governing bodies of each sport represented in Olympic competition, the Special Committee requested them to submit what they considered an ideal scheme for “the discovery of and encouragement of fresh talent,” and “the systematic preparation and training of that talent, with a view to providing the best possible representation at the Olympic Games.” As the BOA contemplated its reform schemes, the Special Committee returned to consider the feasibility of uniting a British Empire Team for the 1916 Berlin
games. Combining the points earned by “Great Britain” and the “Rest of Empire” at Stockholm, British Olympic chiefs recognized that a consolidated Empire team would have considerably diminished the winning margin held by the United States and overall champions, Sweden. After expressing favorable sentiments, Council members voted unanimously not to pursue the matter any further, citing indifference to the scheme in the dominions, combined with the impossibility of converting the IOC to the prospect of a new national combination. The failure the BOA’s grand imperial scheme revealed the growing political independence of the dominions and their desire for separate national Olympic representation. Dominion nationalism had inevitably diverged from imperial patriotism.

While the idea of a unified Pan-Britannica team again failed to materialize, the BOA and the Special Committee continued their work, evaluating suggestions submitted by the various governing bodies of British sport. Under the guidance of their newly commissioned “General Olympic Committee” the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) offered extensive recommendations, aimed at completely modernizing the state of British athletics—an enormous task illuminated by their pre-Stockholm investigatory findings. Mindful of the perilous diminution of British athletic strength, the AAA enumerated a wide range of interesting ideas, including the creation of Olympic Novice Trials, Public School Championships, County Championships, Home Nation international contests with Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, Official Olympic Trials, and the building of Olympic training quarters throughout the British Isles. The Special Committee welcomed these proposals, approving the immediate establishment of Olympic Novice Trials and offering £500 to cover projected costs. Open to athletes of seventeen-years and older “who have
never won a prize at athletics,” the Olympic Novice Trials were scheduled for the 1913-1914 athletic season. J.E.K. Studd wrote to The Times announcing the formation of the trials. He proclaimed that two-hundred-and-fifty events would be held throughout Great Britain, with gold, silver, and bronze medals being awarded to successful competitors. Interestingly, all AAA sponsored events would be held in accordance with the international metric system in an effort to better familiarize British athletes with running at distances measured in meters as opposed to yards. The AAA’s proposal for the establishment of Public School Championships also received approval. The Special Committee sent a letter to headmasters of schools throughout Britain inviting them to participate in the program. Under the proposed guidelines, each individual school would be responsible for initiating their own athletic events, with the Special Committee affording patronage when needed.

Over the forthcoming weeks, the Special Committee made definitive plans to host a Home-Nations athletic contest in Scotland in 1914, as well as an official Olympic Trial for the following year. The Special Committee further approved the AAA’s plans to establish permanent Olympic training quarters in a number of British cities including Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, and Newcastle; hiring a number of trainers to advise and help selected athletes in their preparations for Berlin. In order to oversee the efficient operation of the numerous Olympic training facilities, the AAA announced the appointment of noted Canadian athletic coach, Walter R. Knox, to act as a “Chief Trainer”—the first professional coach in the AAA’s history. Writing in an American newspaper, the Washington Post, British Olympian William Applegarth, a member of Polytechnic Harriers coach Sam Mussabini’s stable of world-class athletes, celebrated the
move towards athletic reform. Applegarth explained, “The young runner or jumper in England today is no different from those of any other country in this respect. He is mighty glad to get all the skilled advice and professional care he can.”

Threatening to repeal the Victorian amateur restraints that had traditional governed British sport, the BOA’s plans for athletic specialization represented a dramatic shift in British sporting culture.

As the launch of initial schemes got underway, the Special Committee received proposals from the leading governing bodies of particular sports, including the National Cycling Union, Amateur Gymnastics Association, and the Amateur Field Events Association. Collectivity, Britain’s governing bodies supported the move towards athletic specialization, 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.

The BOA also put forth and approved a number of recommendations. In light of Britain’s dismal display in the event at Stockholm, the BOA established a “Modern Pentathlon Committee.” The nascent committee proposed the introduction of modern pentathlon competitions to be held on an annual basis during the winter months. The BOA further approved the creation of a sub-committee to oversee the “British Olympic Proficiency Badges and Diplomas Scheme.” This initiative dealt with the awarding of standard Olympic medals to young competitors throughout the country who attained exemplary levels of athletic performance. Eager to defend the British Olympic movement against potential charges of financing professionalism,
Special Committee chairman J. E. K. Studd reassured the public that Britain would not follow America’s lead in creating a “team of ‘gladiators.’”

The proposed schemes for Olympic reform signaled a discernible push towards democratization. Since the inception of Olympic competition, the elitism of the BOA naturally transferred to the Olympic arena, as evidenced by the large percentage of Oxbridge men who regularly comprised British track and field teams. Exclusion and snobbery appeared even more prominent in other Olympic sports, such as rowing, fencing, yachting, and equestrianism. A “Suburban Athlete,” writing to the British daily the London Standard confirmed the class-bias inherent in the British Olympic movement when he complained that “Caste rules the world of athletes and all is snobbery. . . . At present the whole tendency seems to be that only public school and university men shall have all the chances. Those who control the English contribution to the Olympic Games would like to see England represented by nice young men with nice pedigrees and splendid educations.”

J. E. K. Studd, hit back at claims that British athletics were elitist, citing the fact “seven” AAA Championships were recently “won by people who were not university men.” Writing in the Daily Telegraph Lieutenant Stuart W. Blair, secretary of the Special Committee, reiterated Studd’s assessment, but called for a coordinated effort to ensure that the most talented British athletes were selected to compete in Berlin: “The only way we can discover the best talent is for the Press throughout the country to take the matter up. Hidden away in remote villages may be some of the finest specimens of manhood. We want to send our best representatives to Berlin in 1916, and the Press must assist us in the extremely difficult work of finding them.”
Despite the overwhelming response and the elaborate and democratic schemes proposed, not all of the leading governing bodies of sport were willing to cooperate. In an attempt to uphold the nation’s amateur sporting ideals or, rather, to distance themselves from accusations of promoting professionalism, the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA), the Amateur Fencing Association (AFA), and the Hockey Association (HA), all declined invitations to participate in the plans for Olympic reform.\textsuperscript{599} For these elite governing bodies, the raising of public subscriptions for the training and expenses of British Olympic athletes represented a serious breach in the amateur code. ARA rules clearly stipulated that “Oarsmen are no longer amateurs if their expenses are paid by funds raised outside their own rowing clubs.”\textsuperscript{600} Adhering to the most stringent interpretation of amateurism, some of Britain’s leading governing bodies were unwilling to pledge their support to a seemingly professional cause. The FA also declined to participate in the BOA’s schemes, but for an entirely different reason. Boasting the reigning Olympic football champions who earned gold in both 1908 and 1912, the FA insisted that they did not need to implement organizational reform.\textsuperscript{601} Regardless of these setbacks, the initial work undertaken by the Special Committee, and the success of each scheme proposed, remained contingent upon the collection of money through a national appeal for subscriptions, a proposal that had still not materialized.

By May of 1913, the failure of the Special Committee to launch an appeal for subscriptions invited stern criticism from numerous sections of the British media. In a series of defamatory articles, the populist conservative \textit{Daily Express} rebuked the initial work undertaken by the Special Committee as being “scarcely worthy of mention.”\textsuperscript{602} The liberal \textit{Manchester Guardian} voiced similar complaint, when it demanded to know
“what is being done, or what is being attempted, to prepare for Berlin in 1916?" Sir Arthur Conan Doyle moved to appease the growing chorus of condemnation. In a correspondence to the *Daily Express*, Conan Doyle assured the public that the current delay in the launch of an appeal for funds was merely due to “the state of the money market during the Balkan War.” Fortunately, by July 16, the Special Committee reported that arrangements had been made for the appeal to be launched in August, and that at least six “gentlemen,” including the Conservative aristocratic trio of Lord Harris, Lord Strathcona, and the Duke of Westminster, had given their support to the fund. The details of the appeal were drafted shortly thereafter and sent out to those who promised to sign.

**£100,000 Appeal for National Subscriptions**

On August 18, 1913, an open letter announcing the launch of an “Appeal for National Subscription” was sent out to 3,000 newspapers and periodicals throughout Great Britain. Signed by “patriotic men of eminence and statesmanship,” the letter appealed for the nation to raise £100,000 ($486,600), a sum deemed sufficient to provide the “adequate representation of the United Kingdom at the Olympic Games of 1916.” Lord Northcliffe, owner of *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* and an incessant Germanophobe, offered his immediate support to the fund, subscribing £1000, an amount also matched by the Duke of Westminster. Even George V expressed his sentiment in favor of the appeal. In a correspondence to the *Daily Telegraph*, the newly appointed BOA chairman, the Duke of Somerset, announced the King’s “hope that every effort will be made to ensure that the United Kingdom is represented by its best athletes.” The
appeal for national subscriptions found a huge precedent in the success of Lord Northcliffe’s campaign which raised nearly £16,000 to help pay hosting costs for the 1908 Olympic Games in London. An appeal for over six times that amount certainly put the altruistic character of the nation to the test.

British fundraising objectives appeared excessive when compared to the initiatives being undertaken by some of the world’s leading athletic nations. In Germany, the government appropriated 300,000 Deutschmarks (£15,000) from the imperial treasury to train athletes for the first Olympics to be held on home soil. Also recognizing the nationalistic importance of the games, the czar of Russia issued a royal edict creating a Ministry of Sport. Led by General Voyekoff, the first occupant of the office, a council was established to prepare athletes for the upcoming Olympic Games.

The French National Committee of Sports lobbied their parliament for 400,000 francs (£16,000), and also received an additional $100,000 donation from Basil Zaharoff, a Greek arms trader and proprietor of the popular French daily newspaper, Excelsior.

Aiming to defend their Olympic track and field crown, the American Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), led by its president Alfred J. Lill, Jr., launched a scheme to raise $150,000 (£30,807) to cover the costs of training and preparing a U.S. Olympic team for Berlin.

In light of the comparatively modest fund-raising efforts being undertaken abroad, the British appeal for such a large sum of money provoked a torrent of criticism, “especially from athletes of the older generation.” Prominent author and political reformer Frederic Harrison led the attack. In a correspondence to The Times, Harrison charged that the appeal for £100,000 “stinks of gate-money and professional pot-hunting.” Harrison, a vocal anti-imperialist and staunch opponent of Tory flag wagging
and drum-beating, lambasted the Conservative BOA for engaging in such “dismal an act of rivalry,” solely for the purpose to “meet on equal terms foreign athletes who are not real amateurs.” Nowell Smith, headmaster of the prestigious Sherborne School, took an equally acrimonious position. “These modern pseudo-Olympic Games are ‘rot’ and the newspaper advertisement of them and the £100,000 fund for buying victories in them is positively degrading,” Smith admonished. Upon reflection, both Harrison and Smith were representative of the more vocal section of British society that strongly opposed the international Olympic movement and dismissed any BOA attempts to transform the nation’s Olympic fortunes. Drawn from the across the entire spectrum of political sympathies, Britain’s syndicate of discontent were staunchly parochial “Little Englanders,” firmly attached to the most stringent interpretation of amateurism, cynical of the power of Olympism as a force for promoting international understanding, and vocally dismissive of the cultural propaganda utility of Olympic competition.

Various sections of the British media also trumpeted charges of professionalism. The *Manchester Guardian* mused that the money raised would be spent on producing “overtrained physical wrecks” who will “drift from the semi-professionalism of the Olympic Games to professionalism.” The *Liverpool Daily Post* lent their support to any “English gentlemen” willing to “express his contempt for the plebian fussiness of the attempts made by dukes and other persons to compete with America in the manufacture of professional athletes.” Critics of the appeal took refuge in enveloping theories of amateurism and sportsmanship, fearing that £100,000 (nearly $12 million in current values) endangered the sacred principles of British sport by promoting professionalism.
Given that the requested sum totaled four times the amount that the United States spent to send its athletes to Stockholm in 1912 and considerably more than the aggregate sum being raised by Britain’s Olympic rivals for Berlin in 1916, such apprehension appeared warranted.\textsuperscript{624} Even James E. Sullivan, secretary of the American Olympic Committee (AOC), scoffed at British attempts to raise such a prodigious amount. In retaliation for the years of British criticism aimed at the U.S. team of “immigrant mercenaries,” the Irish-American firebrand rebuked the BOA’s £100,000 fund asserting that “it is nothing but flagrant professionalism.”\textsuperscript{625}

Advocates of British Olympic reform moved swiftly to defend the appeal. Responding specifically to Frederic Harrison’s charges, the Duke of Westminster waxed patriotic, demanded to know, “Is England to do nothing to recover her ancient supremacy as the mother of sport?”\textsuperscript{626} Theodore Andrea Cook, another authoritative harbinger of imperial decline, expressed a similar nationalistic sentiment. In a contribution to \textit{Baily’s Magazine of Sport and Pastimes}, Cook pontificated that Britain was “honour bound” to compete in Berlin, and as such, it would be “disastrous” if the money was not raised.\textsuperscript{627} The \textit{Daily Telegraph} reiterated Cook’s pleas, declaring that the appeal “is an affair of honour for this country,” and, as such, its failure “would create a deplorable effect.”\textsuperscript{628} Drawing from the Social Darwinist and nationalistic zeal of the Edwardian era, proponents of British Olympism supported the appeal for national subscriptions in an attempt to confront and neutralize foreign perceptions of athletic decline.\textsuperscript{629} The BOA confirmed their patriotic intentions when they revealed:
The real thing is not whether we score a dozen more points or a dozen less, but whether we are to be held by other peoples as athletically incompetent. As it looks to other nations now, it merely is that heretofore we have held our reputation as an athletic and sporting people only because others did not trouble to beat us. Now that they are taking that trouble, we have suddenly been exposed as pretenders... And if we do take this trouble we shall in the process make ourselves a better and stouter people.

**Sport as Cultural Propaganda**

Although national Olympic committees were supposedly private and politically autonomous bodies, the dominant presence of high profile conservative figures within the ranks of the BOA suggests that the organization spearheaded a cultural propaganda initiative outside of the strictures of official governmental policy. The British government’s hostility to cultural propaganda as an acceptable instrument of normal peacetime diplomacy has been extensively documented. As the historian Philip Taylor has shown the growing association of propaganda with “falsehood and the manipulation of opinion,” combined with the increase in its use by foreign rivals, directed the British government’s policy of abstention. While it would take until the experience of the Great War, and the proceeding inter-war period, to finally convince the government of the role that cultural propaganda, and in particular, sport, could play in the pursuit of national interests, Britain’s Conservative Olympic chiefs had already long been exposed to the effective propagandist activities of Olympic rivals and their respective governments.

In light of the absence of a World Cup tournament in football—an initiative not introduced until 1930—and similar major “global” sporting competitions, the most powerful sporting nations turned to the Olympic arena as an ideal platform for trumpeting national vitality. The United States, more than any other nation, embraced the Olympic
stage as an opportunity to reaffirm national superiority. Media scribes and governmental officials proudly translated Olympic victory as proof of the supremacy of the American way of life, their republican mission, and their liberal democracy.\textsuperscript{633} Similarly, the Greek government openly exploited their historic connection to the Olympic Games in order to transmit positive images of a new and independent European nation-state free from the shackles of Turkish-Ottoman rule.\textsuperscript{634} The BOA was not immune to these messages. As Special Committee chairman J. E. K. Studd confirmed, “other nations—our competitor’s in the world’s business—have adopted them [Olympic Games], and are displaying them to the world as a test of national efficiency.”\textsuperscript{635} Given the transcendent power and universal appeal of international Olympic competition, coupled with the conservative thirst for maintaining national and imperial grandeur, the BOA aimed to revive the nation’s Olympic fortunes in order to project a positive image of Britain to an increasingly global audience. BOA chiefs hypothesized that the repetitive sight of British athletes stood atop the Olympic medal podium in Berlin, with the Union Jack cast overhead, would offer symbolic proof that the sun was far from ready to set on the British Empire.

The BOA’s nation-building efforts drew a strong parallel to the wider activities of the British Conservative Party during the pre-war period. Following the devastating exposure of Britain’s military unpreparedness and inefficiency during the Boer War, coupled with the proliferation of French, Russian, and particularly German sea power, conservative leaders undertook an aggressive policy of military and naval reform. Languishing in opposition to the liberals since the 1906 general election, conservatives, under the leadership of Arthur James Balfour, rallied to transform British defense policy.
With the looming specter of war with Germany growing ever more ominous—especially since Winston Churchill, in his role as First Lord of the Admiralty, withdrew the bulk of the British navy from the Mediterranean to concentrate on the German challenge—conservatives overhauled the Colonial army of the Victorian era, replacing it with the far more specialized and efficient British Expeditionary Force. The Territorial Army was formed to protect the British Isle from invasion, and the Royal Navy was radically modernized and equipped with the revolutionary “Dreadnought” fighting ships. While Britain’s conservatives were successful in reshaping the defenses of the British Empire in the years to 1914, the BOA’s attempts to transform British Olympic sport continued to flounder, as funds proceeded to trickle in at an alarmingly slow rate.

Continued Public Apathy

The popular British magazine of satire, *Punch*, best captured the nation’s general aversion to Olympic competition, albeit somewhat humorously. Entitled “The ‘National Disaster’ of 1912,” *Punch* published a cartoon depicting John Bull “prostrate with shame” and holding the Duke of Westminster’s letter to *The Times*. John Bull sighed, “My place in the councils of Europe may be higher than ever, but what’s the use of that when the Olympic palm for the kneeling high jump is borne by another?” Parody aside, the cartoon emphasized the nation’s general insouciance towards international Olympic competition. British Olympic critic Frederick Harrison reaffirmed the repugnance felt by sections of the British public towards the Olympic Games when he branded them as “swagger cosmopolitan circuses.” Harrison went onto explain pompously, “They may be Olympic, but they are not English. It is not ‘cricket,’ as we
used to play it at Oxford in the fifties.” 638 Certainly the public’s response to the appeal for funds underlined the nation’s apathy. By September 11, 1913, only £7,000 of the projected £100,000 had been subscribed, placing the BOA’s plans for athletic reform in serious jeopardy. 639

The Special Committee addressed the enervated position of the appeal fund at a meeting held on October 8, 1913. Despite widespread criticisms and slow contributions, the Committee decided to persevere. J.E.K. Studd reasoned that in view of the fact that money continued to be subscribed on a regular basis, “it was inadvisable to take any action at present.” 640 Over the next few weeks the position of the Special Committee continued to deteriorate. Theodore Andrea Cook resigned as a Committee member “owing to ill-health.” 641 Total subscriptions lingered at only slightly over £8,670, far short of the goal. 642 Determined to ignite public interest, the Special Committee called forth a meeting with the leading sporting editors of the British press. Held at the Hotel Metropole, in London, on October 21, the conference emphasized the need to increase the appeal fund to at least £25,000 before the end of the year. The Special Committee resolved that the money “should be obtained in order to justify the committee in proceeding with their work.” 643 Reaffirming its intentions to compete in the forthcoming Olympic Games in Berlin, the BOA assured:

We are, of course, not going to “stand down.” British athletes are certainly going to enter and compete at the Berlin Games, and ultimately it is not possible to doubt that the money will be forthcoming to enable them to compete in such a way as to do some credit to us. But those who, from a dislike of the whole notion of the Olympic Games and an attachment to the old Arcadian village-green era of British sport, choose to indulge in more or less diffused and impractical criticism of the Committee’s plans make very hard work for those who have the raising of the subscription in hand and are bent on seeing it carried to a successful conclusion. 644
Despite the BOA’s enthusiasm, slow subscriptions and public criticisms continued to hinder the position of the Olympic appeal, as opponents to athletic specialization held firm to the nation’s amateur sporting traditions.\textsuperscript{645}

**The Retirement of the Special Committee**

On January 16, 1914, *The Times* announced the retirement of the Special Committee for the Olympic Games in Berlin. Members voted unanimously to dissolve the nascent organization after seeing “no other course open to them in view of the lack of support given by the public to the appeal for funds.”\textsuperscript{646} The failure of the Special Committee marked the close of a heroic attempt to proselytize the nation towards Olympism. As the *Daily Mail* remorsefully confirmed, “England, the pioneer in most sports, seems to be alone in the attitude of lukewarm support of the Olympic Games.”\textsuperscript{647} Accruing just under £11,000, the appeal for national subscriptions fell short of the Special Committee’s required £25,000 target by the end of the year.\textsuperscript{648}

The failure of the Special Committee undoubtedly rested upon the £100,000 amount for which the appeal for national subscriptions was made. In an effort to exculpate themselves from any financial wrongdoings, the BOA asserted that the “signatories of the appeal” were responsible for setting such a prodigious target. Writing in their *Official Year Book* for 1913, the BOA reasoned, “The amount for which the appeal was made (£100,000) was fixed without reference to the Council, who have not accepted, and cannot accept, any responsibility for this large increase on the amount originally contemplated.”\textsuperscript{649} Sir Arthur Conan Doyle supported the BOA’s claims. Writing in his memoirs, Conan Doyle revealed that upon returning from a brief vacation
he was “horrified” to learn that the aristocratic signatories had appealed for £100,000. “The sum was absurd,” Doyle groused, “and at once brought upon us from all sides the charge of developing professionalism.” British athletic coach and Olympic chronicler F. A. M. Webster rejected Doyle’s complaints, arguing that the entire £100,000 was desperately needed to “raise the standard of efficiency” of British athletics.

The BOA actually made the decision to dissolve the Special Committee at a meeting held on Friday, December 19, 1913. After assessing the state of the appeal fund, members “quite agreed that it would be useless for them to proceed under the present circumstances.” Nevertheless, members voted to defer the official decision until the “position of affairs” had been brought to the “notice of the signatories of the Appeal.” Subsequently, at the next committee meeting held on January 7, 1914, members tendered their official resignations. Speaking on behalf of the committee, J.E.K. Studd “regretted that they had not been able to do very much.” On a more optimistic note, he argued that “they had succeeded in securing more publicity for the Olympic Games than had been obtained on previous occasions.” Reflecting on his experiences as member of the Special Committee, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle took a less positive tone. Writing in his memoirs years later, Conan Doyle lamented that the whole experience “was the most barren thing that I have ever touched. . . . Nothing came of it, and I cannot trace that I ever received a word of thanks from any human being.” With the failure of the Special Committee, the BOA reassumed full responsibility for the nation’s representation at the 1916 Olympic Games.

Disheartened but not defeated, proponents of the British Olympic movement persisted in their attempts to secure better organization for the forthcoming games in
Berlin. BOA member William Hayes Fisher, a Conservative MP (Fulham) and the future Lord Downham, proposed the immediate formation of a subcommittee of the Council to survey the current position. The BOA approved this recommendation, appointing the committee to draw up a report to determine “what action . . . is advisable for the British Olympic Council to take to ensure an effective representation of the United Kingdom at the Olympic Games of Berlin, 1916.”

Confident of success, the “Ways and Means Committee,”—as it later became known—set out to revive the nation’s interest in the Olympic Games. Hayes Fisher proposed the revival of an appeal for subscriptions but cautioned that such an initiative “would be no easy task.” Given the scarcity of available funds, Britain’s leading governing bodies of sport were forced to drastically curtail their ambitious preparations for Berlin.

Forced into an increasingly untenable position, the BOA, led by Theodore Andrea Cook, made an audacious bid to garner the support of the British government. Hoping to finally convince the government of the importance and potential political utility of international Olympic competition, Cook made contact with the Foreign Office on May 15, 1914, to arrange a meeting with Sir Edward Grey’s assistant. Details of Cook’s meeting with the Foreign Secretary’s assistance are unknown, but a letter dated June 2, to Robert G. Vansittart, a Foreign Office official and a future Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, suggests that his initial request fell on deaf ears. In an impassioned appeal, the British IOC member lobbied Vansittart to secure much needed financial assistance to help underwrite the cost of Britain’s Olympic campaign, warning that the current “attitude” of the British government towards the Berlin games will create “incalculable consequences upon the general cordiality” of Anglo-German relations.
Cook took his argument a step further, lamenting that “it does seem both illogical and possibly discourteous for this country to persist in an attitude which differs from that of every other country, and which places us in a position of the very greatest difficulty towards our hosts in every capital of the world.”

Unmoved by Cook’s desperate and frustrated plea, Vansittart responded brusquely in a private correspondence, dismissing any chance of a government subsidy on the grounds that “It is not a Foreign Office concern.” Vansittart passed his decision on to Sir Eyre Crowe, the Permanent Under-Secretary, suggesting that no further action should be taken unless Cook pursues the matter further. Crowe’s response to Vansittart’s letter is perhaps most telling into the general attitude of the British government towards Olympic competition, especially since it is made by the Foreign Office’s highest ranking official: “There is much diversity of opinion even in this country about these games. Many sensible people consider them to be pure advertisement of professional sportsmen. If the govt is to take them up officially, it must be after a deliberate decision. It is not a Foreign Office question at all, and cannot be decided by Sir E. Grey.” Fighting against an overwhelming tide of public and governmental apathy and opposition and restrained by limited financial support, Britain’s Olympic participation in Berlin hung precariously in the balance.

**On to Berlin!**

On June 28, 1914, world affairs forcibly pulled British Olympic planning and anticipation to the periphery as Europe plunged into a devastating war following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand II, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, by
Serbian terrorists during an imperial visit to the provinces of Bosnia and Hercogovina. In a retaliatory move, Austria broke off diplomatic ties with Serbia and then proceeded to attack the Baltic state after the Serbian government failed to comply with all of the demands issued in a punitive ultimatum. The escalating Balkan crisis continued to spill onto the wider European stage when Germany, staunch allies of the Hapsburg Empire, entered into the conflict. In turn, Serbia’s most powerful ally Russia, buoyed by French military support, ordered a full-scale mobilization. The British government, which was divided over whether or not to enter the fray, finally declared war on August 4, 1914, citing the need to retaliate against Germany’s brutal violation of Belgian neutrality. 664 Even though the invasion of France and the subsequent need to protect the English Channel was a much more serious strategic threat to Britain, “it was over ‘poor little Belgium’ that the British government declared war and mobilized sentiment.” 665

Curiously, the Great War came as a complete surprise to most Britons. When the news of the war broke during the August Bank Holiday Weekend, many people thought immediately of civil strife in Ireland, not to Britain’s involvement on the continent. Despite the shock, the prospect of war sparked celebratory scenes on the streets of London, as it did in many major European capitals. Behind the patriotic outbursts of enthusiasm, the majority of Britons were divided and ambivalent about the prospect of war. Public opinion oscillated between a pro-neutrality and anti-war stance. 666 Duty and sacrifice emerged as the principal motives that led many Britons to battle. For the nation’s aristocracy, the Great War presented the “supreme opportunity to prove themselves and justify their existence” in the wake of widespread Liberal reforms aimed at limiting their hereditary leadership claims. 667 Many middle-class young men also
embraced the impending conflict as an escape from the tedium of modernity and an opportunity to reaffirm their own masculinities in a great martial adventure.\textsuperscript{668} The romanticized notions of warfare as a “great adventure” or a “fine sporting occasion” soon faded away when it became ominously apparent that the Great War was not the gentlemanly, chivalric and sporting conflict that had been so euphorically anticipated by many Britons. H. G. Wells painted the most popular and apocalyptic picture of what a conflict with Germany would entail, when he described the Great War as the “war to end all wars.”\textsuperscript{669}

Following a series of botched initial offensives, the widely excepted “short” conflict spiraled into a war of attrition. Trench warfare and the deadly efficiency of modern armaments produced devastating results. The Germans lost a million men in the first five months. Similarly, Britain’s professional standing army was nearly decimated following a series of early exchanges, as evidenced by the tragic loss of nearly all of the 160,000 men that originally comprised the British Expeditionary Forces. In light of the appalling list of early casualties, the British military establishment eagerly accepted waves of volunteers. Half a million men answered Lord Kitchener’s cry “Your Country Needs You” by rushing to colors in the first month alone. Economic distress and mass unemployment provided the armies best recruiting agent. In fact, by December the majority of the British troops in the trenches were volunteers. Despite mounting casualties, British military planners still clung to the “short-war illusion” and the idea that the outcome of the war would hinge on one great, decisive battle. The belief that one breakthrough would move the stalled war machine continued to prove unfounded as
exemplified by the bloody stalemates at Mons, Ypres, Flanders, Gallipoli and the Dardanelles.670

As the Great War raged on, BOA chiefs conceived that Germany’s hosting of the 1916 Berlin games would be impossible. Predicting the seemingly inevitable cancellation of Olympic competition, the BOA adjourned the Ways and Means Committee’s efforts to garner the nation’s support. In spite of an additional appeal for funds, only £596 had been subscribed.671 Owing to the war, Britain’s Olympic leaders suspended the Proficiency Badges and Diplomas Scheme, the Modern Pentathlon Committee, and the various initiatives proposed by the leading governing bodies of sport.672 Under unworkable conditions, the BOA also postponed future committee meetings, deciding to sublet their offices for the foreseeable future.673 The reality of war accentuated the irony of Great Britain’s attempts to pursue Olympic excellence. While the nation’s youth sacrificed their lives on the battlefields of Europe, the need to reclaim lost British sporting prestige became an inconsequential relic of an earlier era.

Given the patriotic and pro-establishment tone of the BOA, a host of prominent Council members took up arms in the war cause including Secretary Captain F.W. Jones, Major-General Lord Cheylesmore (National Rifle Association), Captain Philip Collins (Hockey Association), Captain F. A. M. Webster (Amateur Field Events Association) and Colonel Sir Claude MacDonald. As products of the English public-school system, where sport was employed an instrument for character and military training, BOA members represented an elite corps of British World War I officers with strong sporting connections. Accompanying these prominent BOA officials were some of the nation’s leading athletes such as former Olympic gold medalists Lieutenant Wyndham Halswell
and Arnold Strode Jackson. As a large pool of Britain’s Olympic future medal hopefuls headed to Berlin, they did so prepared for an entirely different kind of contest than had been anticipated.

In other sports, the contributions of leading British sporting governing bodies and athletes proved equally impressive. In cricket, arguably one of the most popular British sports during the early years of the twentieth century, a host of high-profile stars led by England internationals C. B. Fry and the Indian prince K.S. Ranjitsinhji (the future Maharaja of Nawanagar) spearheaded the British war effort. The English RFU also led the charge, canceling all national, county and club games and urging all of their representative players to sign-up. Interestingly, the FA introduced a compelling recruitment initiative by offering fans the opportunity to sign up and fight in the war effort alongside some of their favorite football heroes. This scheme worked favorably. By the end of November, 1914, over 100,000 fans had already joined the war by the way of professional football clubs. The most renowned of the football battalions was the 17th Battalion Middlesex Regiment, more commonly known as the “Die Hards.”

As Britain’s Olympic preparations for Berlin grinded to a complete halt due to the prolonged war effort, the German Olympic Committee (DRAfOS) repeatedly insisted that the 1916 games would proceed as planned—the British belief that the Great War would be over by Christmas was evidently shared by their Germans antagonists. A number of prominent U.S. cities including, Chicago, New York, San Francisco and Philadelphia ignored German claims, submitting offers to the IOC to replace Berlin as the official host of the 1916 Olympic Games. Unlike some of his high-ranking colleagues, Pierre de Coubertin remained reticent over the issue. When he did comment
publically, the IOC president spoke defiantly, asserting that he would “not allow his hand to be forced.” Nevertheless, as European civilization continued along a path towards destruction, Berlin’s hosting of the 1916 Olympics grew even more unlikely. By the early months of 1916, as the British introduced conscription for all eighteen to forty-one year old males and prepared to launch another major offensive on the Western Front, it finally became obvious, even to the intractable Berlin organizers, that the 1916 games were doomed. Fearing the realistic possibility of the Olympics being lost forever, Pierre de Coubertin fled to neutral Switzerland and the city of Lausanne, where he established the IOC headquarters and worked fervently to keep the Olympic flame alive throughout the remainder of the war.677

Unfortunately for the BOA, the eventual cancellation of the 1916 Berlin games failed to override the damage caused by the failure of the £100,000 Olympic Games fund. This episode set the tone for future developments in the nation’s Olympic history. In the face of post-war austerity and continued British sporting parochialism, future British fundraising efforts were hindered by the negative impression created by the Berlin Olympic appeal. The belief that Britain’s Olympic leaders were promoting professionalism by attempting to raise such a prodigious amount reaffirmed the public’s suspicions that the Olympic games was a debased festival of athleticism—a modern French invention fronting as a purveyor of the nation’s coveted amateur sporting ideal. In spite of the best efforts of the BOA, the Olympic Games continued to occupy a position firmly on the periphery of British sporting interests. More alarmingly, as the Great War straggled into a devastating four-year struggle there was still every chance that Pierre de
Coubertin’s idealistic, utopian international Olympic movement would perish in the crossfire.
Chapter Six

“Olympic Games are an International Farce”

When the guns stopped firing on November 11, 1918, Pierre de Coubertin and the IOC turned their immediate attentions towards reviving the modern Olympic movement. In recognition of Belgium’s bravery during the Great War, the IOC awarded the Games of the VIIth Olympiad to Antwerp at a meeting on April 5, 1919, in Lausanne, Switzerland, the new administrative home of the Olympic movement. For Coubertin, the choice of Antwerp, a city recently liberated from German occupation and oppression, provided an ideal setting for the first postwar games. The Reverend Courcy Laffan, the long-serving honorary secretary of the BOA and a “noble ally” of Coubertin, pledged his unwavering support to the IOC’s decision to revive the cycle of modern Olympic Games. Writing in *The Times* on April 14, 1919, Laffan, a chaplain to the British armed services during the Great War, made a patriotic appeal to the British public. Even though the “time is short and the difficulties are great,” Laffan admitted, Britain must show “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.”

In the aftermath of one of the darkest and most violent epochs in modern history, the thought of returning to international Olympic competition appeared almost unpalatable. The sheer totality of warfare and the unprecedented levels of violence, as exemplified by the mass-battles of the Somme, Ypres and Verdun, plunged European civilization into a state of disrepair. The destructive capabilities of modern technology and weaponry claimed the lives of over nine million soldiers. A devastating 723,000
British servicemen perished on the battle fields of Europe, and a similar number were injured, many permanently, were still fresh in the minds of many Britons.\(^6\) The absolute destruction that characterized the Great War significantly undermined the importance and power of “idealistic” international movements such as the Olympic Games. The IOC’s mantra of promoting international understanding and heightening global stability through athletic competition had clearly failed to help stave off the Great War. With the national debt soaring at over £7.5 billion, ten times its pre-war level, unemployment rates reaching an alarming high and an economy locked in a recession, the idea of diverting the nation’s depleted energies and resources towards an event long-dismissed by many throughout Britain as a trivial and debased French festival of athleticism was met with widespread hostility and discord. Immediate post-war developments also proved less than conducive to an Olympic revival as Britain’s imperial sovereignty came under threat following the emergence of large-scale, newly-organized nationalist movements in Egypt, India and the recently acquired League of Nations mandate, Mesopotamia. Elsewhere, Russia was now led by Bolshevik revolutionaries. In Ireland the British government was embroiled in a bitter guerrilla struggle following the 1916 declaration of an independent Irish republic.\(^6\) In this socially and political challenging post-war environment, the raising of a British Olympic team for Antwerp seemed extremely inconsequential to many Britons.

**The Question of Sending a British Team**

the BOA’s prewar fundraising efforts, demanded that the Olympic Games be temporarily postponed to allow for a full post-war recovery both at home and abroad. Strode Jackson, a gold medalist in the 1500-meters in Stockholm, and Noel-Baker, a finalist in that same event, had both experienced the grim reality of life on the front-line. Serving in the King’s Royal Rifle Corps, Strode Jackson became the youngest brigadier—the highest field rank attainable—in the history of the British army. Decorated repeatedly for his heroics in battle, the former Olympic gold medalist returned from the trenches severely maimed, forcing him to retire prematurely from competitive athletics. Noel-Baker also served his nation admirably as a member of the Friends Ambulance Unit in France, Belgium, and later, Italy, winning numerous awards for his services in battle. Following the war, both were dismayed to observe the abject condition of many of the nation’s most prestigious athletic clubs. Unable to maintain their “staffs, pavilions and grounds” and “burdened with debt,” Strode Jackson and Noel-Baker reasoned that Britain must “put our own house in order” before sending a team to compete in Antwerp. “Olympic Games cost money, and our money is needed first for other things,” the two Olympians argued. The objections raised by two of the nation’s most respected athletic authorities served as a damning vindication against the IOC’s decision to revive the Olympic Games and the Reverend Courcy Laffan’s desire to see a British team represented in Antwerp.

The dilapidated state of the nation’s athletic clubs paled in significance to the wartime deaths of many of Britain’s leading sportsmen. By war’s end, nearly 28 percent of the young men who attended Oxford and Cambridge between 1910 and 1914 had perished in battle. The loss of such a large pool of future British politicians, scholars,
and leaders also had an enervating effect on British athletics.\textsuperscript{686} Since the revival of the Olympic Games in 1896, Oxbridge athletes provided the lifeblood of the British Olympic movement, winning a large portion of the nation’s medal haul on the track. The loss of prominent Oxbridge Olympians such as 110-meter hurdlers Gerald L. R. Anderson and Kenneth Powell, long-jumper Henry S. O. Ashington, as well as other fallen athletes from universities and athletic clubs across Britain significantly diminished the cadre of world-class athletes that the BOA could call upon if the nation decided to compete in Antwerp.\textsuperscript{687} Reflecting on the “terrible losses” that the nation had sustained during the war, Sir Theodore Andrea Cook, recently knighted for his anti-German propaganda efforts, reiterated calls for the temporary suspension of international Olympic competition. In a personal correspondence to Lord Desborough, a man distraught by the loss of two of his sons, Gerald and the acclaimed war poet, Julian, Cook maintained, “I do not see how we can contemplate international competition in any sport for some years to come.”\textsuperscript{688}

Still, as Britain’s most revered and longest serving Olympic official, the Reverend Courcy Laffan persevered in his attempts to see Britain represented in Antwerp. A perusal of Laffan’s frequent wartime correspondences with his close personal friend, Pierre de Coubertin, reaffirms his intense deference to the Olympic cause and his unwavering devotion to the British Olympic movement.\textsuperscript{689} In a renewed plea to \textit{The Times} on June 11, 1919, Laffan reiterated his belief that the nation owed it to Belgium to compete in Antwerp for their resilience and bravery during the Great War. The BOA honorary secretary cited a letter issued by the Belgium Olympic Committee, in which the host nation’s organizers revealed that they were “relying on the support of our Allies.”
Commenting on the Belgian request Laffan lectured, “I cannot believe that British sportsmen will turn a deaf ear to this appeal. . . . There could hardly be a better opportunity of expressing this feeling than by giving to the Olympiad of Antwerp the support for which the Belgian Olympic Committee asks.” Sentimental appeals for immediate British support failed to resonate with Arnold Strode Jackson. The Olympic 1500-meter champion restated his belief that the Antwerp games should be postponed until a full postwar recovery had taken place. “We shall be in a position to pay Belgium a far finer compliment two years later on,” Strode Jackson averred.

Debates surrounding the nation’s participation in another major post-war international sporting event also germinated prior to the Inter-Allied Games. The “Military Olympics,” as the event was more commonly known, was the innovation of Elwood S. Brown, a Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A) play leader assigned to the American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F) on the European continent. Brown established the Inter-Allied games in an attempt “to rebuild the world in the aftermath of the calamity of the Great War” and to celebrate the fraternity among the successful Allied nations. Held between June 22 and July 6, 1919, at the newly established Pershing Stadium in Paris, the Inter-Allied Games drew 1,500 athletes from eighteen nations. The defeated Central Powers (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey) were unsurprisingly excluded. Despite the initial interest expressed by Lieutenant Colonel H. S. Huntington, Chief Physical Training Officer of the British Army, and the occasional advertisement of the games within the mainstream national press, Great Britain did not send an official British team to compete in Paris. A team of English rowers, representing the British Army of the Rhine, did compete, however, winning first
place in the eight-oared shells event. As the official United States military report on the Inter-Allied games noted, Britain was among eleven other allied nations that refused the invitation to participate in the Paris “owing to the fact that their troops had already left French soil and were demobilized at home.” Reacting to Britain’s decision not to take part in the Inter-Allied games, G. E. Goss, the Y.M.C.A’s National Director of Physical Education in Great Britain, insisted that the nation must take part in Antwerp. “I firmly believe that to uphold her dignity and prestige . . . Great Britain should take her place with the nations in this international sporting event,” Goss asserted.

As leading British sportsmen and officials continued to debate the feasibility of reviving the Olympic Games so soon after the war, a more heated discussion arose over whether or not the defeated Germans should be allowed to compete in Antwerp. Debates surrounding the inclusion or ostracism of Germany from the Olympics began as early as 1915, shortly after the outbreak of war. Tensions quickly escalated following the publication of an alleged statement made by IOC President Pierre de Coubertin in the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* on February 13, 1915. Proclaiming the IOC’s neutrality during the war, Coubertin purportedly asserted he would not “deprive Germany the right to manage the 1916 Games.” Sir Theodore Andrea Cook, a prominent British member to the IOC at the time, reacted vehemently to Coubertin’s seemingly blind adherence to the principles of Olympism. In his position as editor of the country gentleman’s newspaper *The Field*, Cook spent the duration of the Great War documenting German atrocities in Belgium and crusading against Prussian militarism, an endeavor that led him to strongly oppose Germany’s future participation in international sport.
Germany’s unsporting conduct during the course of the Great War became a principal rallying cry behind the mobilization of British prowar sentiment. Although Allied propaganda certainly exaggerated the extent of German atrocities, the evidence clearly shows that the Germans systematically flouted international standards governing modern warfare. From the onset of the Great War, the Germans adopted the full panoply of ruthless methods, gratuitous violence, and outright terror against civilians in order to fulfill their own territorial and military aims.\(^698\) Belgium emerged as one of the chief victims of German brutality. Following the German invasion on August 4, 1914, Belgian civilians became the victims of mass executions, famine, forced labor, and deportations. The treatment of “poor little Belgium” became incontrovertible evidence to the Allied powers of German inhumanity.\(^699\) Meanwhile, the introduction of poisonous gases, flamethrowers, trench mortars, sniping and unrestricted submarine warfare as exemplified by the sinking of the civilian RMS *Lusitania*, represented further manifestations of “Hunnish” barbarity.\(^700\)

From Cook’s perspective, the Germans had not “played the game” as the British and international law, as outlined during the Hague conventions of 1899 and 1907, understood it. On April 15, 1915, a disgruntled Cook penned a detailed letter to the BOA chairman the Duke of Somerset and honorary secretary, the Reverend Courcy Laffan, announcing his intent to resign from the IOC. “I will never be a party to any organisation, at the present time, in which Germans are admitted not merely as colleagues in administration but as competitors with representatives of other countries,” Cook fulminated.\(^701\) The Duke of Somerset, who would also shortly resign from both the IOC and his chairmanship position on the BOA, declared his support for Cook’s position,
vowing that he himself “would never have anything to do with Olympic Games in which Germans were in any way concerned.” Taking a more moderate stance, the Reverend Courcy Laffan dismissed the possibility of Britain competing in Berlin, but failed to speculate on whether Germany should be barred from future post-war competition. While the continuation of war in Europe diminished any possibility that the 1916 Berlin games would ever take place, Cook proceeded to submit his official letter of resignation to Coubertin, acknowledging how “painful” it was to be divided with the IOC president “on a fundamental question of principle.”

Cook’s resignation from the IOC illuminates the hypocrisy of the British position. Claiming to uphold the purity of amateur sport, the British frequently condemned the intrusion of politics and nationalism into the sporting arena. Yet, as this incident forcefully illustrates, the British were the transgressors, violating their own lofty standards by transforming a sporting issue into a matter of far greater political significance. Cook’s intransigence further testifies to the limits of Olympism as a force for promoting international goodwill. Idealistically, Coubertin envisaged the Olympic Games as a forum for antagonists to put aside their differences in the name of sportsmanship and fair play. The British, however, were clearly unwilling to forgive and forget. This was not an isolated incident. In international football, the Home-Nations revoked their membership to the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), after the world governing body of football refused to banish the Central Powers from future international competition. Evidently, the overt politicization of international sport during the inter-war years had distinctly British roots.
Predictably, the conclusion of the war brought the question of Germany’s future participation in international sport to the forefront. As Coubertin acknowledged, the Olympic ideal of universality would not allow the IOC to prohibit German athletes from competing in Antwerp. Conversely, the majority of IOC members wished to follow the precedent set by the League of Nations by banishing the former Central Powers altogether. Fortunately for the IOC, a simple diplomatic solution arose. In accordance with Olympic custom established in 1896, the national organizing committees established to oversee the running of each Olympics were charged with the responsibility of sending out invitations. The IOC, therefore, did not have to force the Belgians to exclude the defeated nations; they just recommended that they were not invited. Accordingly, while the punitive terms of the Treaty of Versailles were waiting to be signed in Paris, the Belgians left Germany and the Central Powers along with Bolshevik Russia off of their invitation list for Antwerp. In fact, the ostracized Germans did not return to the Olympic arena until the 1928 Amsterdam games. Russia continued its stance of Olympic isolation, a policy the Soviet Union maintained, until it finally sent an Olympic team to the 1952 Helsinki games.

By October 1919, as proponents and detractors to the British Olympic movement remained divided over the nation’s representation in Antwerp, Baron Moncheur, the Belgian ambassador in London, asked the British government to officially accept the nation’s invitation to the forthcoming 1920 Olympic Games. The Foreign Office only formally accepted an invitation to the Antwerp Games by accident. Ernest Lebuman, an official nearing retirement, replied positively to the Belgian invitation instead of forwarding it to the BOA as was the standard procedure. By the end of November the
BOA received notification from the Foreign Office that they had inadvertently accepted an invitation from the Belgian embassy to compete at the Olympic Games in Antwerp. An error by a governmental bureaucrat thus committed the nation to be represented in Antwerp, infuriating the long list of critics who opposed an immediate revival of the Olympic Games and the participation of a British team. The Foreign Office’s handling of the Belgian request proved indicative of the British government’s general disinterest in Olympic affairs.

With the nation officially committed to compete in Antwerp due to a bureaucratic oversight, the BOA, under the guidance of their newly appointed chairman, Lord Downham of Fulham, a high-ranking Conservative MP and Minister of Information during the Great War, began to initiate preparations to ready British athletes for Olympic competition. On November 20, 1919, the BOA formulated a scheme aimed “at producing a team for the Olympic Games of Antwerp.” Aiming to reach out beyond the nation’s most prestigious universities and athletic clubs in search of potential Olympians, the BOA devised an elaborate athletic training structure to assist the various governing bodies of sport in Britain. Under the proposed guidelines, Britain would be divided up into regional divisions with each division containing a “Central Committee composed of representatives from governing bodies.” Seeking out promising athletes and providing them with appropriate training facilities, the regional Central Committees would be responsible for breeding the next generation of British Olympic champions. Despite the ambitious plans proposed the cost of establishing elaborate training schemes and transporting and housing a team of British athletes in Antwerp would prove to be an incredible undertaking. Drawing up an estimate of potential costs, the BOA’s Finance
and General Purposes Committee projected that the BOA would need to raise at least £30,000 through a public appeal to cover the nation’s Antwerp expedition. With only £550 in its bank account, the BOA’s request for such a vast amount of money would prove quite an endeavor, especially in a nation historically apathetic towards Britain’s Olympic participation and riven by post-war austerity.

**An Olympic Appeal**

On January 31, 1920, *The Times* announced the launch of an appeal for national subscriptions. Signed by BOA Chairman Lord Downham and his two predecessors, the Duke of Somerset and Lord Desborough, the appeal intended to raise £30,000, a sum *The Times* deemed sufficient to “meet the expense entailed in the representation of this country at the Olympic Games at Antwerp.” The signatories of the appeal declared that the money would also be used to “raise the whole standard of British sport” by increasing the number of playing fields, improving the health of the public and promoting class cooperation through sport. King George V graciously offered his immediate support to the fund by donating £100 and expressing his hope that “every effort will be made to ensure that the United Kingdom is represented by its best athletes.” Reiterating the King’s message, *The Field* urged the nation to demonstrate their support for the British Olympic movement by “subscribing generously” to the appeal. By setting a relatively modest appeal target of £30,000, the BOA attempted to remain immune from the charges of professionalism and athletic specialization that torpedoed their earlier attempts to raise £100,000 in preparation for the abortive 1916 Berlin games.
Predictably, with many Britons staunchly opposed to internationally Olympic competition the BOA’s appeal for public subvention failed to inspire the generosity of the British people, as total subscriptions lingered below £1,000. Britain’s post-war economic ebb appears a considerable cause of the funds stagnation. Despite an initial boom period after the war, the British economy soon plunged into a devastating recession. The carnage of the Western Front signaled the loss of Britain’s commercial markets in central Europe, Latin America and East Asia, notably to the United States and Japan. Heavy industries such as steel, textiles and coal naturally suffered the most as exports rapidly diminished, a trend precipitated further by the introduction of new electronic and chemical technologies overseas. With unemployment rates gradually escalating and post-war retributions looming heavily, the government was forced into retaining high war-time rates of taxation, a policy that limited the disposal incomes of many Britons. The twin governmental attempts to maintain free-trade and restore the gold standard failed to improve this bleak economic picture. In the face of a precarious inter-war economy, Britain’s Olympic fortunes in Antwerp rested largely upon public largesse.

The BOA’s appeal for national subscriptions faced stern competition from benevolent institutions and veteran associations who were concurrently spearheading fundraising initiatives of their own to combat the after-effects of the Great War. Among the most prominent of these fund drives included King George’s fund for sailors, a project aimed at supporting seamen’s hospital’s across the country, and the Veterans Association’s appeal for £1,000,000 to erect an “Imperial Memorial” in honor of the nation’s gallant dead fallen in the Great War. Lord Douglas Haig, Commander-in-chief of the British forces, also established a public appeal in honor of fallen British soldiers
during the war. Unsurprisingly, an appeal for £30,000 to train and prepare a team of British athletes to compete in international Olympic competition failed to inspire public munificence in the same volume as building veteran hospitals and memorializing the nation’s war heroes. An exasperated Reverend Courcy Laffan confirmed this truism, conceding that the BOA “could not put themselves in competition with Lord Haig’s appeal for the soldiers, nor with the appeal on behalf of the hospitals.” In a desperate move, the BOA discussed the possibility of lobbying politicians for much needed support.

On March 31, 1920, after consulting with a number of British conservative politicians sympathetic to the nation’s Olympic cause, the BOA announced the formation of a “House of Commons Committee” to assist in the procurement of the funds needed to send a British team to Antwerp. Sir Park Goff, Conservative M.P (Cleveland), headed the six man committee that also included the former First Lord of the Admiralty and noted Conservative politician Walter Long, and Sir Francis Stanley Jackson, Conservative MP (Howdenshire). Jackson, a future president of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), proclaimed that the nascent organization “would practically guarantee that the £30,000 would be forthcoming.” BOA archival records reveal that each member of the committee would be responsible for guaranteeing at least £250 towards the Olympic Games fund, an important contribution given the languid state of the appeal. In the following weeks, several newly appointed committee members, such as Alfred Bigland, Conservative M.P (Birkenhead), and P. J. Hannon, the Conservative Secretary of the British Commonwealth Union, were co-opted onto the BOA in order to give the House of Commons Committee authoritative standing in Parliament and within the eyes of the
British public. Meanwhile, in an attempt to win the support of the nation’s elites the BOA also commissioned a number of vice-presidents, the most notable of whom included conservative leader of the House of Commons and future prime minister Andrew Bonar Law, a move that further alienated the working classes from the increasingly aristocratic and middle-class composition of the British Olympic movement.721

As the conservative dominated House of Commons Committee endeavored to assist the nation’s preparations for Antwerp, the BOA received a generous £100 donation from the Marylebone Cricket Club, the supreme world governing body of cricket. British expatriates residing in Antwerp also expressed their generosity towards the nation’s Olympic efforts by providing unsolicited financial support. Establishing a special committee, the city’s British colony launched their own appeal for funds, donating 5000 francs to start proceedings.722 The Reverend Courcy Laffan revealed how “subscriptions for the British Olympic team from British residents in Belgium are reaching a very generous figure, and we trust the enthusiasm of Englishmen in their midst, and of our Dominions beyond seas, may in some measure compensate, in Belgian eyes, for the apathy they will consider so unintelligible in our own country.”723 These displays of beneficence proved to be a rarity as the Olympic Games fund continued to flounder. Discussing the possibility of lowering the public appeal to a minimum of £13,000, Council members threatened, for the second time since the inception of the BOA in 1905, that they were giving serious consideration to withdrawing from future Olympic competition: “If at least this amount was not forthcoming, it would be necessary either very greatly to reduce our representation, or withdraw altogether, in which case the BOA would have to ‘put the shutters up.’”724

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A Step towards Independence

As the existence of an enfeebled BOA hung precariously in the balance, Irish athletic officials issued a renewed push for Olympic self-representation. The Great War and the immediate post-war years were marked by a grave crisis in Ireland, sparked by militant nationalism and a heightened desire for political emancipation from Britain. Three Liberal attempts to grant Home Rule (1886, 1894, 1914) had met their demise either through Conservative and Irish Protestant opposition, or, in the last case, through the outbreak of the Great War. In the backdrop of the abortive Easter Rising, the militant nationalist group, Sinn Fein, won a landslide victory in the 1918 general elections. By January 1919, the seventy-three newly elected Irish MPs boycotted Westminster and established an independent Irish assembly, Dáil Éireann, in Dublin and declared a new Irish republic. Widespread violence and civil disorder ensued, forcing the British government to react to the escalating crisis. Following impassioned deliberations Westminster passed the “Government of Ireland Bill,” which proposed two parliaments in Ireland, one for the twenty-six predominately nationalist counties of the Catholic south and west, another for the six predominately unionist, Protestant counties of the north. Irish nationalist groups denounced the new measure and officially declared war, plunging Britain into a two-and-a-half-year bitter guerrilla struggle. Aiming to quell the ensuing rebellion, the British government deployed the vicious counter-insurgency force known as the “Black and Tans” to impose martial law in Ireland. The escalating violence forced some Irish nationalists (Cumann na nGaedheal, later Fine Gael) to favor the exclusion of Ulster and a treaty with Britain. The more determined nationalist groups (Fianna Fáil) forcefully denounced the pro-treaty party. Civil war ensued.725
In the midst of heightened nationalist sentiment, Ireland’s athletic leaders stepped up their efforts to secure the independent participation of the Emerald Isle in future cycles of Olympic competition. The *Freeman’s Journal* issued a patriotic rallying cry: “Even though the time is very short, 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.” Even the more moderate, unionist-minded Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA) appeared to favor the move towards sporting independence. At the IAAA’s annual general meeting, held on April 13, 1920, members backed a proposition to “secure separate representation for the country.” Hoping to build upon favorable public support, J. J. Keane, the long-serving leader of the Athletics Council within the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), spearheaded the move for separate representation by establishing the “Irish Olympic Council.” Comprised of GAA representatives and men with strong nationalist proclivities, the nascent organization held their first Council meeting on April 27, 1920. Under the chairmanship of Keane, the Council proclaimed that “the time was opportune and the necessity urgent for formulating Ireland’s right to participate as a distinct national entity in such world competitions as the Olympic Games.”

With the Antwerp games rapidly approaching, Keane sent a letter to Pierre de Coubertin to inquire about the possibility of an independent Irish Olympic team competing in the Belgian capital. Coubertin, keen not to entangle himself in an intricate and politically-charged issue, referred the question to the Belgian Organizing Committee. The IOC president did ensure Keane that the matter would be addressed definitively during the annual IOC session held in Antwerp over the course of the games. The Belgian
Olympic organizers, lacking the jurisdictional power to grant independent status to
nation-states, sought the advice of Britain’s Olympic officials. In the back-drop of a
bloody political and military battle over Irish independence, the staunchly conservative
BOA unequivocally denied Irish claims for separate representation. For many prescient
conservative observers, the breakup of Britain’s political union with Ireland signaled the
beginning of the end of the Empire. The Great War and the immediate post-war years
revealed the extent to which the sinews of an expanded Empire were gradually
weakening. An Afrikaner revolt in South Africa, French-Canadian anti-British
antagonism, Australasian criticism of British military leadership, revolts in the Near and
Middle East following the disintegration of the Ottoman and Tsarist Empires, and a Raj-
inspired push for Indian self-government offered a glimpse into the crises affecting the
Empire and the long-term trend of diminishing British power. Through the eyes of
Britain’s conservative Olympic leaders, a unified Great Britain and Ireland Olympic team
projected a veritable image of solidarity, tradition and power—a still intact Empire.

As Coubertin promised, IOC members discussed the question of Irish
representation during the annual IOC session held in Antwerp. Based upon an interview
with J. J. Keane, the Freemans Journal confidently assured its readers that the IOC were
expected to rule in Ireland’s favor: “Pending the official announcement, it can be said
that Ireland’s right to distinct representation has been recognized, and the conditions
attaching to this recognition will be known in a few days.” Again, BOA chiefs dashed
Irish hopes. On August 18, 1920, when the matter formally came before the IOC, the
highly influential Reverend Courcy Laffan led a British campaign to thwart Irish
separatist ambitions. The BOA honorary secretary, in cooperation with American
William Milligan Sloane, a noted Anglophile and Columbia University history professor, demanded that a final resolution surrounding Ireland’s Olympic status be suspended until Ireland’s future has been solved politically. Once again, the arbitrary and ambiguous standards employed by the IOC were in evidence, especially when considering that members acknowledged the ephemeral Democratic Republic of Armenia’s claims to separate representation.  

**Reviving the Olympic appeal**

With the sanctity of the British and Irish sporting union preserved, the BOA moved to propagate their Olympic appeal more aggressively. Despite a discernible increase in newspaper coverage, the appeal continued to fall on deaf ears. By April 29, 1920, only £1,739 of the projected £30,000 had been procured. Sir Theodore Andrea Cook tried to come to the BOA’s rescue by proposing a last gasp propaganda initiative. Serving as the editor of *The Field*, a chief organ of the British Olympic movement, Cook offered to launch an aggressive media campaign “for the purpose of raising the money required by the Council.” Cook, a prominent member of the BOA despite his resignation from the IOC during the war, estimated that anywhere from £30,000 to £50,000 in subscriptions could still be procured to send a British team to Antwerp. In order for the press campaign to proceed, Cook requested that the BOA raise £5,000 to cover the expenses of publishing the appeal throughout the British press. The proprietors of *The Field* offered to pledge at least £500 towards this sum and would afford “free space” in all of its publications. With time of the essence, the BOA eagerly accepted Cook’s proposition and set out to obtain the money needed to guarantee his services.
Various members of the BOA offered generous donations that totaled £1050, including a £100 contribution from the Reverend Courcy Laffan. With the bulk of the money still outstanding, the BOA called upon the House of Commons Committee to guarantee the remaining figure.738

Regrettably, at a weekly meeting of the BOA on May 27, 1920, the Reverend Courcy Laffan reported that the scheme of propaganda proposed by Sir Theodore Andrea Cook had “lapsed.” Given until Wednesday, May 26, to raise the £5,000 needed to ensure the services of *The Field*, the BOA lamented that the guarantees required to cover that sum were not forthcoming. Incensed by the collapse of his propaganda scheme, Cook immediately announced his resignation from membership to the Council.739 For a man who had dedicated the bulk of his life to the promotion of the Olympic movement throughout Britain, even in the face of widespread public apathy and adversity, Cook’s resignation at this particular juncture highlighted the turmoil that shrouded the BOA. Unable to raise funds to send a British team to Antwerp, and worse still, unable to even raise the funds needed to advertise the public appeal sufficiently in the press, the BOA was powerless to perform the functions for which it was original established. In a letter to *The Field*, a frustrated Cook demanded that the BOA “make an instant and decisive campaign of publicity.” The former captain of the British fencing team at the 1906 Intercalated games in Athens, admonished that the BOA’s “existence as the representative body of every great association controlling sport in this country” would be in jeopardy unless significant advances in the appeal for funds were not forthcoming.740

Captain F. A. M. Webster, recovering from injuries sustained whilst serving with the 2nd Battalion King’s African Rifles during the Great War, echoed Cook’s criticism of
the BOA in a condemnation issued on the pages of the *Badminton Magazine of Sport and Pastime*. Claiming to voice the sentiments of the masses, Webster angrily denounced the BOA’s “management of Olympic matters in this country,” and accused the Council of elitism by carrying “on their conferences behind locked doors” and “failing to take the public into their confidence until the eleventh hour.” Webster rebuked, “Not only is such secrecy bad policy, but it is bad business, because nothing can be made popular without publicity, and it is the art of advertising which the Olympic Council evidently does not understand.”

Reaffirming Webster’s opinions, Arnold Strode Jackson warned that the BOA was “out of touch . . . with modern conditions and methods.” Demanding an overhaul of the nation’s athletic system, Strode Jackson cautioned, “The Olympic Council must change it, or the Olympic Council must be changed.” Such criticisms reflected a renewed wave of opprobrium aimed at the BOA’s leadership in Olympic affairs.

Desperately trying to maintain its position as the overseers of the British Olympic movement, the BOA established an emergency sub-committee to “consider matters in connection with the appeal.” BOA member Lord Campden chaired the new committee and set out to personally drum up support for the Olympic Games fund. After consulting with various publicity agents and the management of the *Daily Mail*, Campden reported that none “were able to give any definite decisions to helping to raise the money.”

Fortuitously, another propaganda scheme materialized in the form of London-based press agent, Sydney Colston. For the seemingly modest fee of £1,500, Colston offered to serve as the “Propaganda Agent of the Council.” Although enthused by Colston’s assurances of garnering much needed publicity, the BOA decided to let the proposal “stand over” as the
amount was “too high for the Council to risk.” The BOA’s reticence was certainly understandable given the lack of funds it had at its disposal. By June 7, 1920, an anonymous benefactor with an interest in international sport mysteriously referred to as “Mr. X,” offered to put down the first £1,000 necessary to secure Mr. Colston’s services. Without hesitation the BOA voted to accept the offer, contributing financially to cover the outstanding £500. It appeared that the BOA had been offered a final reprieve.

As the BOA’s new press agent, Sidney Colston began traveling the United Kingdom trumpeting the appeal in cities such as Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham, the BOA also staged a public luncheon in the national capital with members of the British press corps in an effort to revitalize interest in the Olympic Games fund. Held on June 25, 1920, at a London restaurant, the BOA adopted a marketing gambit used by the American Olympic Committee (AOC) by inviting a high profile political leader, Secretary of State for War Winston Churchill, to rally support for the Olympic fund. In view of the continued failure of the appeal for subscriptions, the future British prime minister announced that that BOA had reduced its appeal target to £10,000, the absolute minimum sum needed to send a British team to compete in Antwerp. The decision to drastically reduce the initial appeal objective of £30,000 and to recruit an eminent politician to promote the appeal reflects the BOA’s attenuated position. Spearheading a late push to arouse public support, Churchill declared, “There was still time to give the United Kingdom a fair chance in the great international competition, but there was only just time left.” Churchill’s optimism, however, proved unfounded as the Olympic fund continued to linger at £1,855.
The failure of the BOA’s appeal for funds reveals a deeper, more pertinent, insight into British views of themselves and their place in the post-war international sporting world. During the inter-war years British governing bodies embraced a far more extreme policy of isolationism. In football, only one foreign team (Belgium) played in England during the 1920s. The other British associations, as the historian Peter J. Beck observed, “possessed more limited geographical horizons” viewing the annual Home-Nations Championship as their main priority.\(^{750}\) Although “splendid isolation” had long been denounced as an acceptable goal of British foreign policy, English cricketing authorities also minimized their commitment to playing international matches. It would take until 1928 before a nation (West Indies) other than Australia and South Africa were granted test match status to play against England—heavy post-war “Ashes” defeats to Australia likely heightened English reluctance to play foreign rivals.\(^{751}\) From an official perspective, such isolationist thinking had been fuelled by a belief in national sporting superiority and a strong concept of Britishness. However, when placed in the context of national sporting decline, Britain’s increasingly parochial stance can be viewed as a deliberate attempt to safeguard the nation’s sporting reputation from further damage and humiliation. In a fundraising pamphlet published prior to the Antwerp games, the BOA urged the public to abandon the nation’s increasingly parochial mindset by throwing their weight behind Britain’s Olympic campaign: “It is unthinkable that they [British sportsmen] should, from any insular interest or prejudice deliberately step down from joining in this great campaign for a cleaner and fuller humanity by refusing to take part in that Olympic movement through which, in so large measure, they have influenced the world.”\(^{752}\)
Governmental Apathy

Not dependent upon voluntary public subscriptions alone, Britain’s desperate Olympic leaders simultaneously courted the British government for much needed financial support. Previous BOA appeals had consistently been met by firm refusals, however, during the inter-war period the government gradually reappraised their historical non-interventionist position. The wartime experience had shown the role that propaganda could play in the pursuit of national interests. Post-war governmental reports from British representatives overseas reinforced claims that cultural activities such as sport should be taken more seriously. Although international sport was gradually brought within the remit of official governmental policy, the Olympic Games still remained a peripheral, low priority sphere of activity—a stance strengthened by the personal anti-Olympic bias demonstrated by certain Foreign Office officials. On June 30, 1920, following the receipt of a British request, the Foreign Office, despite committing the nation to be represented in Antwerp, maintained their apolitical role in international sport by formally rejecting an appeal for the provision of a government subsidy for the British team. Sir Eyre Crowe, Assistant Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs and a previously outspoken Olympic critic, denied the claim on the grounds that in his opinion the “Olympic Games are an international farce.” Gerald Villiers, a counselor at the Foreign Office, most virulently captured the British government’s perennial and deep-rooted aversion towards Olympic competition: “At the present moment, when ex-officers are starving in the streets of London, and men, women and children dying like flies of starvation and typhus in Central Europe, it seems to me somewhat anomalous to raise large sums of money to decide who can run the fastest or jump farthest.”
Angered at the parsimony of the British government Sir Theodore Andrea Cook and *The Field* launched a scathing attack, charging that “The Government, as is usual with our Governments, virtually compelled our Olympic Council to send a representative team, and then left it, without the slightest help, to compete against nations which were without exception assisted by subsidies from their respective states.” Writing in his memoirs years later, Cook expressed a similar sentiment, bemoaning the “handicap” enforced upon British athletes. Taking a more optimistic tone, the Reverend Courcy Laffan assured the public that despite being “left in the lurch” by the government, the BOA would proceed to “do everything that is possible” to ensure that the nation is adequately represented in Antwerp.

Acrimony and a fervent dislike of the Olympics aside, the Foreign Office’s refusal to offer financial support was also the product of an overburdened governmental budget. High unemployment rates, post-war retributions and a burgeoning social expenditure program that encompassed old-age pensions, health and unemployment insurance and a house-building subsidy, created immense fiscal pressures not conducive to supporting the nation’s athletes in international competition. Meanwhile, operating outside of the strictures of official governmental policy, certain British politicians were clearly sympathetic to the BOA’s travails. Alongside the members of the House of Commons Committee, a handful of preeminent political figures such as the Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu, expressed their unwavering vocal support for the BOA’s appeal for funds. As Conservative Minister of Agriculture Lord Lee of Fareham, another advocate of the British Olympic movement confirmed, “This is a matter in which our national pride, to say nothing of our international credit, is deeply concerned, and I
am unwilling to believe that British sportsmen will tamely acquiesce in the non-representation of their country.”\textsuperscript{764}

As the Foreign Office maintained their minimalist role in international sport, Britain’s Olympic rivals enjoyed the benefits of lavish governmental subsidies. In France the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appropriated 200,000 francs in an attempt to transform French military success into “invincibility on the sports field.”\textsuperscript{765} The governments of Sweden, Italy and Spain also recognized the importance of the Olympic Games by contributing generously to their nation’s preparations for Antwerp.\textsuperscript{766} Across the Atlantic, Britain’s most fierce Olympic rival, the United States, were accruing a formidable amount of money via public subscription, estimated at a little over $163,000.\textsuperscript{767} In light of their nation’s impressive Olympic war chest, the \textit{Los Angeles Times} boasted that while the British were “struggling against overwhelming odds” to secure financial support, Uncle Sam was making “giant strides.”\textsuperscript{768} The U.S. government also expressed its support for their nation’s Olympic endeavors, as Congress commissioned the use of an army ship, the \textit{Princess Matoika}, to transfer American athletes to and from the Olympic Games.\textsuperscript{769} The seriousness with which rival governments continued to approach Olympic competition clearly illuminates how international sporting events such as the Olympics were increasingly being embraced as a tool for national projection. Unfortunately for the BOA, the Foreign Office clearly stood alone in failing to take advantage of, or at least recognize, the political utility of the Olympic Games.
Deepening Woes

Alongside a flagging public appeal and a non-supportive government, the BOA plunged into an even deeper state of despair following the death of its chairman, Lord Downham. Suffering from influenza and pneumonia, Lord Downham, a representative of the National Skating Association on the Council of the BOA since 1906, died of heart failure in his home on July 2, 1920. At a weekly meeting of the BOA, members expressed with profound emotion the “serious loss which it had sustained in being deprived of his wise counsel and unflagging energy.” With the commencement of the Olympic Games just over a month away and still lacking the necessary funds to send a British team, the BOA endeavored to find an immediate replacement to fill the vacant chairmanship position. After unsuccessfully courting the assistance of Lord Ampthill, a founding member of the IOC and a former competitive rower at Oxford, members voted unanimously to appoint the Reverend Courcy Laffan as an interim-chairman until the conclusion of the 1920 Antwerp games.

In his temporary position, Laffan initiated a final push to garner the public’s financial support. Writing to the Daily Telegraph on July 28, 1920, Laffan declared that the BOA had desperately reduced its required sum to only £5,500, a fraction of the £30,000 originally requested. With over £3,000 already subscribed or promised, Laffan announced that the BOA required an additional £2,500 in order to ensure an “appearance in any way worthy of our leading position as a sporting nation.” In the weeks leading up to the games public subscriptions slowly gained momentum, a likely result of the various propaganda initiatives undertaken by press agent Sidney Colston and a generous £500 donation from British businessman Donald Macleod. Despite the indefatigable
efforts of Laffan and the BOA, the nation’s apathy towards Olympic competition proved unwavering as over £1,500 was still needed to cover the expenses of the nation’s Olympic expedition.\textsuperscript{775}

Regrettably, the brevity of funds at the BOA’s disposal meant that the nation’s governing bodies of sport were unable to finance the cost of their provisional Olympic training schemes. With a view toward reviving their ambitious pre-war plans for the 1916 Berlin games, the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) proposed the creation of Olympic Novice Trials, Public School Championships, County Championships, Home Nation international contests, and Official Olympic Trials. Again, the failure of the BOA’s appeal fund dramatically curtailed the AAA’s Olympic ambitions.\textsuperscript{776} Fortunately, the AAA mustered enough money to underwrite the cost of an Olympic trial, held on July 2 and 3, 1920, at Stamford Bridge in London. Other governing bodies experienced a similar fate. The Amateur Boxing Association selected an official Olympic boxing team merely on the outcome of one amateur and public school championship event. The Amateur Swimming Association took a more cost efficient route, asking clubs to forward a list of their best swimmers, times, and performances from which a final Olympic team would be chosen.\textsuperscript{777}

Financial privations aside, Britain’s Olympic chiefs were still able to select an impressive two hundred and thirty-four (218 men, 16 women) person Olympic squad. Despite the prodigious size of the British team the BOA did not send any representatives to compete in the archery, equestrian, ice-hockey, or rugby events. In this case of rugby, the English Football Rugby Union, at a meeting of on October 17, 1920, voted unanimously not take part in Antwerp in a deliberate attempt to preserve the sanctity of
The amateur code.\textsuperscript{778} The British Olympic squad was truncated even further by the noticeable absence of Irish athletes. In the build-up to the Antwerp games, a series of news reports claimed that Ireland’s leading Olympic medal hopefuls were threatening to boycott the Antwerp games in protest against the BOA’s decision to oppose the creation of an independent Irish Olympic team. Whether Irish athletes upheld their threat, or, alternatively, British athletic officials simply refused to select them, remains unclear.\textsuperscript{779} Either way, only a small band of athletes from the Emerald Isle, including water polo player Noel Purcell, a soldier in the Royal Leinster Regiment during the Great War, and cross-country runner Frank Hegarty, competed under the colors of the Union Jack.\textsuperscript{780}

The absence of a large pool of Irish Olympic athletes and the curtailing of Britain’s Olympic preparations failed to persuade the BOA to revive pre-war discussions concerning the formation of a unified imperial squad. The BOA’s reluctance appears particularly surprising, especially since the passing of the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act in 1914, granting full British subject status to the dominions, may have strengthened their claims in the eyes of the IOC. Nevertheless, the post-war decline of “Britannic nationalism” and the rising national and political assertiveness of Britain’s overseas territories, as powerfully captured in the West Indian scholar and activist C.L.R. James’ \textit{Beyond a Boundary}, ensured that a British Empire team would never materialize. The “mother country” and her white dominions did unite in 1920 (and twice subsequently in 1924 and 1928) to form a British imperial squad to compete against the United States in a series of athletic duals, and again in 1930 to establish the British Empire Games (later Commonwealth Games).\textsuperscript{781} As testament to the growing independence of the dominions, New Zealand successfully achieved Olympic status in the build-up to the
Antwerp games. Kiwi athletes had competed as part of an Australasian team since the 1908 London games but the formation of the New Zealand Olympic Committee in 1911 ensured that a small band of four athletes marched under the colors of their own national flag in Antwerp.⁷⁸²

**The Games of the VII Olympiad**

On August 14, 1920, the Games of the VII Olympiad were officially opened. After months of squabbling and internal dissent, British athletes arrived in the war-torn Olympic city of Antwerp. Remarkably, in the aftermath of the Great War 2,626 athletes from twenty-nine IOC member nations turned out to vie for gold medal glory, including Olympic debutants New Zealand, Portugal and Estonia.⁷⁸³ Symbolism emerged as a central facet of post-war Olympic ritual. In a move to reestablish Olympism as a powerful force for fostering international relations, the IOC, led by its founder and president Pierre de Coubertin, created a five interlocking ringed Olympic flag, signifying the union of five continents. The IOC also introduced an Olympic oath for competitors to be sworn prior to the commencement of each future Olympics. Marveling at the powerful symbolism on display within the Olympic Stadium, the *Daily Telegraph* rejoiced that the opening ceremony of the Antwerp games helped erase the bitter memories of the Great War by depicting “a world supremely young, buoyant, and laughing, and splendidly disciplined.”⁷⁸⁴

Unsurprisingly, in the backdrop of Britain’s highly publicized organizational difficulties, the nation’s hopes for success in Antwerp remained depressingly low. As the *Daily Telegraph* remarked, the “athletic might of England will not be revealed” because
our men have “nothing like the organization behind them like other countries enjoy.”

In an even more despondent review, Captain F. A. M. Webster opined that “even if we had the money to finance a big team, I do not think that we could find enough men, whose form is sufficiently near to Olympic standard, to justify their inclusion in a British side.”

To the surprise of a pessimistic British public and the experts, the nation’s athletes performed credibly in Antwerp. Gaining revenge for his surprise defeat at the hands of South African Bevil Rudd in the 1920 AAA championship, Albert Hill, a thirty-one year old railway-guard and former radio operator in the Royal Flying Corps during the Great War, led the British team by storming to victory in the 800-meters. Astonishingly, just three days later, in one of the outstanding performances of athletic history, Hill, under the guidance of Polytechnic Harriers coach Sam Mussabini, ran to a second victory in the 1,500-meter final. Hill’s teammate and Britain’s team captain, Philip Noel-Baker, came from behind to earn the silver medal in the same event. Britain recorded another gold-medal on the track as Surrey Athletic Club’s Percy Hodge romped to victory in the 3,000-meter steeplechase. In the 4x400-meter relay final, Guy Butler made up for his disappointing second place finish in the 400-meters when he anchored the British quartet to gold. In other relay events, Britain turned in impressive performances to secure the silver medal in both the 3,000-meter and cross-country team races.

Outside of the Beerschot Olympic Stadium, Britain’s Olympians continued to rack-up an impressive collection of medals. In the velodrome, Britain’s cyclists led by Harry Ryan and Thomas Lance won a gold medal in the 2000-meter tandem event. The British tug-of-war team, comprised of the City of London Police, also clinched an
Olympic championship—the last time that the event would ever appear on an Olympic program. Following back-to-back victories at London and Stockholm, Britain’s men’s water polo team retained their Olympic crown, beating host nation Belgium into the silver medal position. Welshman Paul Radmilovic, a record-setting six-time Olympian and four-time British water polo team captain, scored the winning goal with only three minutes to spare. There were further impressive gold-medal victories for Britain’s men’s hockey and polo teams. In the boxing arena, Britain’s pugilists fought admirably, claiming six overall team medals, including victories by middle-weight Henry Mallin and heavy-weight Ronald Rawson. The tennis tournament brought further British successes following Kathleen McKane’s and Winifred McNair’s victory in the women’s doubles final over fellow compatriots Dorothy Holman and Geraldine Beamish. Britain’s men also recorded a gold medal victory in the doubles event thanks to the efforts of Maxwell Woosnam and Oswald Turnbull. On the water, British boatmen sailed to two gold medals in the seven-meter class and Olympic monotype class yachting events, and claimed a further two silver medals in rowing thanks to the efforts of the Leander Club in the eights and Jack Beresford, a former soldier with the Liverpool Scottish Regiment during the Great War, in the single-sculls.788

In light of the privations that significantly hindered Britain’s Olympic preparations, the nation’s athletes won forty-three medals (15 gold, 15, silver, 13, bronze) in Antwerp, a slight improvement on their overall team performance at the 1912 Stockholm games. The British team finished third in the medal standings behind Sweden and the perennial champions, the United States—it would take over ninety years, until the recent 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, before British athletes would better their medal
tally in Antwerp. In reality, however, Britain’s fifteen gold medals paled in significance to the superlative forty-one gold medals claimed by U.S. athletes. The impressive overall team performances of Scandinavian powers Sweden and Finland, especially in track and field, further undermined traditional images of British sporting superiority. Undoubtedly the biggest blow to Britain’s leadership claims came in football, the last bastion of British sporting prowess. After back-to-back Olympic gold medals, the British team suffered a surprise first round loss to Norway (1-3), illuminating the game’s rapid progress overseas and setting the scene for further challenges to British football hegemony. Remarkably, as Britain’s sportsmen and sportswomen continued to slip even further behind their foreign rivals, there was no great media and public outcry and no gloomy forebodings about the decadence of British society as there had been following Stockholm in 1912. In fact, virtually all of the post-Antwerp media discussions centered on the question of Britain’s continued participation in future Olympics.

**A British Olympic Withdrawal?**

Even though the British media offered scant coverage of the 1920 Antwerp games, press reports focused their attention firmly on the purported scenes of unsportsmanlike conduct that transpired over the Olympic fortnight. Detractors of the Olympic movement voiced their disdain for the local Belgian fans who booed as “God Save the King” played prior to Britain’s victory in the water polo final over host nation Belgium. The British press further assailed the dubious decisions of the judges in the boxing and track and field contests. Similarly, in the football final between Czechoslovakia and Belgium, critics groused as Czech players stormed off the field in
protestation of some “questionable calls” by the ‘British’ referee, John Lewis. To the champions of the nation’s increasingly anachronistic amateur ideal, the athletes of the world did not play the game as the British understood it. The Daily Express confirmed in an angry polemic:

The Olympic Games have ended . . . in disgusting every real sportsman who has had anything to do with them . . . . The amateur status of the competitors has been as questionable as ever. For the most part they have been nothing better than hired gladiators, specially trained to snatch a particular prize. Once again, there has been no vestige of the true spirit of sport in the proceedings, and our contention that no credit can be got from taking part in them has been fully substantiated. It is to be hoped that British athletes have made their last appearance at this travesty of an Olympic gathering.

The Field dismissed reports such as the Daily Express’ as erroneous, claiming that “There was no ill-feeling, no unsportsmanlike conduct, no veiled professionalism in the stadium.” Some of Britain’s Olympic athletes also trumpeted this view, claiming that “ill-informed critics” were purposely spreading the belief that the “Olympic Games are not carried out in a sporting spirit.”

Unfortunately for Britain’s Olympic leaders the fire did not die down. During the course of the Antwerp games Sir Theodore Andrea Cook issued a statement on the pages of The Times demanding Britain’s immediate withdrawal from all future Olympic competition: “This country has made it perfectly clear that the whole movement which resulted in the modern revival by Baron Pierre de Coubertin of the Olympic Games has in its latest phases become entirely alien to English thought and character.” The long-time proponent of international Olympic competition reversed his devotion and urged the Reverend Courcy Laffan to inform the IOC immediately that Britain “will not compete in the Olympic Games of 1924, or in any subsequent occasion in the official Olympic cycle,
while the present state of public opinion in England continues as it is to-day.” Cook’s position signaled the culmination of a long and strained career working within the framework of the Olympic movement at both the national and international level. While his demand for the nation’s Olympic withdrawal can be read as sour grapes, a man aggrieved by the failure of his proposed propaganda scheme and his war-time resignation from the IOC, Cook had simply become disillusioned with the task of trying to spread the gospel of Olympism amongst an apathetic British public. The successive failures of BOA’s fundraising appeals and the unsupportive stance of the British government only served to augment his frustrations. Curiously, determined to prove his continued reverence for the Olympic ideal, Cook participated in the 1920 Antwerp games, claiming a silver medal in the literature competition for his Pindaric ode titled “The Antwerp Olympic Games.”

Rushing to the BOA’s beleaguered defense, interim-chairman and apologist the Reverend Courcy Laffan fervently rejected Cook’s calls for an Olympic withdrawal. While conceding that the BOA had failed in its attempts to raise sufficient funds, Laffan cautioned that “to interpret this as a national repudiation of Olympic Games is deliberately to ignore the difficulties under which appeals of all kinds are labouring at the present time.” Post-war austerity clearly hampered the BOA’s efforts, but the failure of a multitude of appeals for national subscriptions demonstrated that the Olympic flame was barely flickering in the hearts of the majority of the British public. In a second letter to The Times Cook confirmed this truism, citing the failure of the BOA’s fundraising appeals as an accurate measure of the “depth and sincerity of the objections felt by this country as a whole to the entire Olympic movement.”
In the coming weeks, Cook’s withdrawal plan gained widespread support. Reiterating their long held stance that the Olympic Games violated the true spirit of amateurism, Charles M. Pitman, Honorary Secretary of the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA), demanded the nation’s retirement from the Olympic arena. “Unless there is a complete reversal of rowing opinion in this country, Great Britain will not take part in any future Olympic regatta,” Pittman warned.\textsuperscript{800} Reflecting on their experiences in Antwerp, the AAA issued an equally defamatory report. The powerful English athletic body rebuked the BOA for the “unsatisfactory” and “adverse” travel and accommodation arrangements made for the nation’s athletes. The Admiralty, speaking in regard to the participation of the Royal Navy, launched a similar compliant. In a punitive ultimatum, the AAA warned Britain’s Olympic officials that they “must be in possession of ample funds by the end of 1921,” otherwise, the AAA would “consider the question of participation in future Games.”\textsuperscript{801} The AAA also focused their criticism on the IOC; an organization that they claimed was responsible for such egregious and unsportsmanlike scenes during the Antwerp games. The AAA called upon the Britain’s Olympic leaders to demand that the IOC be “reorganized and composed of men who have a practical knowledge of sport,” and one that has the “absolute control” needed to “enforce their rules and regulations.”\textsuperscript{802} Criticisms, discontent and threats of withdrawal from their own representatives and supporters seemingly plunged the BOA into a state of disrepair. The British Olympic movement had reached its nadir.

Working against the tide of widespread national apathy, the BOA would have been forgiven for throwing in the towel and declaring the nation’s withdrawal from future Olympic competition. Facing a £985 deficit as a result of sending a team to Antwerp, the
BOA was unable to circulate Council minutes or produce an official report of the games owing to the cost of paper. The BOA was even forced into canceling the lease agreement on their offices, and to scrap plans to host an Olympic presentation evening for British athletes who competed in Antwerp. More embarrassingly, future IOC president Count Henri de Baillet-Latour pursued the BOA repeatedly for over a year after the conclusion of the games for the payment of 21,175 francs owed to the Belgium Olympic Committee for the cost of accommodation in Antwerp. Surely the thought of Olympic abstention had never appeared more enticing, particularly since the next games were scheduled for a city in a nation that the British had long considered a haven of less than sporting behavior. Paris and France would host the 1924 Olympic spectacle; all the proof Britons needed that the games were indeed an alien affair.
Chapter Seven

“Olympic Games Doomed”

The immediate post-war years revealed that all was clearly not well within the British Olympic movement. The BOA somberly confirmed that they had been “ploughing a somewhat lonely furrow, and without friends in high places, without a chairman, without funds, and without a permanent official home from which to direct our activities, it can be said that the movement generally in this country is not in a very healthy condition.” The BOA stood at a decisive crossroad. With the award of the 1924 Olympic Games to Paris, in recognition of Pierre de Coubertin’s resignation as president to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Britain’s Olympic leaders faced the unenviable task of deciding whether or not to withdraw from Olympic competition altogether.

In his newly appointed position as a British member to the IOC, Brigadier-General Reginald J. Kentish, a British military commander and the founder of the National Playing Field Association (1925), called forth a meeting to determine the fate of the British Olympic movement. Held on November 7, 1922, at the Army and Navy Club, in Pall Mall, London, members of the BOA were accompanied by “certain prominent gentlemen” in sporting affairs such as the Earl of Birkenhead, a former Conservative Lord High Chancellor, and the 9th Earl of Bessborough, a former Conservative MP (Cheltenham). In an effort to ensure impartiality, the BOA invited a number of outspoken opponents to the Olympic movement including former IOC member Sir Theodore Andrea Cook. In a series of impassioned speeches, advocates and
antagonists made their cases for and against the nation’s continued participation in international Olympic competition. In support of continuation former Liberal M.P (Warrington) Sir Arthur Crosfield insisted that “Great Britain the mother of sport, and the pioneer of the principles of ‘playing the game’ had no right to divorce herself from the movement.” Crosfield, a millionaire soap manufacturer, then proposed a final resolution that “Great Britain must continue to identify herself with the Olympic Games.” In a demonstration of unanimous support, the nation’s leading sporting dignitaries pledged their full support to the preservation of the British Olympic movement, promising to “leave no stone unturned” in salvaging the nation’s tarnished sporting reputation in Paris.

Unlike the majority of their upper-middle class and aristocratic peers who trivialized and disavowed the Olympic Games as a faked antiquity or a fledging French invention that promoted professionalism and fostered international disharmony, the BOA was composed of self-proclaimed “true” Olympic apostles. The decorated administrative career of the Reverend Courcy Laffan confirms this truism. This coterie of high-minded gentlemen clearly saw merit in the humanistic mission of the Olympic movement and worked tirelessly to ensure a continued British presence in future Olympic competition. Their idealism reflected the pacifist tone of inter-war Britain. The majority of Britons fervently hoped that their country would never again be plunged into the depravity of full-scale war. In the inter-war years, peace and international cooperation became a desirable goal and an urgent necessity as expressed by British support for establishment of the League of Nations. Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, the nation’s Olympic leaders viewed the Olympic movement as a positive tool for bridging
international differences and heightening global stability. Famed athletic pacifist and BOA member Philip Noel-Baker captured this seemingly quixotic belief when he extolled the virtues of “Olympism.” The 1500-meter silver medalist and British team captain in Antwerp eulogized: “People in every race and climate are now being swept into the great democracy of sport, and that a new bond, a very powerful one, is being forged between the sport-loving peoples of the world.”

The determination of the BOA had been further influenced by a strong ethnocentric belief that a continued British presence was needed to educate foreign athletes on the true spirit of sportsmanship and to ensure that their vision of the ideals of Olympism was being upheld. Rooted in an imperialistic, paternalistic, and hierarchical public school ethos, the British sporting mission was principally one of teaching foreigners the rules of civilized conduct, the rules for “playing the game.” The continued representation of a British Olympic team in Paris would once again bring “lesser breeds,” to borrow from the imperial poet Rudyard Kipling’s vernacular, in direct contact with the nation’s coveted amateur sporting principles, which encompassed values such as probity, decorum and fair play. As South African-born and Oxford-educated 400-meter Olympic champion Bevil Rudd confirmed while pleading for continuation, “Other nations are anxious to learn and understand the higher kind of sportsmanship . . . so there can be no argument amongst our own people as to whether Great Britain shall or shall not give her support to the Games.”

From the perspective of the BOA, the spirit of how foreign nations played the game was important, but ensuring a continued British presence in Paris proved paramount. At this critical juncture, Council members clearly recognized that the
withdrawal of any of the leading governing bodies of sport would have broken up the *esprit de corps* of British athletics and threatened the very existence of the movement they were trying to preserve. In a conciliatory move, the BOA urged the AAA to afford them sufficient time to raise the money needed to train and prepare the nation’s athletes for the forthcoming 1924 Olympic Games:

> The British Olympic Council is of the opinion that if necessary funds, either in the shape of promises or subscriptions, or adequate guarantees, are in hand by Lady Day 1923 [March 25], the views of the Amateur Athletic Association should be satisfactorily met—If this should not be the case, the British Olympic Council would not ask the Amateur Athletic Association to undertake participation in the Olympic Games of 1924.813

Reaffirming their hard-line approach, the AAA denied the BOA’s request for leniency, and instead declared that they “will make its own arrangements in regard to financing the Athletic Team, should it be decided to participate in the Games of 1924.”814

Another major antagonist, the ARA, proved equally obstinate, refusing the BOA’s request to retract their decision to withdraw from future Olympic competition.815 In another desperate plea to win public favor, the BOA proposed a name change, to the “British Sports Association.” After circulating the proposal around the governing bodies of sport, to limited positive response, the BOA decided to abandon the seemingly frivolous idea permanently.816

In the coming months, Britain’s Olympic chiefs would take further steps to placate the nation’s leading governing bodies of sport. On March 22, 1923, following the AAA demands for an overhaul of the organizational structure of the IOC,817 the Reverend Courcy Laffan, recently retired from his long-serving position as BOA honorary secretary, and Brigadier-General Kentish wrote to Pierre de Coubertin to lobby for the formation of a “Committee of experts” to serve as a court of arbitration during the course
of the Olympic Games. Britain’s two IOC representatives further proposed that every national Olympic committee (NOC) should be made to educate their athletes on the “true principles of sportsmanship,” a measure aimed at eliminating all incidents that were contrary to the British ideal of sport. At the 1923 IOC Session in Rome held just two weeks later, Reverend Courcy Laffan and Brigadier-General Kentish propagated these very proposals. Laffan ensured Coubertin that he had received assurances from the AAA that their “opposition to the IOC would disappear” if the British proposals passed. After some initial hesitation, IOC delegates formally accepted the propositions and a jury d’honneur, an administrative framework for settling non-structural disputes, was established. The IOC planned to issue a statement to every NOC concerning the issue of sportsmanship prior to the commencement of the Paris games.

A “British” Fundraising Effort

With the AAA moderately appeased and the 1924 Paris games fast approaching, Britain’s Olympic leaders moved to place the BOA on a much firmer footing by filling vacant leadership positions and continuing to rally aristocratic affiliations and even royal patronage. Following the sudden death of former chairman Lord Downham in 1920 just prior to the Antwerp games, the BOA invited the 6th Earl of Cadogan, a Lieutenant for the 1st Life Guards during the Great War, to fill the vacant chairmanship position. Cadogan, the son of former Conservative Secretary of State for War, George, and older brother of Conservative Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Alexander, upheld the organization’s strong Tory tradition. The BOA also created a Presidency and appointed the Duke of Sutherland, the Under-Secretary of State for Air in the 1922-1924
Conservative government, to fill this honorary role. Most notably, on December 10, 1922, King George V agreed to serve as official patron of the British Olympic movement. The King’s sons, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York also agreed to take up the position of vice-patrons. The BOA also announced that they had secured spacious new offices at 166 Piccadilly, London; a far cry from the temporary one-room quarters loaned to them by the AAA following the Antwerp games. Remarkably, within the space of just over one month the British Olympic movement had risen from the point of extinction towards a seemingly stable and salubrious position.

With the immediate future of the BOA ensured, Britain’s Olympic officials rallied to secure the necessary financial support needed to reclaim the nation’s lost sporting prowess. At a meeting of the BOA on March 28, 1923, Council members voted unanimously “not to make a public appeal.” With the public’s attitude towards the Olympic movement at an all-time low, the BOA’s decision reflected prudent policy-making. Interestingly, the Appeals Committee, following the recommendations put forth by its Honorary Treasurer Lord Campden, decided to adopt a fund-raising initiative first introduced within the United States. By placing a levy on every town and city throughout the British Isles, the BOA reasoned that a significant sum would be “very quickly raised without calling on any individual to put his hand too deeply into his pocket.” As BOA guidelines revealed, the levies were apportioned based on the population of a particular area. Towns or cities with a population of 10,000 people would be responsible for raising £10; populations of 100,000 people would be called upon to raise £100 and so on. Promulgating the BOA’s new fund raising scheme, Appeal’s Committee chairman the Earl of Birkenhead, the incoming Conservative Secretary of State for India, sent out a
circular missive to Lord Mayors, Lord Provosts and chairmen of urban district councils up and down the country. In a passionate plea, Birkenhead called upon the nation to join this “whole-hearted endeavour to regain the prestige, which Great Britain formerly enjoyed in the world of International Sport.”

The presence of Britain’s most eminent and experienced patricians, boasting the most illustrious names in the land, exemplifies the aristocratic composition of the BOA. During an era in which the British aristocracy lost much of their prosperity, prestige and political significance, as precipitated in part by the passing of the Parliamentary Act (1911) and widespread social and land reforms, prominent elites such as Sutherland, Birkenhead and Bessborough and others such as Somerset, Westminster and Desborough that preceded them, turned to the British Olympic movement as an opportunity to demonstrate and reaffirm their hereditary leadership claims as benefactors in a cause deemed worthy of international repute. Meanwhile, given their own dwindling position of prominence in British society, the nation’s aristocrats felt an even greater sense of “anxiety” and “apocalypse” regarding Britain’s standing in the post-war world. In this context, the Sutherlands, Birkenheads and Bessboroughs gravitated towards the Olympic movement as a viable intervention against their own grave perceptions of British decadence.

Even though Britain may have been largely disarmed in the weapon of words following a drastic reduction in the governmental propaganda machine after the Great War, Britain’s Conservative Olympic leaders and aristocratic supporters launched a renewed cultural propaganda initiative outside of the strictures of official governmental policy. For many prescient observers, the wartime experience had reinforced the role that
propaganda could play in the pursuit of national interests. BOA Council member Captain F. A. M. Webster reaffirmed this truism, trumpeting the ability of international sport to transmit positive images of national power, leadership, and values to an increasingly global audience. “Successful, or even efficient athletes are the best form of advertisement for the country they represent,” Webster hypothesized. Unlike the immediate post-war games in Antwerp, where widespread austerity severely hampered the nation’s preparations, Britain’s Olympic oligarchs embraced the upcoming Paris games as an opportunity to translate Olympic success into proof of national vitality. As BOA president the Duke of Sutherland reaffirmed: “We are determined that Great Britain shall be worthy represented because it is as important that our prestige should be maintained in international sport as in international politics, commerce and the arts. A physically healthy nation is an object lesson to the rest of the world.”

Fortunately for the BOA, their attempts to restore the halcyon days of British athletic supremacy received a substantial boast as a deluge of levy payments began filling their coffers. The Appeals Committee rejoiced that towns and cities from across the country had collectively subscribed £6,451; a sum more than totaling the amount spent to send a British team to Antwerp. Aiming to build upon their initial success, the BOA recruited agents to personally visit every town and city that had refused to support the levy initiative in an effort to “interest the people in the movement.” The creation of a House of Commons Olympic Committee on May 1, 1923, bolstered the BOA’s fundraising efforts. Comprised of staunch patriots such as chairman Sir Park Goff, Conservative MP for Chatham, and Patrick J. Hannon MP, the Conservative secretary of the British Commonwealth Union, the conservatively dominated House of Commons
Committee set out to procure financial contributions from members of Parliament.\textsuperscript{831} Meanwhile, \textit{The Times} announced that Lord Willoughby de Broke, another prominent Tory MP (Rugby) with strong public school sporting ties, had assembled a similar committee in the House of Lords, and, collectively, the Houses would endeavor to raise £1,500 towards sending a British team to Paris.\textsuperscript{832} To the doyens of the BOA it must have appeared that the Olympic flame had begun to ignite within the hearts of the British public.

As contributions continued to flood the BOA’s headquarters, Lord Rothermere expressed an interest in assisting the nation’s Olympic fund-drive.\textsuperscript{833} Convinced that “Great Britain must at all costs be well represented,” the politically Conservative press baron made a sizable £1,000 donation towards the nation’s Olympic fund and offered the BOA free column space on the pages of the \textit{Daily Mail} for two months to launch a public appeal for national subscriptions. Following in the footsteps of his recently deceased elder brother, Lord Northcliffe, who spearheaded a similar fund-drive prior to the London’s hosting of the 1908 Olympic Games, Lord Rothermere’s munificence reflected his wider political attempts to promote British interests overseas.\textsuperscript{834} With donations continuing to arrive at an unprecedented rate the BOA reversed their initial decision, keenly accepting the opportunity to promote a supplementary appeal within one of the nation’s highest circulating interwar newspapers, with an average daily readership of over two million.\textsuperscript{835}
The *Daily Mail's Appeal for National Subscriptions*

On June 27, 1923, the Earl of Birkenhead wrote to the *Daily Mail* announcing the launch of a public appeal for national subscriptions. With £40,000 needed to adequately train and equip the British team for Paris, and with £17,400 already received in cash or promises, the Appeal’s Committee chairman adjured the public to help raise the remaining £22,600 before the close of the appeal on August 31. Lamenting the “sorry displays” of significantly under-funded and ill-prepared past British Olympic teams, the Earl of Birkenhead demanded that Britain must make sure that the nation’s athletes can do themselves ‘justice in the greatest contest in the world’.836 Aiming to avert another blow to Britain’s besmirched sporting prestige the *Daily Mail* echoed these sentiments, opining, “It is a case where the national reputation is at stake.”837

In the forthcoming weeks the British public actively rallied behind the nation’s Olympic campaign as funds were collected at a rate never before experienced by the BOA. In fact, by July 4, 1923, Lord Campden, honorary treasurer of the Appeals Committee, joyfully declared that over £25,000 had already been subscribed towards the BOA’s £40,000 fund raising target.838 In contrast to previous Olympic appeals, the BOA received contributions from a wide spectrum of British society, including the gun-room officers aboard the HMS *Malay* and some of the nation’s most prestigious football clubs such as Arsenal, Aston Villa and Chelsea.839 As with the great cultural institutions of the time, the most significant financial contributions towards Britain’s Olympic campaign came from wealthy industrialists and plutocrats such as Sir Malcolm McAlpine, head of public works contractor Sir Robert McAlpine and Sons, rather than the old titled and territorial elites.840 Even King George V made a gracious £250 contribution to the
Olympic fund. The *Daily Mail* also lauded the efforts of the “poorer men,” who unlike during previous Olympic appeals, are “coming forward with their donations.”

The initial success of Britain’s Olympic appeal soon began to reverberate across the Atlantic. As Major-General Henry T. Allen, executive officer of the American Olympic Committee (AOC), confirmed, “In England, everyone from the King to the kitchen police is becoming interested in the coming Olympic Games.” Bemoaning the efforts of his nation’s own Olympic fund-raising efforts Allen warned, “If England requires and can raise $200,000 to put her team in the field then it will be very necessary for the United States to arise twice that sum.” Reports revealed that rival European nations such as Sweden, Finland, Italy, Norway and Holland had prepared on “a much larger scale than ever before.” Similarly, supported by large governmental subsides, host nation France was “leaving no stone unturned” in its preparations for securing an Olympic victory. British attempts to appropriate the mantle of Olympic champion would face stern competition from the world’s most formidable sporting powers.

The deluge of funds inundating the BOA’s offices signaled a veritable turnaround in the fortunes of the British Olympic movement and even hinted to a more positive public attitude towards the Olympic Games. Primarily, the creation of a sound organizational structure spearheaded by some of the nation’s most revered political and social elites created the impression of unity and a collective national push towards reclaiming Britain’s lost athletic hegemony. The tacit agreement of some of the nation’s most vocal Olympic detractors, such as Sir Theodore Andrea Cook, not to arouse public animosities in the press further contributed to the creation of a climate more favorable to the British Olympic movement. The initial success of the Paris Olympic fund also
represented a significant shift in British Olympic policy. Learning from the calamitous Antwerp Olympic appeal, BOA chiefs discarded their myopic lenses and introduced plans for democratization by bringing a larger proportion of the British public into the Olympic fold. Unlike the 1920 Antwerp games fund-drive in which the BOA only advertised their appeal in a handful of elite, London based newspapers, the towns and cities levy program and the Daily Mail appeal represented a coordinated “nationwide” attempt to raise the required sum needed to train and equip a team of British athletes.

In spite of the unrivalled success of the levy scheme and Lord Birkenhead’s appeal, not all sections of the British public were willing to offer their support to the British Olympic movement. In a scathing attack, The Morning Post branded the Olympic Games appeal “a waste of money and a waste of time” and urged the public not to “subscribe one penny piece to such a fund.” Citing the purported failure of the humanistic mission of the Olympic movement, the elite daily broadsheet lambasted, “What international good has ever come from these games? Did they stay for one day the great European war?”844 In a similar caustic tone, the Manchester Guardian echoed their disgust of “‘stunt’ appeals and public subscriptions for the payment of the expenses of amateur athletes.” Dismissing the political utility of Olympic competition the popular daily tabloid mused, “It is no disaster for England’ if they lose at the Olympic Games because ‘Nations do not stand or fall by proficiency in football or rowing.”845 These attacks served as an evocative reminder to BOA officials that specific factions of the country still remained largely opposed to international Olympic competition and to the belief that sporting success provided an accurate barometer of national prowess.
Eager to eliminate the anti-Olympic sentiment so firmly entrenched amongst certain sections of the British public and media, the BOA held a meeting on July 25, 1923, at the Mansion House in London in support of their Paris fund-drive. Former Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, a close political friend of Appeal’s Committee chairman Lord Birkenhead, again made an appearance as a guest speaker in an attempt to rally interest in the BOA’s twin-appeals. Aggrieved by Britain’s humiliating past Olympic performances in which the nation only claimed “six” of the “sixty-five principal events,” Churchill pontificated that “This was not creditable to this country . . . the home of modern sport and the birthplace of nearly all the principal games played throughout the world.” Imploring the public for financial support the future British prime minister waxed patriotic: “There is nothing that our race cannot do if it really tries—but we must have the organization and the funds necessary to secure an equal opportunity for our men.” Cambridge University’s sprint star Harold Abrahams, who would play a leading role in the Paris games, reiterated Churchill’s sentiments, confidently assuring the public, “You get the money; we will do the rest.”

With the closure of the Daily Mail appeal on August 31, 1923, following its two month free advertising slot, the BOA began redirecting all of its energies towards the nationwide towns and cities levy scheme. Aiming to cross their fundraising threshold, Britain’s Olympic leaders drew up plans to expand their levy scheme to all towns and cities throughout the British Isles. BOA archives reveal that towns and cities collected their allotted levies through a variety of methods. In many cases a local sportsman or politician would rally the patronage of a few wealthy friends in order to obtain the required sum. In larger towns or cities where the apportioned levy was much higher, local
residents would form committees and with the aid of the local press, initiate an appeal for financial subscriptions.\textsuperscript{849} For instance, in Reading, the Lord Mayor and the popular local daily newspaper, the \textit{Berkshire Chronicle}, launched an Olympic appeal. Local residents, along with a collection of the city’s major sports clubs donated generously towards their £100 quota.\textsuperscript{850} Similarly in Hull, a committee spearheaded by the Lord Mayor and the Chief Constable also met their fundraising goal thanks to public benevolence.\textsuperscript{851} As towns and cities across the British Isles busied themselves trying to reach their levy targets the BOA cast their immediate attentions towards raising a team to compete at the inaugural winter Olympic Games.

\section*{The First Winter Olympics}

At the 1921 IOC session in Lausanne, Switzerland, members approved the formation of a quadrennial winter Olympic festival.\textsuperscript{852} Despite strong opposition from Sweden, Norway and Finland, representatives voted in favor of a resolution proposed by French Olympic Committee representative Marquis Melchior de Polignac to organize a winter sports competition under the patronage of the IOC. Winter-based sporting events were not new to the Olympic arena. In fact, figure skating had been included in the program at the 1908 London games, while ice-hockey made the list for the 1920 Antwerp games.\textsuperscript{853} Earlier attempts to institute a separate winter Olympics, however, failed to meet widespread international support as the Scandinavian nations sought to uphold their own sporting traditions and winter festivals such as the \textit{Nordiska Spelen} (Nordic Games), held sporadically in Sweden since 1901. Similarly, the United States opposed the initiative on the grounds that most nations faced a competitive disadvantage due to
unsuitable climatic conditions. The IOC’s plans to stage the first winter Olympics in Germany’s Black Forest mountain region in 1916 were abandoned due to the outbreak of the Great War. With Paris slated to host the summer games in 1924 and with foreign fears temporarily assuaged, the French Olympic Committee selected the glamorous Alpine ski resort of Chamonix Mont-Blanc as the setting for the inaugural Olympic Winter Games.  

On November 14, 1923, following the receipt of an official invitation from Count Justinien de Clary, president of the French Olympic Committee, the BOA announced that Great Britain would pledge its full support to the winter games by sending a competitive team. The British had a long affinity for winter-based sporting events such as alpine skiing which they had helped to develop and popularize. In fact, the British stood at the forefront of modernizing winter based sports. The world’s first skating club had been built in Edinburgh in 1742, while it was for the use of the British that the Swiss built the first ice rink in Davos in 1877. In the 1880s, Major W. H. Bulpett built the first Cresta Run for tobogganing. The British also played a significant part in the two and four men sledges used for the sport of Bobsleigh. Despite the nation’s leadership role, winter sports remained a badge of social exclusivity during the early decades of the twentieth century. Lured by the “stunning vistas” and “luxury accommodations,” hordes of middle and upper-class Britons had long been flooding into some of Europe’s most exclusive winter sporting destinations. The cost of travel and accommodation alone put the sport firmly outside of the reach of all working-class Britons, a claim that was probably true of all nations entered at Chamonix. Mindful of the limited number of qualified British athletes the BOA dismissed the nation’s chances of success in Chamonix, noting that
since only a “very small” percentage of the public were exposed to winter sports, Britain “cannot be considered as a winter sports nation.”

Determined to overcome this competitive disadvantage, the BOA charged the British Federal Ski Council, the British Ice-Hockey Association, the Royal Caledonian Club (curling), and the newly established National Bob-Sleigh Association with the responsibility of selecting the British squad to compete in Chamonix. In an attempt to limit costs, the BOA urged the governing bodies of winter sports to only select athletes who were capable of bestowing success on Britain. Predictably, given the long tradition of elite participation in winter sports, the first British winter Olympic squad, which comprised forty-five athletes, including six female figure-skaters, was dominated by wealthy public school and university “Old Boys.”

Held between January 25 and February 5, 1924, the Chamonix Olympic Winter Games, or the “International Winter Sports Week” as the event was commonly known at the time, comprised two-hundred-and-fifty-eight athletes from sixteen IOC member nations. Athletes contested a variety of popular winter sporting events including, ice-hockey, bobsledding, figure skating, skiing, curling, and speed skating. Female athletes had been restricted to only the figure-skating events. As the cradle of winter sports, the Scandinavian nations unsurprisingly dominated proceedings, with Norway topping the overall standings with seventeen medals. Exceeding the BOA’s expectations, British athletes performed creditably in Chamonix finishing in sixth place with a total of four medals. The nation’s curlers clinched the only gold medal of the games for Britain following impressive displays over Sweden and host nation France. British athletes recorded additional success in the bobsleigh event, clinching the silver medal behind
Switzerland. Britain’s primary bobsleigh crew, led by Captain F. A. M. Browning, a decorated British military officer and a former competitive sprint hurdler, proved less successful trudging home in fifth place following a serious crash during an early run. Britain’s only female medalist of the games, Ethel Muckelt, recorded another British success following her third place finish in the ladies figure-skating competition; an event that included Norway’s future Olympic and Hollywood starlet Sonja Henie. To round-out Britain’s medal tally, the nation’s ice-hockey team clinched bronze, despite heavy defeats to silver medalists the United States and champions Canada.

Surprisingly, British success did not end there. During the closing ceremony of the Chamonix games, IOC president Pierre de Coubertin awarded the Olympic prize for mountaineering to Lieutenant Colonel Edward Strutt and the 1922 Mount Everest Expedition team for the greatest feat of mountain climbing during the quadrennial period of the Games of the VIII Olympiad. Led by Brigadier-General Charles Granville Bruce, the team reached the unprecedented height of 8,320 meters, agonizingly short of the summit of the world’s highest mountain. George Mallory, a member of the 1922 award winning expedition, would again attempt to assent Everest during the course of the summer Olympic Games. Tragically, Mallory, along with his climbing partner Andrew Irvine, were killed on June 8, 1924. His mummified body was found seventy-five years later during a special search expedition.

As the Chamonix winter games came to an official close, the BOA reflected fondly upon their experiences in this novel extension of the Olympic program and pleaded for their continuation, noting that “It would be a great pity if, once they have been started, they are allowed to drop.” The Times, one of the few British newspapers
to actually cover the games, expressed similar sentiments.\textsuperscript{863} The paucity of media
coverage, combined with the elite composition of the British Olympic squad, certainly
suggests that the majority of the British public were unaware, or let alone even interested,
that the Chamonix games were taking place. In spite of being heralded as a success by
those who took part, the future of the winter Olympic festival hung in the balance after
the Scandinavian nations reaffirmed their desire not to see winter sports made a
permanent part of the Olympic program. Undeterred by foreign objections, Pierre de
Coubertin praised the purity of winter sports and expressed his eagerness “to see them
take their place in a definitive way among the Olympic events.”\textsuperscript{864}

\textbf{Onward to Paris}

As British athletes returned home following their respectable sixth place finish at
the inaugural Olympic Winter Games, the BOA refocused their attentions back towards
their principle objective: securing a British victory in Paris. Unfortunately for the BOA,
plans to ensure Olympic success hit a slight stumbling block as many regions of the
country proved increasingly unable to meet their levy quotas. Fundamentally, the success
of the levy scheme rested entirely upon the shoulders of a few individuals who
endeavored to rally support in their own local areas. If nobody assumed a leadership
position, or if the scheme did not speak favorably to local residents—as it failed to do in
many economically depressed regions of Britain—then the BOA’s levy initiative would
prove an abject failure. For instance in Newport, the \textit{South Wales Argus} lamented the
failure of local residents to meet the city’s £100 target, a likely product of a sagging
Welsh coal industry.\textsuperscript{865} Derby experienced similar difficulties, despite establishing a
committee to help procure its £110 share.\textsuperscript{866} For Sir Theodore Andrea Cook, the BOA’s inability to obtain the required funds provided overwhelming “proof that whether we keep the British Empire in the Olympic movement or not, the great public of England has never really had its heart in the matter.”\textsuperscript{867}

By February 25, 1924, as levy quotas continued to trickle in at an alarmingly slow rate, the BOA decided to take affirmative action by sending Brigadier-General Kentish on a publicity campaign throughout the British Isles. With the commencement of the Paris games less than three months away, the BOA grew increasingly apprehensive as to whether or not they would be able to provide the full subsidies allotted to the various national governing bodies of sport—financial assistance considered crucial to not only maximizing Britain’s Olympic performance, but also ensuring the participation of the AAA.\textsuperscript{868} Speaking at a publicity event in the north east of England, Brigadier-General Kentish appealed passionately to the on-looking crowd in an effort to stimulate interest in the Olympic Games fund. “There is real importance attached to the performances of our country if and when we are up against the teams of other nations,” Kentish sermonized.\textsuperscript{869}

In the coming months, as the official opening of the Paris games drew near, the BOA proudly announced the collection of nearly £27,000 in-cash through its contemporaneous fund-raising appeals—earlier projections for larger amounts were based on cash-promises that failed to materialize prior to the commencement of the games. In spite of a late downturn in the amount of funds generated via the towns and cities levy scheme, the Parliamentary and armed services appeals came forward with important contributions. Collectively, the House of Commons and the House of Lords raised over £1,000 amongst government ministers—the sudden death of Lord
Willoughby de Broke in September, 1923, likely stymied fund raising efforts. The armed services and police force collected a larger sum, estimated at over £2,500, towards the nation’s representation in Paris. British residents living in the Parisian French capital also offered a small £570 donation, thanks largely to the efforts of Mr. H. G. Mackie, H. M. Consul-General in Paris.  

The BOA’s success in securing a respectable sum ensured that for the very first time the custodians of the British Olympic movement were able to award sizable grants, totaling £8,299, to the various governing bodies of British sport. In light of the numerous criticisms lodged by the AAA following the 1920 Antwerp games, the receipt of supportive grants must have gone a long way to abating their threats of an Olympic withdrawal. The Amateur Rowing Association proved unmoved by the BOA’s fundraising efforts. In a bitter tirade, the elite governing body reaffirmed their opinion “that organised international athletic competitions to take place at regular specific periods, and the expenditure of time and money which such competitions must necessarily entail, are entirely contrary to the true spirit of amateur sport.” Curiously, in spite of their continued abhorrence of international Olympic competition the ARA grudgingly gave consent for British crews to compete in Paris. Failure to do so would have immediately ceded authority to their more democratic rival, the National Amateur Rowing Association.  

Reveling in self-congratulation, Britain’s Olympic leaders boasted that “nothing that your Council could have done to further the success of our teams had been left undone, and that all now depended on the performances of the men selected for the great honour of representing their country.”
Making the Great Britain and “Northern” Ireland Team

Backed by the BOA’s generous financial subsidies, the leading governing bodies of British sport set out to compose an Olympic team that would rival the world’s most dominant sporting powers. The AAA quickly put the money to good use, appropriating a number of training facilities throughout the British Isles such as the White City and Crystal Palace stadiums, and hiring the services of both full and part-time coaches and masseurs. AAA officials also scheduled a number of district and country trials, culminating in an official Olympic trial to be held on June 20-21, 1924. Following a rigorous selection process, the AAA announced an impressive squad that included two of Cambridge University’s brightest medal prospects, sprinter Harold Abrahams and 110-metre hurdler Lord David Burghley, son of the Marquess of Exeter and a future member to the IOC. A host of other Oxbridge stars dominated the make-up of the British athletic team. Supported by the Achilles Club, a sports organization founded in 1920 to assist “Old Blues” to stay in competitive shape, a troupe of world-champion-caliber athletes such as 800-meter runners Douglas Lowe and Henry Stallard, spearheaded the squad heading to Paris. Edinburgh University divinity student Eric Liddell, a Scottish international in both rugby and athletics, represented Britain’s best hope for a track and field gold medal in Paris following his superlative winning displays in both the 100-and-220-yard sprints at the annual AAA championships. As a devout muscular Christian and Sabbatarian, Liddell decided to forgo the 100-metres in Paris due to the scheduling of qualifying heats for a Sunday. Instead, the “Flying Scotsman” focused all of his energies towards the 200-and-400-metre events.
In their quest for Olympic victory, British selectors were unable to call upon the most talented sportsmen and sportswomen from Ireland. Following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the subsequent granting of Irish national autonomy, the Irish Olympic Council were awarded full recognition by the IOC on June 9, 1922, at the annual IOC session in Paris. J. J. Keane, the Irish Olympic Council’s inaugural chairman was appointed as his nation’s first representative to the IOC. After decades of heated political struggle, dating back to Peter O’Connor infamous flag waving incident at the 1906 Intercalated Games, Ireland finally achieved full independent Olympic status.

Predictably, given their firm opposition to previous appeals for independence, the BOA did not easily assent to the new national combination. Citing the fact that the six Ulster counties that comprised Northern Ireland were only provisionally part of the Irish Free State—they were be given the opportunity to opt out of forming a unified Ireland when the Anglo-Irish Treaty was officially enacted in December, 1922—Brigadier-General Kentish expressed opposition to Irish claims for Olympic independence on the grounds that the “Irish situation is still too uncertain.” Britain’s IOC representative proposed that a final ruling on Ireland’s Olympic status should be “referred to a later meeting” when the political situation had resolved itself. Nevertheless, following a prolonged conversation with J.J. Keane later that evening, Kentish surprisingly retracted his initial opposition, paving the way for the IOC to unanimously approve Irish separatist claims. The presence of the Earl of Birkenhead, a key figure in the signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and a personal friend of Irish leaders such as Micheal Collins, within the ranks of the BOA likely shifted the organization’s historically firm unionist position.
With the Paris games rapidly approaching the Irish Olympic Council initiated plans to select a delegation of athletes to compete for the first time under the colors of the newly proclaimed Irish Free State. The independent representation of athletes from the Emerald Isle sent the alarm bells ringing amongst Britain’s Olympic leaders. Fearing the Irish Olympic Council’s potential encroachment of athletes from Northern Ireland—the six Ulster states did eventually swear their allegiance to a British union—Brigadier-General Kentish remonstrated that “Ireland could not compete as one country.” Kentish expounded, “The Free State must compete as the Free State, a separate Dominion, and Ulster must come in with Great Britain.” The nation’s most devout Olympic apostle, the Reverend Robert S. de Courcy Laffan, fired a similar warning to his Irish counterparts when he declared that “the Irish Free State could not take any athletes from Northern Ireland to compete in the Games.”

BOA officials clearly recognized that in order to record an Olympic victory in Paris, Britain would require its most prominent athletes competing together under the Union Jack.

In spite of the selection of an impressive squad The Times mused that the “British public probably is not anticipating any great triumph” at the forthcoming Paris games. Such a grave forecast hinged upon the historically conservative and unspecialized nature of British athletics. “To be English,” so it was commonly believed, “was to be sportsmanlike and seemingly indifferent to winning.” During the inter-war years, however, the Victorian interpretation of amateurism came under an increasing attack, as both British and foreign athletes looked admiringly upon the United States as “the exemplar of modernity, technology, and progress” and attributed the nation’s dominance in international sport as the result of “rigorous and extensive training and careful
attention to efficiency.”\textsuperscript{884} The sudden emergence of Scandinavian athletic powers Finland and Sweden proved that the American system of athletic specialization had eclipsed the British system as the dominant global sporting model. Harold Abrahams best captured the renegade spirit of British athletes during the inter-war years. Under the guidance of renowned Polytechnic Harriers coach Sam Mussabini, Abrahams began a regimented and “Americanized” training schedule in his quest to overtake America’s Charlie Paddock, as the “fastest human on earth.”\textsuperscript{885}

Like Abrahams, Britain’s Olympic chiefs also appeared to disregard the old British adage, “sport for sports sake.” Through their multifarious fundraising efforts and their overwhelmingly patriotic rhetoric, the BOA was hardly reflective of an organization “seemingly indifferent to winning.” On the contrary, the BOA’s approach to the Paris games clearly illuminates the hypocrisy of the nation’s sporting ideology. In practice, the Victorian amateur ideal of not taking sport “too” seriously proved increasingly untenable in a global sporting context, especially when defeat was translated by foreign rivals as evidence of British decadence. As ardent nationalists firmly entrenched in the public school amateur sporting ethos, Britain’s Conservative Olympic leaders reflected this broader British sporting paradox. The tension between achieving Olympic success and demonstrating high levels of sportsmanship would soon erupt as the 1924 Paris games got underway.

**The Games of the VIII Olympiad**

The opening ceremony of the Paris Olympic Games took place at the Colombes Stadium on Saturday July 5, 1924. Watched by 60,000 spectators, the British team
entered the stadium headed by the pipers of the 2nd battalion of the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders. Adorned with white trousers, cream plated-shirts, straw-hats, and blue blazers bearing the Union Jack, the British contingent represented a “source of pride to all Britishers” as they encircled the Colombes track and past the box of French president Gaston Doumergue and a host of royal dignitaries including his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. Famed Olympic coach and founder of the Amateur Field Events Association Captain F. A. M. Webster, marveled at the BOA’s organizational efforts, gushing that the nation’s representatives were “better clad, better equipped and moving much more smartly than had been the case among their compatriots of pre-war British Olympic teams.”

The special correspondent to The Times, Sir Harry Perry Robinson, a British expert in U.S. culture, echoed Webster’s sentiments, rejoicing that “for the first time, we have something like a properly organized team.”

Interestingly, during the early months of 1923 Paris’ hosting of the Olympics hung in the balance as French troops moved to occupy Germany’s industrial Ruhr basin after the Weimar Republic again defaulted on the reparations payments outlined at Versailles. With the nation’s post-war economy in turmoil, French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré ordered troops to strip the Ruhr of its precious natural resources and industrial machinery as a form of remuneration. The French move backfired badly, triggering a financial crisis across Europe and plunging the forthcoming Paris games into a state of uncertainty. Fortunately for Coubertin and the IOC, exigency plans to relocate the games to Los Angeles were shelved after the French government appropriated an exorbitant 20 million francs to guarantee the successful staging of the Olympics in Paris. Nonetheless, the Ruhr episode soured France’s international relations with its allies, as
Britain and the United States publicly denounced French belligerence and continued to refuse a rigid enforcement of Versailles that would guarantee France’s security against German invasion.  

Despite the looming political tensions, the 1924 Paris games appeared to restore the Olympic movement to a position of international prominence following the austerity and depression of the immediate post-war games held in Antwerp. Located in Europe’s ritzy capital of culture, the Paris games attracted a larger roster of participating nations, including Latin American debutants Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico and Uruguay, as well as the new European states of Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia. The strong Latin American presence in Paris proved testament to the growing success of Pierre de Coubertin’s long held aspirations for Olympic universality. In the build-up to the Paris games, the IOC admitted eight new Latin Americans onto the IOC and witnessed the establishment of five NOCs in the region. With more than 3,000 athletes (2,954 men and 135 women) from forty-four IOC member nations scheduled to compete under the watchful eye of over 1,000 journalists from all corners of the world, the Paris games seemingly transformed the Olympics from a mere athletic sideshow into a truly global sporting spectacle.

On the track British athletes scored some resounding victories. Cambridge University student Harold Abrahams led the British charge, clinching the 100-meter gold medal in a world record clip. Abrahams, the younger brother of former British Olympic long-jumper Sidney, tried to repeat his remarkable sprint success in the 200-meters but to no avail. Exhausted by the strains of four consecutive days of competition, Britain’s first Olympic champion over 100-meters trudged home in sixth place. Compatriot Eric
Liddell, however, secured the bronze medal. Meanwhile, in “probably the most dramatic race ever seen on a running track,” as The Times described it, the “flying Scotsman” Eric Liddell, added to his medal collection by storming to Olympic gold in the 400-meters, smashing the world record set by American Horatio Fitch less than twenty-four hours earlier in the preliminaries. Liddell’s British teammate, Guy Butler of Cambridge University, finished in third place. The Academy Award-winning film Chariots of Fire (1981) later immortalized the achievements of Abrahams and Liddell. Additional British success on the track soon followed thanks to Cambridge University’s Douglas Lowes last-gasp victory in the 800-meters. Lowes’ national and collegiate teammate, Henry Stallard, the pre-race favorite following his resounding victory in the 1920 AAA championship, tottered home in a disappointing fourth place due to a serious foot infection. Remarkably, just two days later Stallard overcame his physical malaise to score a bronze medal in the 1,500-meters behind the peerless Finn, Paavo Nurmi, a five-time gold medalist in Paris.

In other Olympic sports, British successes proved harder to come-by. In the pool, Blackpool native Lucy Morton did manage to provide some further glory for Britain, becoming the first British woman to win an Olympic gold medal in an individual swimming event following her victory in the 200-meter breaststroke. Compatriot Gladys Helena Carson finished narrowly behind in third place. In the 100-meter backstroke event, U.S. champion Sybil Bauer beat Britain’s Phyllis Harding into the silver medal position. The rowing regatta brought additional British victories thanks to the gold medal winning students of Trinity College, Cambridge, in the coxless-fours. Improving on his silver medal performance at Antwerp in 1920, Jack Beresford claimed the first of his
three career Olympic gold medals in the single-sculls event. As the son of a Polish furniture maker, Julius, who rowed for Britain at the 1912 Stockholm games, Beresford would go onto dominate a sport renowned for its long-tradition of elite patronage.\textsuperscript{893}

The absence of British association football and rugby union teams dealt a further blow to the nation’s Olympic aspirations. In the case of football, the home-nations refused to participate as a representative side in Paris out of fear that foreign nations were promoting veiled professionalism. The growing trend abroad towards “broken-time payments”—monetary compensation to help defray the cost of traveling expenses—convinced the home-nations to stay at home in protest. Britain’s abstention reflected their wider struggles with FIFA during the inter-war period. Despite re-affiliation in 1924, following a four-year rift over FIFA’s refusal to exclude the Central Powers, Britain’s relationship with the world governing body of football remained increasingly volatile. Power struggles over control of the world’s game, coupled with contrasting definitions of amateurism, would eventually set the home-nations on a collision course with FIFA. In the absence of the two-time British Olympic football champions, Uruguay were left seemingly unopposed to clinch gold, beating Switzerland (3-0) in the final. Uruguay’s status as world amateur champions confirmed both Latin America’s emergence as a dominant force in international football and the steady decline of British hegemony.\textsuperscript{894}

**Chariots of Discord**

In the midst of seemingly benign and friendly Olympic competition, nationalistic rancor rose to the surface on an unprecedented scale. Hostilities first emerged during the rugby union final between the United States and France. Held on May 18, 1924, prior to
the official opening ceremony of the Paris games, the Olympic rugby final would serve as a prelude to the animus that marred the main events held six weeks later. In a heated contest, the United States surprised the home nation with a resounding 17-3 victory to claim the gold medal, much to the chagrin of the local French fans. The 30,000-strong partisan French crowd drowned out the action on the field by heckling their American opponents with “catcalls and curses.” Tensions reached a feverish pitch as free-fights between smalls bands of French and American spectators erupted in the stands. As French Olympic officials clamored to quell the ensuing fracas, the American flag was hoisted to signal a U.S. victory. Remarkably, the sound of the “Star-Spangled Banner” playing overhead was barely recognizable as local fans and even French security police continued to vocally express their disdain for their American opponents.895

As runaway Olympic leaders, the U.S. appeared to bear the full brunt of French hostilities as chauvinistic displays and unsportsmanlike scenes continued to occur wherever American athletes competed. In tennis, the U.S. sweep of all five events, led by Vincent Richards’ victory over local French favorite Henri Cochet in the men’s singles final, aroused further riotous scenes. Similarly, in the diving contests, successive American victories ignited the French crowd into action as they “threatened to throw the judges in the pool.” Even American swimming sensation Johnny Weissmuller, the man later cast onto the silver screen as “Tarzan, the Ape-Man,” was not immune to French condemnation.896 Elsewhere, chauvinistic outbursts continued to plague the 1924 Paris games; a far cry from the “Spirit of Locarno” that would temporarily soothe international relations just a year later. In the fencing tournament, a series of heated exchanges
between the two leading authorities in the sport, Hungary and Italy, led to an armed duel that left a Hungarian official and an Italian athlete severely wounded.\textsuperscript{897}

As far as the British were concerned, the most egregious scenes occurred within the Velodrome d’Haiver, site of the often troubled Olympic boxing tournament. Recriminations unfolded during a middle-weight quarterfinal clash between London policeman Henry Mallin, the reigning Olympic champion and one of the greatest amateur boxers in British history, and home-crowd favorite Rodger Brousse. After allegedly out-boxing his “novice” French opponent for three consecutive rounds, Mallin became the victim of controversial officiating as the judges awarded Brousse a surprise victory and a place in the semi-finals against Belgian Joseph Beecken. Infuriated by the decision, Mallin began to remonstrate with the Olympic officials by highlighting a series of bite marks that his French opponent had inflicted on his chest during the course of the bout.\textsuperscript{898} Following an appeal launched by British representatives, a jury disqualified the Frenchman for such a “grave offence” and designated Mallin the rightful winner of the clash. Unsurprisingly, when Mallin took to the ring for his semi-final fight, a large contingent of angry French fans stayed within the arena to voice their disdain. Amid “a storm of protest and cat-calls,” Mallin easily disposed of his Belgian opponent to earn a place in the gold-medal bout against fellow Briton John Elliot.\textsuperscript{899}

On the evening of the Mallin-Elliot Olympic middle-weight final, a new wave on nationalistic fervor filled the Velodrome d’Haiver as Argentinian fans lodged a dramatic protest against the officials’ decision to award the welter-weight gold-medal to Belgian Jean Delarge over their countryman Héctor Méndez. Drowning out the Belgian national anthem, Argentinean fans “screamed and shrieked and yelled” in protest. Fist-fights
broke out amongst the crowd as chants of “Méndez,” “Méndez,” reverberated around the arena. As gendarmes were called in to restore the peace, Henry Mallin and John Elliot emerged from the locker-rooms for their gold-medal bout. With the row still raging furiously in the background, Mallin out-boxed his compatriot to earn the gold medal, becoming the first man to ever successfully defend an Olympic boxing title.\textsuperscript{900} Regrettably, these were not the only incidents to occur inside the boxing arena. As the London \textit{Daily Mail} revealed, a “foaming mob” of Italians chased a British boxing referee, Mr. T. G. Walker, out of the Velodrome following a controversial decision made during an earlier bout.\textsuperscript{901}

Non-sporting factors visibly heightened international animosities. Most notably, British and American criticism aimed at France’s occupation of the Ruhr “exacerbated” an already tense sporting relationship.\textsuperscript{902} The special correspondent to \textit{The Times}, Sir Harry Perry Robinson, confirmed this truism, opining that every British and American competitor “started with five marks against him because of the Ruhr.”\textsuperscript{903} Even the appointment of the more conciliatory and Anglophilic French Prime Minster, Édouard Hérriot, prior to the commencement of the games failed to temper Olympic antagonisms. The bitter scenes of squabbling signaled a culmination of the strained Anglo-French relationship during the early 1920s. Alongside Britain’s stance on the Ruhr, the British government remained reticent over a formal military alliance with France, supported Germany’s cause for a minimum degree of rearmament, and also rejected French attempts to establish a series of independent Rhineland states.\textsuperscript{904} The interference of fragile political relations into the Olympic arena reinforces the widespread scholarly
belief that the Olympic Games serve as a microcosm of wider political relations between nation-states.  

**“No More Olympic Games”**

To the refined amateur sensibilities of some British sportsmen and officials, the flagrant scenes of chauvinism and unsportsmanlike behavior were simply too disturbing. On July 22, 1924, in an article in *The Times* mirroring a funeral epitaph, Sir Harry Perry Robinson pronounced the “Olympic Games Doomed.” Bemoaning the failure of the ideal that inspired the revival of the games of classical antiquity, Robinson charged that the Olympics “exacerbate international bitterness instead of soothing them.” The acclaimed British historian of American culture reasoned that before the Olympic Games can serve as a positive international force, “all nations must learn equally to regard sport and politics as two separate and independent spheres.” In an additional editorial in *The Times* published on the same day, the traditionalist daily captured the nation’s sense of outrage when a headline that proclaimed, “No More Olympic Games.” Recounting the nationalistic outbursts that marred the Paris Olympics, *The Times* fulminated: “Miscellaneous turbulence, shameful disorder, storms of abuse, free fights, and the drowning of the National Anthems of friendly nations by shouting and booing are not conducive to an atmosphere of Olympic calm.”

The intrusion of political rivalries into the Olympic arena came as a debilitating blow to the IOC, an organization that preached a mantra of separating sport and politics.

In the following days, a phalanx of British Olympic officials came to the defense of the Olympic Games. The Reverend Courcy Laffan led the counter-attack. While
conceding that “deplorable incidents” plagued the Paris games, Laffan urged the British public not to relinquish the nation’s leadership and civilizing responsibilities in international sport by withdrawing from future Olympic competition. “To teach all nations to ‘play the game’ . . . with cordial good feeling and comradeship between winners and losers, is the object of the Olympic Games,” Laffan contended. Britain’s most revered Olympic official clearly understood that the Olympic mission as a work in progress, a reality the Paris games forcefully illustrated. He cited the strong sporting bonds between the United States and Great Britain as proof that foreign nations could learn to “play the game,” at least as long as British sportsmen and sportswomen continued to provide instruction. As the Daily Express confirmed, “if we persevere, the British ideal of sportsmanship may revolutionize the world.”

The nation became polarized on the issue of whether or not Britain should withdraw from future Olympic competition. Advocating discontinuation, the Manchester Evening Post lambasted the politically charged atmosphere in Paris. “In their rivalry there has been enmity and in their competition there has been antagonism . . . . They have stirred rancour and animosity” the popular daily newspaper thundered. Similarly, the Spectator also demanded Britain’s departure from the Olympic arena on the basis that the games “are undoubtedly doing much more to exasperate international relations than to improve them.” From Sir Harry Perry Robinson’s cynical perspective, a British Olympic withdrawal would come as no great loss anyway since “England has never had any affection for the Olympic Games.”

Britain’s most fervent internationalist, Philip Noel-Baker, then the Cassell Professor of International Relations at London University (1924-29), emerged as the
leading vocal proponent of continuation. In a series of impassioned journal and
newspaper articles, the British team captain in Paris accused the nation’s Olympic critics
of spurious and sensationalist reporting. “These games have shown once and for all that
the Olympic atmosphere and Olympic traditions promote not ill will, but friendship, not
international friction, but mutual respect and admiration,” Noel-Baker retorted. The
future Labour MP and Nobel Peace-Prize Laureate for disarmament supported his own
tenuous claims by pointing to the example of an American javelin thrower who pointed
out to the Olympic judges that they had unfairly disqualified his British opponent’s
furthest throw. Former British Olympic 400-meter runner E. A. Montague reaffirmed
Noel-Baker’s romantic depiction of the Paris games by praising the “universal and
unstudied” sportsmanship on display. Writing on the pages of the Manchester Guardian,
Montague unequivocally rejected any alleged animosities as the product of a “hysterical
and misinformed” press corps.

On the one hand, the nation’s Olympic supporters appeared correct in their claims
that certain sections of the British media were keen to exemplify and sensationalize
conflicts and animosities between nations instead of publicizing examples of fraternity
and good sportsmanship. Aside from the obvious financial desire to sell more papers,
sections of the British media had repeatedly demonstrated an historical opposition to the
Olympic Games and worked tirelessly to discredit their utility as a harbinger of
international peace. Additionally, the American media’s refusal to support British calls
for the dissolution of the Olympics solidified the BOA’s belief in the sanctity of Pierre de
Coubertin’s quadrennial athletic festival. Labeling the British position as ungracious, the
New York Times downplayed the controversial scenes as a few minor “squabbles” and
praised the Paris games as a “splendidly contested athletic festival.” AOC president Colonel Robert M. Thompson also criticized British attacks on the Olympic Games as mere “propaganda,” a view shared by former AOC chief Gustavus T. Kirby. Such lofty idealism and apparent myopia failed to impress Britain’s Olympic critics. Despite Noel-Baker’s insistence to the contrary, Britain’s Olympic officials continued to delude themselves in the belief that sport and politics were two separate and independent spheres and that the Olympic Games was not a politico-sporting contests between nation-states. As Sir Harry Perry Robinson confirmed, “No intelligent person of any nationality can possibly have watched the course of events in the present Olympiad without being convinced that nothing has been generated except international ill will.”

In their *Official Report of the VIIIth Olympiad*, published months after the conclusion of the Paris games, the BOA dismissed the flood of negative media reports and ignored calls for a British withdrawal by pledging their full support to the future of the international Olympic movement:

Your Council feel that in spite of the criticism leveled at the Games by a small section of the Press, and by an equally small and misinformed section of the public, the action of the British Olympic Association in supporting the Games is justified from every point of view, and it is convinced that the duty, which great institutions such as the British Empire and the United States of America owe to the world, is to help the International Olympic Committee in the pioneer work, which it is conducting and which in a sense is still in its infancy, rather than to throw obstacles in the way, which mostly certainly be the case if either Great Britain or America withdrew.

In an effort to combat the new anti-Olympic sentiment sweeping the nation, BOA chairman the Earl of Cadogan proposed a “drastic reduction” in the size of future Olympic programs. A measure aimed at eliminating some of the sports more prone to overt nationalistic displays. British sprint king, Harold Abrahams supported the Earl of...
Cadogan’s proposal, noting that the larger the scale of the program, the “more risk that some of the competitors who haven’t been bred in the same school of sportsmanship as we have will go off the deep end and have duels, and all that sort of stuff.”

Subsequently, at the 1925 IOC Congress in Prague, British representatives lobbied their fellow IOC delegates to approved a reduction of the Olympic program for the forthcoming 1928 Summer Games, awarded to the Dutch capital city of Amsterdam. Although the IOC ruled against the British proposition, the Dutch organizers did later decide to downsize the Olympic program, staging one-hundred-and-nine events in fifteen sports as opposed to the one-hundred-and-twenty-six events in seventeen sports that were contested in Paris.

**British Olympic Decline**

Debates surrounding the future of the international Olympic movement and the participation of a British team redirected the BOA’s attention away from the unpalatable truth that an Olympic victory, so ardently desired, had eluded them yet again. In spite of the BOA’s impressive fundraising and organizational efforts as well as several victories in high-profile athletic races, Great Britain finished fourth in the overall medal standings behind host nation France, European minnow Finland, and overall Olympic champions the United States. Claiming only thirty-four medals, Britain experienced a significant decline from the nation’s forty-three medal performance at the 1920 Antwerp games. More alarmingly, the British team only included nine Olympic champions amongst its ranks as compared to the fifteen gold medalists in Antwerp. If cynics needed any
further evidence of Britain’s decline in the international sporting world, the overall medal standings served as damning proof.

In other major international sporting events, British performances proved equally abject during the inter-war era. Following a string of thirty consecutive men’s singles titles at Wimbledon, Britain’s leading tennis players failed to record a single victory between 1910 and 1924. During this period, British golfers won only two U. S. Open Championships, a significant decline following a run of fifteen straight titles. England’s cricketers lost seven of the last eleven Ashes test series against Australia. Only association football, protected by the Home-Nations relative stance of sporting isolation, continued to remain immune to the inexorable signs of decline. Even on the pitch, Germany, Italy, and the rising South American powers, Uruguay and Argentina, would soon mount a serious challenge to the decades of association football invincibility enjoyed by the British. The remarkable frequency of international sporting defeats in this era forced Britain’s governing bodies to increasingly cling to the vestiges of the nation’s anachronistic amateur ideal. The BOA proved a testament to this trend. In the build-up to the 1928 Amsterdam games, Britain’s Olympic leaders moved to defend the purity of amateurism against the rising tide of veiled professionalism and “broken-time” payments. This controversy would once again cast Britain’s Olympic future into serious jeopardy.
Chapter Eight

The Curse of the Shamateur

The years leading up to the 1928 Amsterdam games represented a period of remarkable change in the Olympic movement. After twenty-nine years at the helm, Pierre de Coubertin carried out his promise to retire from the position of IOC president at the 1925 Prague Congress. Under Coubertin’s tenure the Olympic Games had grown exponentially from a grandiose vision to a global mega-event, attracting athletes from all of the major continents. Through Coubertin’s ingenuity and the enduring goal of Olympic universality, the IOC attempted to expand the Olympic brand by adding a separate winter games. Coubertin’s plans to establish a Latin American Games (though it was not until 1951 that the Pan-American Games began) and African Games for non-Europeans (the *Jeux Africains* did not materialize until after World War II) were well developed at the time of his retirement. With rising media saturation, high financial stakes, and strong nationalistic involvement, the Olympic Games had fast become a sporting colossus. Eager to sustain the movement’s remarkable growth, IOC members elected Comte Henri de Baillet-Latour, a wealthy Belgian racehorse owner and IOC member since 1903, to an eight-year term to the office of president—only the third chief executive in the organization’s history.

Like the IOC, the British Olympic movement also experienced a leadership change during this period following the Earl of Cadogan’s 1926 resignation as BOA chairman. Financially insolvent and suffering from ill health, Cadogan officially stepped down in October of that year. Searching for a suitable replacement to fill the vacant
chairmanship position, the BOA shortly appointed George Kemp, the 1st Lord Rochdale, a former first-class county cricketer with Lancashire; a decorated British military commander during both the Boer and First World Wars; and a respected former Liberal MP (Manchester North West). The sudden death of the Reverend Courcy Laffan on January 16, 1927, necessitated further leadership changes. As a founding member of the BOA, honorary secretary (1905-1922), interim-chairman (1920-1922), and senior representative to the IOC (1897-1927), Laffan stood as Britain’s most decorated Olympic official. Without his tireless resolve and unwavering conviction in the power of Olympism as a force for international stability, the British Olympic movement would never have survived the immediate post-war years. Writing in his obituary, James A. Blair, vice-president of the BOA, recounted how “Mr. Laffan fought and won against almost overwhelming odds for the continued participation by this country in the Olympic Games . . . . His achievements were remarkable in face of the opposition with which he was continually faced, and of the enormous difficulties that continually arose.” At the 1927 annual IOC session in Monaco, Lord Rochdale succeeded the Reverend Courcy Laffan as a British representative to the IOC.

The death of Britain’s most revered Olympic protagonist signaled a new chapter in the British Olympic movement. The historically elite, Anglocentric, conservative men who dominated the composition of the BOA had gradually given way to a somewhat more heterogeneous and inclusive body. The appointment of Lord Rochdale, a former Liberal MP, as BOA chairman marked a blatant departure from the association’s strong predilection for politically conservative leaders. Reflecting the rising democratic sympathies of British life, the BOA experienced remarkable growth during this period.
By the beginning of 1927, the BOA, no longer a self-recruiting agency, boasted seventy-one “Life Members” and one-hundred-and-fifty-nine “Ordinary Members,” a sharp increase from the fifteen gentlemen who originally comprised the organization. On June 23, 1926, the BOA even voted to accept six new “lady members,” abrogating the organization’s strict patriarchal structure. The BOA also permitted the Welsh, following two decades of aggressive lobbying, representation on the BOA’s Council by appointing W. T. Lintern of the Welsh Amateur Swimming Association.

Unlike the unmistakably imperial, militaristic and Tory dominated organization of the previous two decades, whose principle objective focused on consolidating British sporting power, the new BOA proved far less nationalistic in its actions, ideology, and rhetoric. Accepting the reality of modern sporting conditions and heightened foreign competition, Britain’s new band of Olympic leaders suspended attempts to reclaim the nation’s lost sporting prestige. The rising politicization of international sport on the European Continent, as evidenced by the increasing role that the governments of Germany, Italy, and France played in Olympic affairs, in concert with Britain’s declining competitiveness, encouraged the BOA to embrace a far more traditional and rigid interpretation of the nation’s amateur sporting ideal. The quest for Olympic glory through athletic specialization, professional coaching, lavish training quarters, unified imperial squads, and exorbitant £100,000 fundraising appeals were cast into the annals of Britain’s Olympic past. In the case of the 1928 Amsterdam Games, the BOA announced that they were now no longer willing to even subsidize the various training schemes proposed by the nation’s leading governing bodies of amateur sport.
The BOA’s inhibition proved indicative of British foreign policy during this period. The currents of idealism, pacifism, and optimism during the inter-war years dramatically reshaped British political, military, and imperial ambitions. British support for a series of humanitarian pacts and organizations, including the Dawes Plan (1925), Geneva Protocol (1925), Locarno Treaty (1925), and the League of Nations, underlined the government’s growing desire for international stability.\textsuperscript{933} Despite remaining a pre-eminent naval and imperial power the British adopted a less bellicose tone, phasing out conscription and slashing military spending in half from their pre-war levels. By the late 1920s, defense spending accounted for only one-eighth of Britain’s gross national profit. Further cutbacks were forthcoming. Led by Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston Churchill, Britain adopted a “ten year rule” which constrained British military spending on the premise that the country would not be involved in another major war for the next decade.\textsuperscript{934} Even in the broader framework of empire, the nation appeared to be resigned to the diminishing trend of British power, influence, and ambition. At the 1926 Imperial Conference, the government signed the \textit{Balfour Declaration}, establishing the principle that Britain’s white dominions were “autonomous communities . . . equal in status . . . though united by a common allegiance to the crown”—a move that provisionally laid the constitutional framework for the establishment of the Commonwealth. Elsewhere, anti-colonist movements raged in China and Egypt, the government granted indirect rule to the Sudan and Tanganyika (Tanzania), and Lord Irwing, the Viceroy of India, announced his vision of an eventual evolution to dominion status for the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{935}

Back within the Olympic fold, the BOA’s fundraising efforts for the Amsterdam games illustrated the organization’s less ambitious approach. On May 25, 1927, the Earl
of Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, issued a nationwide press release calling upon the British public to help raise £30,000, a sum needed to underwrite the nation’s Olympic campaign. Unlike previous fundraising announcements, which were laden with patriotic rhetoric and grave forebodings about the decline of British athletic supremacy, the Earl of Birkenhead took a far more moderate tone, reassuring the public that the money raised would be used strictly for ensuring that Britain’s athletes were “properly equipped, housed and fed,” and to enable the BOA to “reciprocate hospitality” with their foreign competitors.\footnote{936} Shifting their priorities away from achieving Olympic victory, the BOA finally acknowledged the unfortunate truism that Britain had been supplanted as the leader of modern sport. The British, no longer leaders on the field, were still determined to ensure that they remained leaders off it by asserting their authority within the framework of the international Olympic movement, even as the death of the Reverend Courcy Laffan and the retirement of the passionate Anglophile Pierre de Coubertin significantly diminished British influence within the IOC. Britain’s leadership claims were soon put to the test when the IOC’s strict amateur code came under serious assault in the months leading up to the Amsterdam games.

**The Broken–Time Controversy**

On August 8, 1927, the BOA’s fundraising initiatives were dealt a grave blow following the IOC Executive Committee’s decision to award broken-time payments to amateur football players during the 1928 Amsterdam games.\footnote{937} The Executive Committee’s ruling signaled a blatant departure from the British designed rules of amateurism laid down at the 1925 IOC Congress in Prague, where members granted
permission to international federations to enforce their own amateur definitions on the condition that all athletes “must not be a professional in any branch of sport; must not have been reinstated as an amateur after knowingly becoming a professional; and must not have received compensation for lost salaries.” Such a dramatic breach in the IOC’s amateur code was the result of a Dutch and Belgian threat, made on June 5, 1927, during the annual FIFA Congress in Helsingfors, to boycott the Amsterdam Olympic football tournament unless the IOC recognizes a FIFA ruling that grants all affiliated national associations permission to award compensation for lost earnings. Forced into a seemingly untenable position, the Executive Committee conceded to FIFA’s demands on the condition that monetary payments “will be placed in the hands of the employers, the athletes having no direct contact with any compensation for lost salary.”

The practice of reimbursing amateur football players had taken place openly but without sanction at the 1924 Paris games; hence Britain’s noticeable abstention from the football tournament and the more stringent amateur regulations imposed after the Paris games at the 1925 Prague Olympic Congress. Under existing guidelines, a football player whose employer generously agreed to pay him his full salary while he competed was considered a fully fledged “amateur.” If on the other hand, his employer ceased to pay him his salary, and he received it from the national football association he represented instead, that player was considered a “professional.” The Executive Committee’s ruling removed this apparent inequity by granting national football associations permission to reimburse employers for the money they paid out in salaries. The authorization of broken-time payments not only contravened the IOC’s rules on amateurism, but it also officially sanctioned a practice long considered anathema in Britain.
News of the ruling triggered a cascade of criticism in British sporting circles. In a private correspondence to IOC president Comte Baillet Latour, Lord Rochdale demanded to know “what powers the Executive Committee have” to overturn a ruling passed by an IOC Congress? “By all our English ideas such men are just professionals,” the newly appointed BOA chairman fumed. Surprisingly, the Star, a popular working-class daily and chronicler of professional sport took a more combative tone, proposing that Britain be “left out of the Olympic Games at Amsterdam next year . . . because of her regard for an honest, clear-cut status for athletes and sportsmen who are amateurs.” Dominion sporting officials also coalesced against the Executive Committee’s ruling. James “Pa” Taylor, the President of the Australian Olympic Federation, warned that unless the Executive Committee’s ruling is immediately overturned, Australia “will decline to send competitors to Amsterdam.” In the wake of the bitter fall-out from the 1924 Paris games, the Executive Committee’s concession appeared to deliver a death knell to the British Olympic movement. BOA Secretary Evan A. Hunter, a former Oxford University and Scottish 400-meter runner, confirmed dourly: the “decision to allow compensation for lost time in football has done a tremendous amount of harm to the Olympic movement in this country.”

The IOC Executive Committee’s ruling was indicative of a gradual loosening of amateur restraints during the inter-war period. At its annual Congress in 1927, the Union Cycliste Internationale sparked controversy by deciding that their forthcoming World Road Championship would be open to both amateurs and professionals alike—a decision that forced Britain’s leading amateur road racers to abstain. Similarly, the International Lawn Tennis Federation had aggressively lobbied the IOC Executive Committee to grant
reinstated amateurs permission to compete in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games after knowingly becoming professionals. As testament to the Executive Committee’s inconsistency, members ruled against the proposition on the grounds that they were “obliged to respect the rules of qualification voted by the Congress of Prague in 1925.”

Aligned with the rising prevalence of monetary compensation to “shamateur” football players on the European Continent, British sporting officials clearly perceived serious threats to the sanctity of amateur sport. Theodore Andrea Cook, a former Olympic advocate turned antagonist, confirmed such fears when he called upon Britain’s sporting leaders to insist upon a “clear and constant demarcation” between amateurism and professionalism. Cook warned that failure to do so will see “the old form of sport that made England what she is . . . perish.”

As Cook’s comments indicated, the award of broken-time payments violated all that was sacrosanct to British amateurism. F. J. Wall, the long-serving secretary of the Football Association (FA) and an inaugural member of the BOA, acknowledged this fact, viewing the Executive Committee’s decision as “a breakaway from the old traditions on which British sport was founded.” Wall maintained that “Under the altered conditions the United Kingdom cannot be represented in any branch of sport in the Games at Amsterdam.” The Athletic News supported calls for a national Olympic withdrawal “rather than permit this thin end of the wedge to spoil the tone of the Games and imperil the healthy control of amateurism within the British Isles.” In a similar vein, the Sporting Life favored a boycott by British athletes in Amsterdam to protest the IOC Executive Committee’s decision to convert the “greatest exclusively amateur gathering of athletes in the world . . . into a semi-professional meeting.”
condemnation, a few isolated voices spoke out in favor of the IOC’s decision. George Nicol, a former AAA quarter-mile champion and member of the more progressively-minded Polytechnic Harriers Athletic Club, celebrated the introduction of an indemnity for lost earnings as “recognition of the increasingly democratic nature of amateur sport all over the world.” Nicol reasoned, “It is merely another step away from an ideal which is no longer practicable so far as international sport is concerned.”

Regardless of Nicol’s more enlightened position, the British public and media viewed the introduction of broken-time payments for footballers as the first step on the nefarious path towards flown-blown professionalism. As the country gentlemen’s newspaper *The Field* presaged, “If payment for part time is recognised in Association Football . . . similar payments will inevitably be made in connection with other games and sports.” Britain’s own recent sporting history had shown that once concessions were made and the amateur seal was penetrated, it was impossible to withstand the inexorable forces of professionalism. Association football provided compelling testimony to this fact. The growing prevalence of northern amateur clubs awarding excessive broken-time payments to their players, particularly those recruited from Scotland, eventually forced the FA to recognize professionalism in 1885. The Scottish Football Association bowed with the wind and made a similar concession in 1893. Despite the Rugby Football Union’s (RFU) more defiant stance, twenty-two leading northern clubs left the RFU in 1895 to form the Northern Union, which unlike the national body did allow an indemnity for lost earnings. The establishment of the Northern Union created an irreconcilable schism in the sport that led to the creation of rugby league.
spectatorship and growing commercialization fuelled the emergence of professionalism in a host of other British sports including, horse-racing, golf, and athletics.\textsuperscript{954}

British opposition to broken-time payments and subsequent support for an Olympic withdrawal left the nation open to charges of hypocrisy from abroad. Writing in \textit{The Times} Philip Noel-Baker revealed how “foreign critics believe that we are in no position to throw stones, because our own games here are by no means free from ‘shamateurism.’”\textsuperscript{955} Foreign suspicions proved on the mark as English county cricket was riddled with veiled professionalism. In spite of a clear distinction between gentlemen-amateur and professional players, “shamateurism” prevailed in the form of player testimonials, nominal employment as club secretaries, and monetary reimbursements. Even Dr. W. G. Grace, the greatest gentleman amateur in the game’s history, earned a small fortune from his cricketing exploits. This veiled practice also proved ubiquitous in rugby union, national hunt racing, cycling, and track and field.\textsuperscript{956} Ignoring their own double-standards the British continued to insist upon the most stringent interpretation of Olympic amateurism. The award of the 1932 Olympic Games to Los Angeles heightened British fears that broken-time payments would soon be introduced to all Olympic sports in order to off-set greater travel costs to the distant North American pacific coast location, as well as a more prolonged period away from the workplace.\textsuperscript{957} The potential for unscrupulous totalitarian regimes to exploit the broken-time system by financing full-time professionalism under the guise of legitimate amateurism compounded British trepidations. The Nazi, Fascist and Communist sport systems of the proceeding decades would prove that British concerns were justified.\textsuperscript{958}
Curiously, the Executive Committee’s decision to award broken-time payments to footballers aroused British suspicions that the IOC had been strongly influenced by overriding pecuniary motives. After all, the association football tournament, the de-facto World Amateur Championship, had long established itself as the “greatest source of revenue” at the Olympic Games. At the 1924 Paris Olympiad, the football tournament yielded more in gate money than the entire athletic program, and even exceeded the aggregate receipts of swimming, rugby union, tennis, cycling, wrestling, gymnastics, and fencing.\(^959\) The prospect of the reigning South American Olympic finalists Uruguay and Argentina pitting themselves against some of Europe’s strongest footballing nations at the 1928 Amsterdam games heightened the IOC’s expectations that profits would reach unprecedented levels. The *Sporting Life* condemned the apparent avariciousness of the IOC and their willingness to sacrifice the nation’s amateur ideal so that “turnstiles click merrily.” “What would the IOC executive have said if the application had come from gymnasts?” the British sporting weekly queried.\(^960\) Clearly, BOA vice-president James A. Blair’s calls for the IOC to “drop football out of the Olympic program” in an effort to defuse the broken-time controversy appeared overwhelming naïve.\(^961\)

On September 17, 1927, in the backdrop of widespread national outrage and mounting fears of an international Olympic boycott, Lord Rochdale wrote again to Comte Baillet Latour in an effort to ascertain whether or not the Executive Committee’s decision is “fixed in all points,” and if not, whether a special IOC Congress could be immediately summoned to discuss, and potentially ratify the broken-time ruling.\(^962\) In an exhaustive defense, the newly appointed IOC president attempted to allay British fears by insisting that the “decision of the Executive Committee of the IOC is not final.” Conversely,
Baillet Latour acknowledged that while “the Congress is the only supreme Court, which has the power to decide . . . . There is no time to call such a Congress, which has to be attended by representatives of the whole world.” Subsequently, in the case of the 1928 Olympic football tournament, Baillet Latour admitted that players accepting broken time payments would be considered “amateurs” in the eyes of the IOC. “Of course, if the ideas of the FIFA do not meet with the approval” of a future Congress, “football will have to go out of the programme of the Games or FIFA will have to allow the Federations affiliated to send teams, only composed of men who do not accept any compensation for lost salary,” Baillet Latour expounded.  

Infuriated by the IOC president’s response, Lord Rochdale warned that Great Britain would now be forced to seriously consider its Olympic future: “As Chairman of the BOA I cannot ask for support for the Olympic Games on the ground that they are amateur.”

With the prospect of a British Olympic withdrawal looming, Lord Rochdale arranged a Council meeting of the BOA on October 5, 1927, to discuss the organization’s official position. Deeming the concession of broken-time payments to football players as detrimental to the Olympic principle, council members unanimously agreed that the IOC Executive Committee acted “Ultra Vires” (beyond its power) by modifying the rules of amateurism laid down at the 1925 Prague Congress, the “supreme tribunal.” Britain’s Olympic leaders demanded that at their next meeting the Executive Committee must adhere to the decision which it made previously at The Hague on July 31, 1926, where it denied FIFA’s request to acknowledge broken-time payments on the grounds that “it was not qualified to change a decision ratified by a vote taken during the Congress.”

Updating Comte Baillet Latour with the BOA’s demands, Lord Rochdale warned that
“the decisions of Olympic Congresses must be upheld.” In the coming days, the fledging IOC president received similar pleas from both the South African and Hungarian Olympic Committees.

The IOC Executive Committee, a product of the rising bureaucratization and standardization of Olympic affairs, had been established in the aftermath of the 1924 Paris games under the direction of Pierre de Coubertin. The baron believed that the IOC had grown too unwieldy; therefore, he created a small nucleus consisting of some of his most dedicated and trusted followers. IOC president the Comte Baillet Latour, Theodor Lewald (Germany), Godefroy de Blonay (Switzerland), the Marquis de Polignac (France), Sigfrid Edström (Sweden) and Brigadier-General Kentish (Britain) comprised the original committee whose primary responsibility involved the overall administration of IOC affairs. On May 6, 1926, during the annual IOC session in Lisbon, the Executive Committee expanded their remit of control even further after members agreed to grant the committee “full powers to deal with the difficulties that might arise on the subject of the Games of 1928 with the Rowing, Football and Tennis Federations.” From the Comte Baillet Latour’s perspective, the new powers trusted to the Executive Committee proved that they had not acted “Ultra Vires” by granting broken-time payments to amateur footballers. In an impassioned letter to Lord Rochdale, the IOC president insisted that “the Executive Committee had the right to act . . . . Our decision may be a foolish one, but it is legal.”

Brigadier-General Kentish found himself caught in the ensuing cross-fire. As the nation’s sole representative on the IOC Executive Committee, Kentish had come under increasing criticism in British media and sporting circles following the IOC’s decision to
remunerate amateur football players. Eager to defend his sullied name, Kentish assured the BOA that he and Sweden’s Sigfrid Edström fiercely opposed the broken time ruling but were outvoted by their fellow Executive Committee members, four votes to two. In a heated letter to the Comte Baillet Latour, Kentish underlined the severity of the Executive Committee’s ruling and the harm that it caused to the Olympic movement in Britain: “With the feeling towards the Olympic Games and the movement generally in England never too friendly,” the whole broken time incident “has given the ‘mud slingers’ the opportunity to write in deprecatory terms of the Games” and “has created an air of uncertainty in this country as to whether Great Britain will take part in the Games or not.”

Defending the Amateur Ideal

In the wake of the football fracas, calls for a British Olympic withdrawal continued to reverberate throughout the country. Reissuing an appeal made in the immediate aftermath of the 1924 Paris games, The Times urged the nation to cease its Olympic participation. “Broken time is taboo throughout amateur sport in Great Britain and the Dominions . . . it soon becomes professionalism in its worst, not its best, form,” The Times averred. Searching for a way through the current impasse, the Athletic News proposed that the Olympic Games should be divided “into two distinct classes, one for open professionals and subsidized ‘amateurs,’ and one for those whose amateurism is above suspicion”—a similar bifurcation between “clean” and “doped” athletes has regularly been proposed to effectively combat the rampant use of performance enhancing substances in contemporary cycles of international Olympic competition.
Otway, the honorary secretary of the National Cross-Country Union and a regular contributor to the *Sporting Life*, took a more assertive stance, demanding that “Either the IOC must go, or the Games!” Otway advised that a new, more informative body, comprised of “delegates from the sporting federations” should replace the outmoded and inefficient IOC. “Peruse its minutes and you will find it a mere debating society which settles nothing at all,” Otway sneered.975 Amongst the clamor for drastic organizational change and a national withdrawal, Brigadier-General Kentish urged “moderation.” The prominent British Olympic official underlined the “wisdom of sending a dignified protest to the International Olympic Committee” rather than taking “a step which would cut us off for ever from taking part in international sport.”976

As discussions of a widespread British Olympic withdrawal continued to gain significant momentum in the press, the BOA called forth a meeting with representatives of the nation’s leading governing bodies of sport to decide upon Britain’s Olympic participation in Amsterdam once and for all. Held on November 12, 1927, under the chairmanship of Lord Rochdale, the meeting resolved that that while they were of the “opinion that the action of the Executive Committee has seriously prejudiced the prestige of the Olympic Games in the world of amateur sport . . . each individual sport in this country is justified—if its Governing Body so desires—in supporting its own section of the Olympic Games so long as the International Federation controlling that section is emphatically opposed to all payments for ‘broken-time,’ however directly or indirectly payment may be made.”977 The BOA quickly drafted a copy of the resolution, which they sent to the IOC and all affiliated member nations, stressing the need to ensure that in “future Olympic Games no competitor who has received ‘broken-time’ payment, directly
or indirectly or in any guise whatsoever, shall be permitted to take part.” Over the next few days, telegrams from the United States, Canada, South Africa, Sweden, Hungary, New Zealand, and Australia, expressing support for the British position inundated the IOC.

Remarkably, after months of uncertainty Britain’s Olympic leaders pledged their renewed support to the nation’s continued Olympic participation. The BOA justified their decision, as they had done repeatedly for the past two decades, by appealing to the British tradition of leadership and their nation’s civilizing responsibilities in international sport. Against the backdrop of the broken-time ruling, the BOA reasoned that the onus had increasingly been placed on the British to defend the sanctity of amateurism against the rising tide of professionalism. The BOA declared that it must “pursue unhesitatingly a policy calculated to secure world-wide support for amateurism in the realm of International sport and the Olympic Games.” The reigning Olympic 100-meter champion, Harold Abrahams, reaffirmed the need “to use all our influence in the international federations to which we belong” in order to preserve the amateur ideal. Reflecting on the BOA’s decision not to oppose any governing body from participating in Amsterdam, a relieved Baillet Latour admitted that he was “awfully glad that England is taking part in the Games.”

Despite the BOA’s official position, Britain’s leading governing bodies of sport had still not decided whether or not they would compete in Amsterdam. Following decades of unwavering and outspoken opposition to the Olympic ideal, the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) seized the opportunity to justifiably bow out of future international Olympic competition. At a special Council meeting, members voted
unanimously that the “ARA declines to take any part in the forthcoming Olympic Games.” The more democratic National Amateur Rowing Association (NARA) supported their parent body’s withdrawal plan. In a virulent disavowal “against broken-time payments being made in any shape or form,” Charles Tugwell, secretary of the NARA, acknowledged that he “would be glad to see the back of the Olympic Games.” Meanwhile, the Amateur Boxing Association (ABA) announced that “Great Britain will not be represented in boxing at Amsterdam unless this decision is rescinded.” Fortunately for Britain’s Olympic leaders, the AAA took a far more compromising position. Harry J. Barclay, Honorary Secretary of the AAA, proclaimed that “As long as the IAAF maintains strictly that ‘An amateur is one who competes only for the love of sport,’ and to which the definition the AAA has always adhered, it should be loyal to the International Federation to which it is affiliated, and is justified in sending a team to Amsterdam.”

In the case of association football, the four British Football Associations had earlier convened a meeting in Liverpool, on October 28, 1927, to discuss the broken-time issue. In a unanimous and unsurprising move, the English, Northern Irish, Scottish, and Welsh associations agreed that a representative British Olympic football team would not compete in Amsterdam. Unwilling to “deviate from our definition of an amateur,” Britain’s football leaders upheld their decision from the 1924 Paris games by refusing to allow the Home-Nation’s best amateur players to compete against foreign “professionals.” As the self-perceived moral authority in world football, the British fiercely defended the sanctity of their most “enduring export.” Fearing that the amateur game was slipping into the pernicious hands of pseudo-professionalism, the British
decided to take a more drastic step. At a meeting in Sheffield on February 17, 1928, the four Home Nations resolved on yet another withdrawal from FIFA, only four years after reaffiliation. Remarkably, it would take until 1946 before the four British associations eventually put aside their insular and conservative attitudes and rejoin FIFA in the aftermath of the Second World War.  

**The Second Winter Olympics**

With the participation of a truncated British Olympic team seemingly assured, the BOA moved to revive the nation’s fundraising efforts. As a direct result of the broken-time controversy and the ensuing question mark surrounding Britain’s own Olympic future, the BOA’s fundraising initiatives had managed to gather only a mere £4,812 in total subscriptions. As the BOA later explained in their own *Official Report of the IXth Olympiad*, “It was difficult to persuade would-be-supporters that Great Britain was a loyal advocate of the vital principles of amateurism, and that none of the Governing Bodies of sport in this country would allow their athletes to participate in any section of the Games where semi-professionalism prevailed.” Reflecting on the relatively barren pool of funds at the BOA’s disposal, a frustrated Lord Rochdale apportioned the blame squarely onto the shoulders of the IOC Executive Committee. In a private correspondence to the Comte Baillet Latour, the BOA chairman lamented that the broken-time decision “has absolutely stopped the B.O.A. Appeal for the Olympic Games at Amsterdam this year. Nothing could more effectually have damped, if not completely extinguished the Olympic spirit.” With the Amsterdam games less than six months
away, Britain’s Olympic leaders drew up plans to relaunch an “Olympic Appeal” in the New Year.

The second Olympic Winter Games, scheduled for the exclusive Swiss resort town of St. Moritz, temporarily redirected the BOA’s attention. Following the success of the inaugural winter games held in Chamonix in 1924, the IOC granted full Olympic status to a distinct cycle of winter sports competitions during the 1925 Prague Congress; thus retroactively acknowledging the Chamonix “International Winter Sports Week” as being the first official Olympic Winter Games. IOC members determined that the country holding the summer games would have the right to hold, if practicable and if they desired it, the winter games as well. Since it was obviously impossible for the Netherlands, a predominately low-lying country, to host a complete winter sports program, the IOC allotted the winter games to Switzerland during their 1926 annual session in Lisbon. The IOC’s plans to expand the Olympic brand by adding a separate cycle of winter competitions met stern resistance from the traditionalist Norwegian Ski Association, who fervently opposed the Central European and Anglo-American lust for record-breaking and athletic specialization. As the dominant winter sporting power—Norwegian skiers had won every medal save one at the Chamonix games—Norway’s absence would have likely dealt a crushing blow to the fledging Olympic Winter Games. Fortunately for the IOC, the Norwegian Ski Association narrowly passed a vote to compete in St. Moritz.

As early as November 16, 1926, the BOA, in conjunction with the nation’s governing bodies of winter sports, announced that a British team would be represented at the St. Moritz winter games. Over the proceeding twelve months, however, the broken-time controversy drastically hampered the nation’s winter Olympic ambitions. By
December 8, 1927, Lord Rochdale announced that owing to the brevity of funds at the association’s disposal the BOA would only be able to offer limited financial support to the nation’s winter Olympians.\footnote{995} Thankfully, with Britain’s participation hanging in the balance, the nation’s governing bodies of winter sports reassured the BOA that they were able to shoulder the burden of financing a modest British team. Subsequently, the BOA sent a twenty-nine person British winter Olympic squad to compete in St. Moritz, which included two bobsleigh crews, one ice hockey team, three speed skaters, five figure skaters (three male, two female), and one skeleton racer.\footnote{996} Once again, British skiers were conspicuously absent from the Olympic roster. Despite the indomitable efforts of Arnold Lunn, the Fédération Internationale du Ski, operating under the direction of the Scandinavian authorities, continued to withhold official recognition of alpine skiing.\footnote{997} As the “Pope” of alpine skiing, Lunn explained that Britain “shall not be represented as far as ski-ing is concerned at the next Winter Olympic Games . . . unless the International Racing Rules are modified.”\footnote{998} In fact, it would take until the 1936 Winter Olympic Games, held in the twin Bavarian towns of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, before alpine skiing would finally make its Olympic debut.\footnote{999}

Held between February 11 and 19, 1928, the St. Moritz Olympic Winter Games attracted a large roster of four-hundred-and-sixty-four athletes from twenty-five IOC member nations, including the winter Olympic debutants Argentina, Estonia, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Mexico. Germany made their highly anticipated reentry into the Olympic arena following their eight-year “unofficial” expulsion. In the midst of a torrential blizzard, the Scandinavian nations unsurprisingly dominated proceedings, winning all nine ski events. The young Norwegian figure skater Sonja Henie
grabbed the headlines, winning the first of her three Olympic gold medals. Only the United States, led by their two gold medals in the skeleton and bobsleigh events, were able to challenge Scandinavian hegemony. As a likely result of the BOA’s financial restraints, Britain’s winter Olympians finished in a disappointing eighth place in the overall medal standings. David Ludovic George Hopetoun Carnegie, the 11th Earl of Northesk, earned the nation’s solitary medal following his third-place run in the skeleton event. Britain’s ice hockey team came close to winning another medal. Despite two victories in their opening pool matches against Belgium and Hungary, the British team suffered defeats in all three of their final round games. Meanwhile, the absence of curling from the program of events prevented Britain’s reigning Olympic champions from defending their crown.1000

Reflecting on the substandard performance of British athletes, Brigadier-General Kentish bemoaned the fact that unlike their foreign rivals, who enjoyed “adequate provisions,” the “British representatives had to pay practically all their own expenses.”1001 The Daily Mail supported Kentish’s criticisms, viewing Britain’s performance as proof that the BOA can no longer send athletes who are “foredoomed to defeat.”1002 Writing on the pages of their own journal, Britain’s Olympic leaders attempted to deflect criticism away from the BOA by emphasizing the difficulties of raising a successful winter team when “opportunities for training and practice are dependent upon snow and ice conditions rarely found in this country.”1003 Britain’s Olympic failure aside, the 1928 St. Moritz Olympic Winter Games were internationally celebrated as a resounding success, diminishing the IOC’s fears that a separate Winter Olympiad would become a fleeting experiment. The special correspondent to The Times,
however, took a far less congratulatory tone. Reflecting on the poor conditions and inadequate standard of judging, the special correspondent dismissed the St. Moritz games as “a colossal mistake and a gross waste of money.”

**Reviving the Olympic Appeal**

In the aftermath of a disappointing British performance in St. Moritz, the BOA redirected their full attention towards reviving the nation’s Olympic appeal. On February 15, 1928, Lord Rochdale wrote to the *Daily Mail*, calling upon the British public to help raise a sum of £8,000 needed to underwrite the cost of sending three-hundred athletes to compete in the Amsterdam games. With British sentiment towards the Olympic movement at another record low, Lord Rochdale attempted to rally public support by appealing to the nation’s leadership responsibilities. From Rochdale’s perspective, the British had to be represented in Amsterdam in order to continue safeguarding the nation’s coveted amateur ideal against broken-time payments and pseudo-professionalism. “If Great Britain falls out now,” the BOA Chairman warned, “she must lose her position in the world councils of sport, and her influence in upholding its highest and best traditions.” In a nationwide press release published the following day, 1924 British Olympic champions Harold Abrahams, Eric Liddell, Douglas Lowe, as well as a host of other prominent British athletes expressed their support for the nation’s continued participation. With sustained British guidance, “sport can be made to play a real part in the attainment of international friendship and good faith,” the Olympians reasoned.

Remarkably, against the backdrop of a flagging inter-war economy, high unemployment rates, and diminishing British exports the public expressed their support...
for Lord Rochdale’s appeal. Donors subscribed £2,880 in the first twenty-four hours, including a generous £1,000 donation from the proprietors of the *Daily Mail*. Lord Riddell, owner of the *News of the World*, also expressed his own personal beneficence, donating £500, plus the total proceeds from a specially arranged athletic meeting.

Over the following months banks, business, sports clubs and associations throughout the country inundated the BOA offices with cash donations ranging anywhere from £5 to £1,000. Towns and cities throughout the British Isles also played their part. In Edinburgh, Sir William Lowrie Sleigh, Lord Provost of the city, formed a special committee to try and raise funds towards Britain’s Olympic campaign, an idea also shared by the residents of St. Albans, Hertfordshire. Overall, the British public donated an impressive £18,681 to the nation’s Olympic campaign; a sum that guaranteed Britain’s participation in Amsterdam.

For the BOA, further good news was forthcoming as the Amateur Boxing Association rescinded their threat to abstain from competing in Amsterdam in recognition of the BOA’s protest to the IOC. The Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) also made another stunning turn-about by announcing their intent to compete. Outspoken criticism, threats of withdrawal, followed by reluctant participation once again characterized the ARA’s attitude towards the Olympic Games. Unwilling to cede to authority to their rival National Amateur Rowing Association and determined to continue the pattern of British rowing success, the elite governing body of amateur rowing sent a twenty-three man team to the Dutch capital. Unfortunately for the BOA, the FA proved far more recalcitrant, reiterating their refusal to compete against foreign shamateurs in the football tournament. Meanwhile, the English Hockey Association’s refusal to join the *Federation*
Internationale de Hockey, the international controlling body, meant that a British team would not be represented. Britain’s Olympic chiefs received a further blow when the Women’s Amateur Athletic Association (WAAA), an organization formed in 1922 after the male-dominated AAA refused to allow women’s clubs to affiliate, declared that Britain’s female track and field athletes would not compete in Amsterdam.

Unlike the decision of the English football and hockey associations to boycott the Amsterdam games in protest against the sanctioning of broken-time payments, the WAAA’s abstention was motivated by the IOC’s attempts to limit the growth of women’s sport. Female Olympic participation had long been abhorred within the male chauvinist ranks of the IOC. Pierre de Coubertin regularly expressed his staunch opposition to female participation, even proposing that women’s events be dropped from the games altogether. In a farewell address to the BOA upon his retirement, Coubertin reaffirmed that “it is against my desire that they [women] have been admitted to a growing number of competitions.”

In the inter-war years, however, interest in women’s sport skyrocketed. The growing political assertiveness of the European and North American feminist movement, aligned with the introduction of mass education served as the catalysts for greater female participation in sport. Under the leadership of Alice Milliat, a respected French authority on women’s sport and founder of the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI), the first Women’s Olympic Games were held in Paris in 1922. Over 20,000 people attended the one-day event which attracted female athletes from five countries—including Britain—to compete in eleven track and field events. Led by sprinter Mary Lines, British athletes dominated proceedings, winning five of the eleven events. The success of the inaugural athletic
festival inspired the FSFI to hold the games on a four-year rotation, with the 1926 games scheduled for Gothenburg, Sweden.  

The IOC and the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) moved quickly to control this development. Sigfrid Edstrom, the founding-president of the IAAF and an influential member of the IOC Executive Committee, moved to bring women’s track and field back within his organization’s control. Edstrom offered the FSFI the power to continuing governing women’s sport if the events were contested under IAAF rules and regulations and if the designation “Olympic” was dropped from all of their sponsored events. Finally, the agreement also included a proposal for a full program of track and field events for women at the 1928 Amsterdam games. At the IAAF Congress at The Hague, held between August 5 and 8, 1926, members reacted so violently to Edstrom’s proposition that only a watered down program of five events (100 meters, 800 meters, 4x100 relay, high jump and discus) was begrudgingly accepted. Infuriated by IAAF’s decision to curtail the women’s track and field program, the WAAA proclaimed their intent to boycott the 1928 Olympic Games, even though experts identified Britain’s female athletes as favorites to win the majority of events.

The Games of the IX Olympiad

Prince Hendrik of Holland officially opened the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games on Saturday July 28. In spite of the noticeable absence of Britain’s footballers, hockey players, and women’s track and field athletes, a team of two-hundred-and-fourteen British athletes competed in Amsterdam. In the track and field portion of the Olympic program, a tiny European nation, Finland, once again stunned the world by
producing a string of remarkable victories. Finish star Paavo Nurmi, building upon his unprecedented five gold medal performance in Paris, clinched the 10,000-meter event ahead of teammate Ville Ritola. Roles were reversed in the 5,000-meters, when Nurmi was forced to settle for silver behind his fellow “Flying Finn.” Finland would go onto record victories in the decathlon, 1,500-meter and 3,000-meter steeplechase events. Left in the wake of overwhelming Finish success, the United States won only four gold medals on the track. Ray Barbuti, victor in the 400-meter race, and Elizabeth Robinson, winner over 100-meters, recorded the only American victories to win individual races. Japan’s Mikio Oda, a triple jumper, became the first Asian Olympic gold medalist, while Mohammed El Ouafi, an Algerian-born mail carrier representing France, became the first North African marathon champion. Following the games, Ouafi followed Dorando Pietri’s earlier lead by parlaying his Olympic success into monetary reward by engaging in a series of professional pedestrian events against American long-distance runner Joie Ray.1020

As conclusive evidence of the diminishing trend of national athletic strength, Britain only won two track and field gold medals in Amsterdam. Cambridge University star Douglas Lowe became the first man to retain an Olympic 800-meter gold medal, racing to victory over his nearest competitor, Sweden’s Erik Byléhn, in a new Olympic record clip. Fellow Cambridge student and Achilles Club member Lord David Burghley, the future Marquess of Exeter and a future high-ranking IOC official, earned Britain’s only other gold medal on the track. Burghley, a former world record holder and reigning AAA champion, made up for his disappointing first round exit in Paris by storming to victory in the 400-meter hurdles. British Guiana born Jack London, a pupil of former
Olympic champion and Polytechnic Harriers coach Albert Hill, finished second in the 100-meters behind Percy Williams of Canada. London’s teammate, Walter Rangeley, also had to settle for silver behind the impressive Canadian in the 200-meter event. In other sports, British Olympic successes proved equally as hard to come by. In fact, the British failed to record a single medal in the boxing, diving, sailing, water polo, and weightlifting events. On the water, Cambridge University’s First Trinity Boat Club salvaged some British pride by clinching gold in the coxless fours event. In the Olympic pool, Britain’s women performed admirably. Scotland’s Ellen King won silver in the 100-meters backstroke, while Joyce Cooper, wife of British Olympic rower John Badcock, won the bronze in both the 100-meter freestyle and backstroke events.  

The controversy surrounding the inclusion of track and field events for women continued to rage even in the aftermath of the Amsterdam games. Although female athletes set new world records in all five track and field events, the male sporting establishment voiced serious concerns over the physiological and psychological strain of high-level competition for women. Popular misconceptions of this nature had long been firmly ingrained in Western thought, reinforced by socially defined gender roles and a patriarchal health establishment. In the 800-meter race at Amsterdam, the sight of Germany’s Lina Radke crossing the finish-line in a state of exhaustion provided critics with what they deemed incontrovertible proof of the physical inferiority of women. Antifeminists and the IAAF seized on the race as evidence that women should be banned from running in events longer than 200-meters. Subsequently, on August 7, 1928, the IAAF rejected a proposal for the inclusion of the full list of ten events sought by the FSFI, and even limited future female participation to the 100-meters, 4x100-meter relay,
the high jump, discus, javelin, and 80-meter hurdles; a decision backed by Britain’s male athletic representatives. Remarkably, it would take until the 1960 Rome Olympic Games for this ruling to be repealed.

When the final medal standings were tabulated, Britain finished in a dismal eleventh place overall. British athletes won only twenty medals (3 gold, 10 silver, 7 bronze) in Amsterdam, fourteen less than they had earned in Paris four years earlier. As testament to the rising competitiveness of international Olympic competition, Britain was eclipsed by her dominion, Canada, and even by smaller European sporting powers Hungary, Switzerland and Italy. The inclusion of Britain’s footballers, hockey players, and female track and field athletes might have colored this bleak picture, but certainly not enough to rank the nation anywhere near the dominant Olympic powers the United States, Germany, and Finland. Compared to their rival nations, Britain’s competitive inhibition proved staggering. The BOA only spent £8,928 on the nation’s Olympic campaign; a diminutive figure when compared to the $400,000 (£82,203) and 450,000 Reichmarks (£22,004) spent by the American and German Olympic Committees. In France, huge sums of money were also apportioned toward their nation’s Olympic endeavors, while the government announced its intent to award all French Olympic victors in Amsterdam the cross of the “Legion of Honour.” Similarly, the Italians, under the guidance of their country’s Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, had prepared for the Olympic Games on an unprecedented scale. International Olympic competition had grown to become serious business, but the British appeared no longer willing to “play the game.”
An Imperial Effort

The lamentable performance of British sportsmen and sportswomen in Amsterdam failed to produce a cause of great anguish or a sense of national calamity. In fact the British press, while admitting the failures of the nation’s athletes in boxing and track and field events, took a surprisingly congratulatory tone by appealing to a broader imperial nationalism.1026 *The Times* proudly translated and subsumed the victories of dominion athletes as victories for “Britain” and the “Empire.”1027 Canada’s Percy Williams, double gold medalist in the 100-and-200-meters, and South Africa’s Sydney Atkinson, gold medalist in the 110-meter hurdles, were presented as the embodiment of British strength and vitality, successfully upholding the reputation and tradition of the Empire against foreign rivals. The manner in which the British press displayed dominion athletes as “our boys” reveals more about the nation’s waning fortunes in international sport than it does about the potency and prevalence of imperial sentiment. As the British continued to slip even further behind their foreign rivals, at least in the international Olympic arena, “British” and “dominion” athletes were increasingly viewed synonymously in media coverage—the sound of former Olympic champion and BBC broadcaster Harold Abrahams triumphantly hailing down a microphone the gold medal victory of New Zealand’s Jack Lovelock in the 1,500-meter final at the 1936 Berlin games forcibly confirms this truism.

Beyond the affirmations and celebrations of imperial solidarity and victories in a few high-profile races, BOA officials attempted a more honest examination of the nation’s failures, attributing Britain’s meager medal haul not to the rising standard of international competition, but as a product of their own adherence to increasingly
“obsolete amateur standards.” Mindful of the politicized and increasingly militant tone of international sport, Britain’s Olympic leaders were left to ponder whether there remains a place for the “bona fide British amateur” in future Olympics.1028 Question marks surrounding Britain’s participation in the next edition of Olympic competition, scheduled for the distant American west coast city, Los Angeles, again loomed ominously. The heightened costs of transporting and housing a British team in the Golden State forced BOA chairman Lord Rochdale to acknowledge “that it was rather too soon to take definite decision about Los Angeles.”1029 Eager to determine the attitudes of Britain’s governing bodies of sport, BOA secretary Evan A. Hunter circulated a questionnaire in the months following the Amsterdam games.1030 The results were overwhelming in favor of non-participation. The amateur fencing, boxing, rowing, and modern pentathlon associations all informed the BOA that they would not be competing in Los Angeles, while the amateur athletic, swimming and cycling associations suggested that their participation was very unlikely.1031

The uncertainty surrounding the IOC’s future policy towards broken-time payments continued to serve as a major deterrent for Britain’s governing bodies. The decision of the IOC Executive Committee to grant international football associations permission to provide an indemnity for lost earnings still proved extremely contentious in British sporting circles. Even the BOA, who had earlier rejected calls for a national withdrawal prior to the 1928 Olympics, threatened to approve a permanent British boycott if the IOC failed to deal definitely with the broken-time issues after the conclusion of the Amsterdam games. Writing on the pages of their own journal, Britain’s Olympic leaders reaffirmed their desire to defend the sanctity of their amateur ideal. “The
most effective method of preventing the undue extension of broken time is to insist upon adherence to the conception of amateurism, which will not permit of it . . . Any other attitude can only lead to professionalism,” BOA officials asserted. As Comte Baillet Latour had earlier promised, the IOC addressed the broken time issue at their 1929 annual session in Lausanne, Switzerland, but delegates voted to defer a final decision on the matter until the Berlin Congress scheduled for the following year. The “Congress alone has the right to maintain or modify the decisions of the Congress of Prague,” the IOC president insisted.

Looking ahead to the Berlin Congress, BOA officials, in cooperation with their colleagues representing dominion participation in the Olympics, planned to mount an exhaustive defense of amateurism. British aspirations received a timely boast in the months building up to the Congress when the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) rejected a Swedish and Finnish bid to authorize broken-time payments in all international track and field meets—the English AAA had threatened to withdraw from the IAAF if the Scandinavian proposal carried. The British soon faced an even sterner test in Berlin, however, as Belgian sporting authorities tabled a bid to grant International Federations the power to determine the amateur status of Olympic athletes; a move that if passed, would officially sanction FIFA’s, and other like minded international bodies, policy of remunerating amateur athletes. Sensing that the floodgates could potentially be thrown open to all forms of pseudo-professionalism, Britain’s representatives and imperial allies presented an amendment to the Belgian proposal. Reviving the resolutions passed at the Prague Congress five years earlier, the British proposed that Olympic athletes should only be considered “amateur” if they are “not or knowingly have become,
a professional in the sport for which he is entered or in any other sport” and have “never received re-imbursement or compensation for loss of salary.” By a vote of 90 to 20, IOC delegates approved the British amendment, dealing a crushing blow to advocates of broken time payments and a more democratic interpretation of the amateur ideal. In fact, on October 11, 1930, British spirits were raised even higher when the IOC Executive Committee unanimously upheld the ruling of the Berlin Congress. British style amateurism remained intact, at least for the time being, seemingly removing a major roadblock preventing the nation’s full participation in the forthcoming 1932 Los Angeles games.
Conclusion

Nationalism, Totalitarianism, and British Apathy

During the 1930s, while most of the world engaged in Olympic competition with even greater fervor, Britain increasingly withdrew resources and energies from the quadrennial international athletic festival. The visible maturation, rising popularity, and internationalization of the Olympic movement produced a tremendous increase in the political dimensions of Olympian spectacles during the 1930s. The emergence of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in Germany, Italy, and Japan spurred a substantial rise in governmental involvement in international sport. While the British were one of the first to forge the linkage between competitive sport and national interests, training and shaping the views of an imperial governing class through masculine exertion of the playing fields, their fascist and militaristic rivals fully exploited the value of physical culture by positioning sport as the centerpiece of their foreign policy and transforming major international sporting events into a ruthless game of realpolitik.¹⁰³⁸

Nazi Germany typified the elevation and centralization of sport as an affair of the state. Adolph Hitler’s ascent to the chancellorship of Germany’s ruling Nationalist Socialist Party on January 30, 1933, pushed the integration of German sport, and in particular the Olympics, with his expansionist and totalitarian ambitions; a relationship that reached its apex at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.¹⁰³⁹ Similarly, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini coveted international sporting success as a medium for boosting his nation’s prestige, relentlessly propagandizing and lavishly subsidizing the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, the nation’s fascist leisure and recreational organization, including the
affiliated Italian Olympic Committee. Like their European allies on the continent, the Japanese government sought to demonstrate their nation’s substantial sporting advances through Olympic victory—a policy that paralleled their aggressive territorial schemes highlighted by the September, 1931, invasion of Manchuria.

The development of highly-politicized, totalitarian sporting systems around the globe fueled waves of opprobrium in British sport discourse between the wars. From the British perspective sport and politics were antithetical—any kind of formal state intervention ran strongly against the forces of voluntarism and amateurism. The Daily Mirror proved antagonistic to the manner in which foreign rivals “seized upon ‘sports-training’ as the certain road to supremacy in peace and war,” and demanded an immediate withdrawal from the Olympic Games, “a fertile stamping ground for the development of the seven deadly sins.” The British sought the moral high ground against the overtly nationalistic and hyper-competitive tone of international sport during the 1930s, increasingly portraying themselves as defenders of true amateurism and upholders of their long venerated dictum, “sport for sports sakes.”

The BOA of the 1930s increasingly assumed this protectionist mindset, dismissing the win-at-all-cost practices of unscrupulous totalitarian regimes and other glory-seeking nations, even the Olympic ambitions of their close allies, the United States. Unlike the ambitious and aggrandizing policies of the elite, Anglocentric, and politically conservative men that preceded them, this new cabal of BOA leaders pursued a far more reserved path in their raising of British Olympic teams during this period, a competitive inhibition admittedly necessitated to some measure by a global economic
crisis that unmercilessly drove the nation’s financial system to its knees and sparked surging rates of inflation and unemployment throughout the British Isles.  

A British Olympic Epilogue

In the build-up to the 1932 Los Angeles games the BOA, now under the chairmanship of Sir Harold Bowden following Lord Rochdale’s resignation from the position on January 8, 1931, outlined a far more moderate approach to Olympic competition. Speaking at a Council meeting of the BOA on July 14, 1931, Bowden, a former Cambridge University rower, prominent philanthropist, and head of the Nottinghamshire-based Raleigh bicycle company, announced that owing to the “heavy expense of the long journey to Los Angeles and the depressed state of industry . . . a restriction in the number of both competitors and official must be made.” Bowden revealed that a financial outlay of only £9,000—a figure still to be raised through public subscriptions—would be spent on underwriting the nation’s Olympic campaign, thus “only competitors who had a real chance of a place in the final of their event, and officials who were absolutely essential could be taken” to the pacific west coast. The BOA’s expenditure for the 1932 Olympic Winter Games, scheduled for Lake Placid, New York, proved significantly more meager. BOA officials agreed to underwrite the cost (£73) of a solitary female figure skater to compete in Lake Placid. The three additional female figure skaters who represented Britain had to pay their own way across the Atlantic. The British were certainly not alone in scaling back their Olympic plans. The New York Times reported that the current financial depression had left the national Olympic committees of France, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, and a host of other
European nations scrambling to procure sufficient funding for the forthcoming winter and summer games. Incensed by the BOA’s growing list of self-imposed competitive inhibition, F. A. M. Webster, a long serving advocate of Olympic reform, stressed the broader nationalistic ramifications of Britain’s sporting performances: “I do not think I am overstating it when I say that our national prestige does depend to a very remarkable extent on the showing that we make in international contests. It does not do us any good in the eyes of the world to lose Test Matches, to lose Championships at Wimbledon, to be beaten year after year by American golfers, or to make a bad show at the Olympic Games.” BOA chairman Sir Harold Bowden dismissed the well established linkage between international Olympic success and national prestige, a connection long recognized by his predecessors, when he remarked: “The object of the Games has never been to show which country is supreme—in fact, no points are allocated, and there is no ‘champion’ country.” A cursory glance at the BOA’s early history, replete with plans for lavish training schemes, professional coaching, imperial squads, and direct appeals for state intervention, undermined Bowden’s assertion.

The performance of British athletes in the 1932 Olympic Winter Games certainly failed to project positive national images as F. A. M. Webster and a handful of his contemporaries had wished. Britain’s band of four female figure skaters, a team that included two eleven-year olds (Megan Taylor and Cecilia Colledge), failed to earn a single medal in Lake Placid, plunging the nation to their worst finish in winter Olympic history. Britain’s prospects for the Los Angeles games also appeared ominously bleak, particularly since a BOA appeal for public subscriptions failed to generate much needed
funds. The *Sunday Express*, like many newspapers throughout the British Isles, insisted that the Olympic Games were not even “worth £9,000 to Britain.”\footnote{1053} When efforts to recruit the fundraising acumen of Lord Rothermere and his *Daily Mail* newspaper proved unsuccessful, desperate BOA officials sent hundreds of fundraising circulars to schools, universities, sporting clubs, boards, and governing bodies up-and-down the country.\footnote{1054} The BOA’s financial travails once again failed to inspire the intervention of the Foreign Office, which reaffirmed its non-interventionist strategy towards international sport. The British government did make a perfunctory gesture, albeit begrudgingly, when they awarded a £50 grant to the British Consulate in Los Angeles to cover the cost of entertaining high-ranking dignitaries during the Olympics.\footnote{1055}

Despite the prevailing forces of British apathy and inhibition, the Los Angeles games proved an unprecedented success. Connecting the games with the glamour and stardom of Hollywood, as well as harnessing their full commercial potential as an attractive commodity, the Los Angeles organizers provided the blueprint for transforming the Olympics from a relatively marginal and elitist event into one of the world’s most important entertainment extravaganzas.\footnote{1056} Print, radio, and newsreel media chronicled Olympic feats; silver screen celebrities and studio moguls flocked to Olympic events; and U.S. companies such as Coca-Cola and Kellogg’s avariciously engineered ways to exploit the Olympic brand.\footnote{1057} The Los Angeles organizers also set new standards in event management, perfecting the modern bid process; boasting an impressive array of sporting infrastructures, including the recently renovated 105,000 seated Los Angeles Coliseum; celebrating the achievements of Olympic medalists in a formal victory ceremony; and housing male athletes in an Olympic Village, a vast network of Spanish-
style bungalows and amenities overlooking the Pacific Ocean—female athletes were relegated to a local hotel. Drawing upon the organizational, salesmanship, and promotional skills that had made the U.S. the world leader in mass culture, and Los Angeles one of the world’s fastest growing cities, the 1932 Olympics overcame the gloom of a global depression to achieve economic solvency, recording a surplus of $1.5 million, and more importantly, ensuring the future stability of the international Olympic movement.

While the 1932 Los Angeles games commodified and popularized the Olympic spectacle, the games can also be credited with marking a significant step towards the realization of Coubertin’s avowed principle of Olympic universality. Despite mounting fears that the austerity and gloom of a global economic crisis would plunge the Olympics into cancelation—not a single national Olympic committee had replied positively to the LA invitation just six months before the official Opening Ceremony—the Los Angeles games boasted an impressive international roster, attracting 1,332 athletes from thirty-seven IOC member nations. More non-Western countries, including the Olympic debutants the Republic of China, which had its first IOC member, Wang Zhengyan, elected in 1922, participated than ever before. The frequent appearance of non-white athletes, including Japanese swimmers, Indian field-hockey players, and an Argentinean marathon runner, stood atop of the medal podium proved testament to the inexorable forces of globalization and the rising competitiveness of international sport—Olympic glory was no longer the privilege of Europeans and North Americans. Led by the double-gold medal winning feats of star U.S. athlete Mildred “Babe” Didrikson, the Los Angeles
games provided a watershed moment for female participation confirming that women, despite IOC opposition, were in the games to stay.\textsuperscript{1061}

Amongst the glittering of Olympic success, British sportsmen and sportswomen cut abject figures in Los Angeles. After nearly two years of uncertainty surrounding Britain’s participation, BOA officials were eventually able to muster enough money to persuade a handful of governing bodies to send a team of seventy-seven athletes (62 men and 15 women) to the Golden State.\textsuperscript{1062} Pitted against highly specialized and state-subsidized foreign rivals, British athletes finished a disappointing eighth place in the overall, “unofficial” medal standings. Despite the impressive gold medal performances of Thomas Hampson in the 400-meters; Tommy Green in the 50-km walk; and the men’s coxless pairs and fours on the water, British athletes collected a haul of just sixteen medals—the nation’s worst showing to that point since the establishment of the BOA in 1905. Evidently, Britain’s enormous early advantages in experience and tradition had passed away. Following the forty-three medals earned by British athletes at the 1920 Antwerp games, they earned thirty-four in Paris, twenty in Amsterdam, and only sixteen in Los Angeles. A dramatic increase in foreign competition and the unwillingness of the state to intervene in sporting affairs goes some way to explain the nation’s decline, however, put quite simply, British sport remained too exclusive and inhibited. Excessive voluntarism and the restrictive social codes of those who governed it appeared to have reduced Britain to the status of a second-rate international sporting power, despite the nation’s continued success in football and tennis during this period. The failure of the British public to replicate the intense reverence in which foreign rivals embraced international Olympic competition also goes some way to explain how the country which
invented modern sport had been surpassed so quickly by its pupils. Looking ahead to the next edition of the summer and winter games scheduled for Berlin and Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, BOA officials expressed hope that in future “the public will be less apathetic.”

Aiming to build upon the unprecedented success and innovations of the Los Angeles games, Adolph Hitler embraced Germany’s preparations and saw the prospect of hosting the 1936 winter and summer Olympics as a platform for national propaganda, an opportunity to “dazzle” the world with the financial solvency and power of the new militaristic German state. Despite pledging to oversee a Germany cultural renaissance, Hitler eschewed the nation’s regimented system of Turnen gymnastic and embraced westernized sporting practices and models of internationalism—yet, paradoxically, in the diplomatic arena he ordered Germany’s withdrawal from both the League of Nations and the Lausanne Disarmament Conference. From Hitler’s perspective, the Olympics represented a powerful form of political and cultural capital, an unparalleled platform for positively shaping world public opinion. Overseeing Olympic preparations with the same intensity as he put into Germany’s other grossly nationalistic and grandiose celebration of Nazi strength and vitality, the Nuremberg Rallies, Hitler commissioned the expenditure of lavish sums, estimated by one account at 100 million Reichsmarks, for the construction of state of the art sporting and media facilities, and an Olympic village—signaling the first time in Olympic history a state provided substantial resources towards hosting costs.

The appropriation of a supposedly neutral and internationalist sporting event by an authoritarian and openly anti-Semitic state sparked threats of a global Olympic
boycott.\textsuperscript{1066} Hitler’s strident policies of racial and religious persecution, aligned his government’s revocation of Jewish citizenship through the “Nuremberg Laws” passed in 1935, forced many nations, including Britain, to seriously consider their participation in both Berlin and Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Communist and socialist groups debated an alternative form of protest, conceiving plans to host a rival counter-Olympics, the “Peoples Olympiad,” in Barcelona—though the scheme eventually had to be aborted owing to the outbreak of the Spanish civil war.\textsuperscript{1067}

Press reports throughout Europe and North America told of the reprehensible manner in which German Jews were excluded from national sports clubs and institutions, prohibited from using public facilities, and forbidden from competing at the forthcoming Olympic Games.\textsuperscript{1068} The U.S. took the lead in denouncing the Nazi’s discriminatory policies. At the annual IOC session held in Vienna in June of 1933, Brigadier-General Charles Sherrill, a U.S. member to the IOC, demanded that the Germans immediately rescind their policy of racial discrimination and allow non-Aryans to try-out for the German Olympic team. Although Karl Ritter von Halt, a Nazi Party member and IOC representative, balked at the American demands, the IOC eventually secured an official governmental guarantee that Germany would not violate the principles of Olympism by barring the participation of Jewish athletes. Despite Germany’s “Vienna pledge,” the U.S. boycott movement, backed by a broad coalition of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and intellectual pressure groups, continued to gather steam, culminating in the Amateur Athletic Union’s (AAU) 1933 decision to bar American track and field athletes from competing in Berlin—the American Olympic Committee (AOC) took an equally
belligerent tone, threatening a complete U.S. withdrawal unless German Jews were allowed to train, prepare, and participate in the 1936 Olympics.\(^{1069}\)

Across the Atlantic, the question of Britain’s Olympic participation also sparked vehement protest, despite the absence of a powerful Jewish lobby or a large pool of black athletes.\(^{1070}\) The *Manchester Guardian* favored the sporting ostracism of Nazi Germany; a stance echoed by Philip Noel-Baker. The former British Olympic team captain and acclaimed internationalist expressed his abhorrence at the disdainful manner in which the Nazi’s injected “politics into sport” and openly flouted the basic principle “of the equality of all competitors.”\(^{1071}\) In a defamatory report uncovering the conditions of German life and sport “Under the Heel of Hitler,” British trade unionist leader Sir Walter Citrine issued another ringing endorsement in favor of Britain’s abstention.\(^{1072}\) *The Field* strongly objected to the growing momentum of the British boycott movement, insisting that the alleged racial and religious persecution of German subjects is “Germany’s affair, and no other country’s.”\(^{1073}\) Responding to that broadside, F.A.M. Webster inveighed against the viewpoint expressed by the country gentlemen’s newspaper, insisting that the overt politicization of international sport and reported degradation of German Jews flagrantly “contravenes the Olympic spirit.”\(^{1074}\)

Cautious of wading into unchartered waters, BOA officials refused to stoke the flames of an increasingly volatile Olympic boycott movement. In fact, the BOA purposefully avoided any issue that seemed to entangle sport and politics—a position that strongly contradicted the organization’s post-World War I efforts to exclude Germany and the other defeated Central Powers from the international sporting arena. Britain’s Olympic leaders refused to respond to pro-boycott literature circulated by the British
Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi Council and even voted to abstain from publishing in their official journal any information pertaining to the plight of Jewish sportsmen and sportswomen in Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{1075} Even an impassioned appeal by the Archbishop of York, William Ebor, urging the BOA to officially denounce the “cruelty and injustice” suffered by German Jews at the hands of Hitler’s brutal totalitarian regime failed to steer the organization away from their strict non-interventionist position; a stance that the historian Martin Polley has shown proved indicative of the British government’s handling of this matter.\textsuperscript{1076} For one BOA Council member, Harold Abrahams, a celebrated Jewish athlete, his organization’s apolitical stance proved misguided. Britons were “shutting our eyes to reality if we believe that the mere organization and support of such institutions as the Olympics Games, constitutes the end of our duty in this matter,” the former 100-meter gold medalist lectured.\textsuperscript{1077}

In the broader framework of the international Olympic movement, Britain’s delegates grew increasingly uncomfortable amid news of Germany’s escalating anti-Semitic policies and restrictions. At the 1934 annual IOC session in Athens, Britain’s leading representative, Lord Aberdare, demanded an official guarantee from his German colleagues that their government’s pledges issued in Vienna were trustworthy. The Welsh-born military officer and winner of the 1930 U.S. amateur tennis championship threatened that Britain would stand alongside the Americans and boycott the Olympics if Germany reneged on their earlier promises.\textsuperscript{1078} Theodor Lewald and Karl Ritter von Halt moved to placate British fears: “It goes without saying that the Pledges given by Germany in Vienna in 1933 to admit to the German Olympic team German Sportsmen of Non-Aryan [i.e., Jewish] origin, provided they have the necessary capability, will be
strictly observed and facilities for preparation will be given to all sportsmen.”1079 The British, the self-appointed moral guardians of sport, appeared satisfied. On October 11, 1934, at a Council meeting of the BOA, members voted unanimously to “accept the invitation extended by the German Olympic Committee to participate.”1080 The Amateur Athletic Association soon dealt a further blow to the British Olympic boycott movement when members rejected a resolution proposed by the National Workers’ Sports Association to “withdraw its support and withhold the necessary permission to any of its members who make an application for a permit to compete.”1081

To the delight of Hitler, the British sent a small contingent of thirty-nine athletes (29 men, 10 women) to the Olympic Winter Games in the twin Bavarian towns of Garmisch-Partenkirchen.1082 Britain’s involvement in the largest and most expensive winter Olympics to date, held at a cost of over 2.6 million Reichsmarks, went ahead without much protest or publicity. Led by the gold-medal winning performance of a team of predominantly British-born Canadian ice hockey players, Britain’s winter Olympians even performed surprisingly well, finishing seventh in the overall medal rankings, much to the delight of a pessimistic sporting public.1083

In the aftermath of the winter prelude, BOA officials set their sights firmly towards the highly anticipated Berlin Olympics. With less than five months in which to prepare the BOA issued a public appeal for subscriptions in order to train, transport, and house a British team in the German capital. Weary of the current tide of pro-boycott sentiment and the public’s long-held aversion to international Olympic competition, BOA leaders reassured that their own nation that “Great Britain’s team will be chosen without any regard whatsoever to the origin, religious belief or political creed of the

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competitors.” The timing of the BOA’s launch of a public appeal proved fateful. Hitler’s controversial reoccupation of the demilitarized Rhineland on March 7, 1936, revealed the growing extent of Nazi fanaticism and soured the public’s attitude towards Olympic participation in Berlin even further. With the games fast approaching and their coffers worryingly bare, BOA officials voted to suspend a nationwide appeal and concentrate on seeking funds through private channels. Responding to the mounting diplomatic crisis on the European continent, the BOA’s newly appointed president Lord Portal of Laverstoke restated his organization’s desire to set aside political considerations and set a good “sporting” example by sending a team to compete in Berlin. Lord Portal declared: “We should not have to consider such things as sanctions in sport. We cannot go to these extremes. Here we have a wonderful nation offering us hospitality, and guaranteeing us that anybody we care to take shall have fair treatment.”

After nearly three years of international condemnation and threats of a global boycott, the 1936 Berlin games, or Nazi Olympics as they have been more commonly labeled, officially opened on August 1, 1936. Against the backdrop of Hitler’s much publicized diplomatic and military confrontations, a staggering 3,949 athletes from 49 nations participated in Berlin, including the perennial Olympic champions the United States. Amid widespread public dissension and a prolonged struggle to raise sufficient funds, the BOA sent a team of 227 British athletes (190 men, 37 women) to the German capital city. Hitler’s late concession to select the former Olympic gold medal fencer Helen Meyer, a “half Jew” under the Nuremberg Laws then living in California, onto the German team appeared to placate international anxieties and helped to avert a U.S. led boycott. The sporting world seemingly turned a blind eye to the fact that out of
the twenty-one German Jews nominated as candidates for the Olympics, none were selected. With both international opinion and the Olympic Charter in mind, the Reich went to great lengths to keep the games free of any pernicious anti-Semitic overtones. Anti-Jewish signs, books, and newspapers were removed, and the German people were exhorted to treat visitors, including Jews, amicably—a series of measures proposed by the Ministry of Propaganda to successfully hoodwink foreign guests into leaving Berlin with a favorable impression of life under the Third Reich.

In its main aim, the 1936 Olympics proved to be a remarkable success. Attracting over three million people, the Berlin games could rightfully claim, as the historian Barbara Keys put it, the title up to that point of being the “best Olympic Games ever.” Under the skillful guidance of Olympic choreographer Carl Diem, General Secretary of the German Organizing Committee, doves flew, the Olympic flame burned brightly, and sonorous overtures of peace and international harmony rang throughout the Olympic fortnight. Inside the Olympic arena, the world’s best athletes set new standards in sporting performance. African-American track star Jesse Owens, the son of an Alabama sharecropper, emerged as a shining light in Berlin, clinching four gold medals in the 100-and-200-meter sprints, long jump, and 4x100-meter relay (setting world and Olympic records in the process) and dealing a symbolic blow to Hitler’s pseudo-Darwinian theories of Aryan racial supremacy. The Nazi’s still found some comfort in the fact that Germany stood atop of the medal rankings for the first time, claiming an impressive haul of eighty-nine medals. The United States, after again dominating the track and field portion of the Olympic program, finished in second place in the overall medal count, well behind Germany but comfortably above Mussolini’s fascist Italy. The
performance of Britain’s sportsmen and women offered another telling insight into the severity of the nation’s sporting decline. Placing tenth in the overall medal standings, British athletes earned just fourteen Olympic medals, two less than in Los Angeles, a performance that sparked a torrent of criticism in the press.⁠¹⁰⁹³

The triumph of totalitarian dictatorships such as Germany and Italy over Britain’s liberal democracy within the Olympic arena significantly undermined the nation’s international sporting reputation and cast doubt upon the superiority of free societies over totalitarian regimes. The Observer lamented the negative impression created by Britain’s Olympic campaign. “To be beaten into an insignificant ranking is to convince half the world that we are decadent in those qualities that were distinctive of our past,” the British daily fumed.⁠¹⁰⁹⁴ The Daily Express took an equally acrimonious position, conceding that “our exhibition in Berlin was one of which we should feel ashamed . . . the Americans and the Germans, and the Japs and the Finns, licked us hollow. What was worse, they made us look ridiculous.”⁠¹⁰⁹⁵ The Times, long a bulwark of British prestige and tradition, also expressed concern at the manner in which the advance of sport around the world was leaving the “originator and teacher” in the wake of foreign rivals who preached “long, scientific and intensive training.”⁠¹⁰⁹⁶ The sheer thoroughness, efficiency, and capital outlay expended by Olympic rivals such as the U.S. and Germany stood in stark contrast to Britain’s timid efforts. Restrained by a continued public and governmental apathy, BOA officials spent a modest £4,004 to send a team to the 1936 Berlin games—a diminutive sum especially when compared to the $264,669 (£52,243) spent by the U.S., the globe’s most dominant sporting power, in spite of their 1936 loss to the Germans.⁠¹⁰⁹⁷
In the midst of a widespread effort to uncover the causes of the nation’s failings in Berlin, British observers typically consoled themselves with the idea that they were the moral victor—“amateurs in the truest sense.” An editorial in the Observer celebrated the British “amalgam of work and play” as being superior to “those other codes which have reaped superior honours at Berlin.” The British rationalized their defeat further by shining light on the veiled professionalism of foreign athletes, some of whom arrived in Berlin over two months before the start of competition. “How do they afford it? Have they no profession?” BOA vice-president Lord Decies challenged. Rushing to the defense of his nation’s sportsmen and sportswomen, the former high-ranking British military officer pleaded, “we cannot possibly compete on equal terms with men who have been withdrawn from ordinary life and carefully trained for months.” As Lord Decies comments indicated, intensive and specialized training, professional coaching, and lavish state subsidies helped breed Olympic champions, but the British—as the past four decades had proven—were unwilling to sacrifice the nation’s coveted amateur ideal in pursuit of Olympic success. The BOA, formerly a voice for change and modernization, reflected proudly upon the nation’s amateur sporting traditions, reassuring the public that the British had not suffered a “loss of prestige” because “in the Olympic Games there are no ‘points’ and no winning country.” The differences in rhetoric, ideology, and actions between the founding BOA and the organization of the late inter-war period proved overwhelmingly stark.

In the 1930s, having failed in more than three decades of endeavor since its 1905 birth to convince the British public, the British government, and most of the British press to invest in the notion that the Olympics represented a platform from which the founding
nation of global sports culture could reanimate the energy of the British Empire and convince the world that Britain remained a force to be reckoned with, the BOA surrendered the field. Mimicking the “peace with honour” sentiments expressed in British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s 1938 appeasement speeches, the BOA during the 1930s gave up the quest to seek Olympic glory and sought comfort in the notion that defeat confirmed moral virtue, a principle that earlier potentates from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to Winston Churchill to the Earl of Birkenhead, whatever their other differences, found abhorrent.\textsuperscript{1102}

As the global economic depression lifted only as a result of the world descending into the cataclysm of another total war, a conflict that would threaten the very survival of the British Empire in the face of her totalitarian enemies, the BOA and allied apostles of imperial revival through Olympic victories had fallen to their nadir. Not even the efforts of a defeated BOA to rescue an ultimately war-erased 1940 Olympics in London after Japan relinquished the games signaled any real British passion in the idea of Olympic spectacles as a force for national revival.\textsuperscript{1103} Obscuring their earlier history of failed efforts to galvanize British support for the Olympics, later twentieth-century and early twenty-first century Britons have “invented” a very different “tradition” of British Olympism, one that inaccurately depicts Britain as an early epicenter of Olympic fervor.\textsuperscript{1104}

**Re-interpreting British Olympic History**

Recent events provide an outline of this effort at inventing a tradition of Olympic passion. On July 6, 2005, the IOC’s award of the 2012 Olympic summer games to the
city of London sparked scenes of jubilation throughout the British Isles. As the world’s largest regularly scheduled sporting event, and an economic, political, and cultural colossus, the Olympics promise to open new vistas in Britain’s twentieth-first-century sporting landscape, leaving behind an enduring legacy of urban regeneration and mass youth participation.1105 Reflecting on the IOC’s decision, former Prime Minister Tony Blair described London’s nomination as a “momentous day” for Great Britain.1106 London bid leader and former Olympic gold medalist Sebastian Coe reiterated Blair’s message, expressing his joy that Britain had captured “the biggest prize in sport,” the Olympic Games.1107 The euphoria that surrounded the IOC’s decision creates the impression that the Olympic Games, like the World Cup in football, are central to the aspirations of British sport. Upon closer inspection, however, British affinity for the Olympic movement appears to be a very recent phenomenon. In fact, history has revealed that the Olympics held an extremely tenuous position in Britain throughout the formative decades of modern Olympic competition.

Although the British provided the ideological and institutional framework that inspired Baron Pierre de Coubertin to revive the international Olympic movement in 1894, the nation proved overwhelmingly apathetic to early Olympic competition. Through their robustly parochial and ethnocentric lenses, the British looked condescendingly upon the Olympics as a trivial and debased French festival of athleticism, a faked antique that violated the aesthetic cannons of antiquity. Boasting a rich domestic sporting calendar, a strong aversion to competing against foreign rivals, except their own white dominions, and a self-righteous belief in their own status as true sportsmen in the amateur tradition, the British refused to embrace the Olympics with the
same level of intensity and devotion as other nations. Remarkably, Britain’s deep-rooted aversion to the Olympics held steadfast at least up until the aftermath of World War II, when the nation came to the IOC’s late rescue by agreeing to host the 1948 Olympic Games in war-torn London. As the historian Janie Hampton and others have suggested, the Olympics, although not relished in anticipation by the majority of sports followers in Britain, proved an overwhelming success and established a climate more favorable to future cycles of the quadrennial international athletic festival.  

Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, the British Olympic Association, an organization founded in 1905 to oversee the nation’s Olympic participation, experienced the full brunt of the public’s disinterest in the Olympics. Comprised of predominately elite, Anglocentric, public school “Old Boys” with strong conservative proclivities, the BOA seized upon the Olympic Games as a platform for promoting British interest at home and abroad. In fact, BOA chiefs stand out as being among the earliest sporting administrators in Britain to grasp the propaganda utility of international sport: success within the Olympic arena transmitted positive images of national strength and vitality to increasingly oversea audiences. In an era of sweeping social and political reform, and relative imperial and sporting decline, Britain’s Conservative Olympic leaders attempted to overhaul the Victorian restraints of amateurism by undertaking an ambitious policy of athletic specialization. As history has shown, however, the BOA’s efforts faltered, the nation’s Olympic performances worsened, and foreign rivals eclipsed Britain as the leader of modern sport.
End-Notes

Introduction

1 Athens has also hosted three IOC-sponsored events, in 1896, 2004, and the 1906 Intermediate Games. However, the 1906 games are no longer officially recognized by the IOC, as they allegedly do not fit with the quadrennial pattern of the modern Olympics (see chapter one).


6 C. L. R. James, Beyond a Boundary (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 64.


10 There are abundant academic histories on the British Empire perhaps the most comprehensive of which is the The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volumes 1-5 (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2001).


16Young, *A Struggle for Revival*, 1-23.


28 Young, *A Struggle for Revival*, 35.

29 Ibid., 61.


32 Young, *A Struggle for Revival*, 68-80. Young claims that Brookes was the driving force behind Pierre de Coubertin’s Olympic revival ambitions. Young argues that prior to Coubertin’s interactions with Brookes, the baron had never even conceived of reviving the Olympics. Since the publication of Young’s book, his claims have been greeted with both praise and opposition. For a list of criticisms and Young’s response to these specific criticisms see, David C. Young, “Further Thoughts on Some Issues of Early Olympic History,” *Journal of Olympic History* 6 (Fall 1998): 29-41.

33 Guttmann, *The Olympics*, 12.

34 MacAloon, *This Great Symbol*, 166.

35 Charles Herbert to Pierre de Coubertin, January 10, 1894, IOC Archives, MBR-HERBE-CORR (1894-1908), OU MO 01 47 07.


42MacAloon, This Great Symbol, 176.


47“The Olympic Games,” The Field, May 2, 1896, 153-157. According to John Pius Boland, George S. Robertson served as the special correspondent to The Field throughout the 1896 Athens games.


51Lord Ampthill to Pierre de Coubertin, September 13, 1896. MBR-VILLI-CORR (1894), OU MO 01 41 07, IOC Archives. This is the only known correspondence between Lord Ampthill and Pierre de Coubertin on record at the IOC Archives.
52 Charles Herbert to Pierre de Coubertin, October 10, 1894, MBR-HERBE-CORR (1894-1908), OU MO 01 47 07, IOC Archives.

53 Amateur Athletic Association, General Committee Minutes, November 23, 1895, Amateur Athletic Association (AAA)/1/2/2/4. The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, England.

54 “The Olympic Games,” Bristol Mercury and Daily Post, April 9, 1896.


56 As cited in “Our French Critics Again,” The Graphic (London), April 11, 1896.


58 Guttmann, The Olympics, 13.


60 “The International Athletic Congress,” The Times, June 23, 1894, p. 9. The exact amateur definition read as “any person who has ever taken part in a public race open to all comers and run for a money prize, or for money forming a part of the sum taken at the gates, or with professionals for a prize, or for money collected by public subscriptions, or who has never been at any period of his life a professor or salaried master of physical exercise.”

61 Wray Vamplew, Play Up and Play the Game: Professional Sport in Britain, 1875-1914. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For a more comprehensive discussion of these developments see chapter eight of this project.


63 John Pius Boland, Collected Diaries of John Pius Boland. Unpublished, BOF Archives.

64 Anthony, An Archaeology of the Olympic Heritage Network, 63-64.
Anthony, An Archaeology of the Olympic Heritage Network, 63-65, British visitors to Athens also included the crew of the HMS Rowe; W. Last, a journalist for the Birmingham Post; and Lawrence Levy, a representative of the Amateur Gymnastic Association.

For a detailed discussion of the problems that marred the organization of the Athens games see Kitroeff, Wrestling with the Ancients, 36-45.


For a comprehensive listing and summary of results see Mallon and Widlund, The 1896 Olympic Games.


G. S. Robertson to Pierre de Coubertin, August 8, 1896, Grande-Bretagne Correspondence (1892-1923), OU MO 01 14 36, IOC Archives.
81 Mallon and Widlund, *The 1896 Olympic Games*.


85 Ibid.

86 As cited in Bailey, “A Noble Ally and Olympic Discipline,” 56.

87 Ibid.


90 Guttmann, *The Olympics*, 22.


92 Mallon, *The 1900 Olympic Games*.


96 Amateur Athletic Association, General Committee Minutes, May 28, 1904, AAA/1/2/2/4.

97 For instance *The Times* only carried one Reuter’s report on the entire Games: “The Olympic Games at St. Louis,” *The Times*, August 30, 1904, p. 8. For an excellent examination of the anthropological events see, Susan Brownell, *The 1904 Anthropology*
*Days and Olympic Games: Sport, Race, and American Imperialism* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).


103IOC Session Minutes, June 20-22, 1904. IOC Archives.


Evidently, nineteenth-century industrialization played the most crucial role in the development of modern sport in Britain. For an interesting forum on the role of associativity in creating modern sports see, the *Journal of Sport History* 35 (spring 2008): 1-64.


British Olympic Association, Inaugural Committee Meeting Report, May 24 1905. Grande-Bretagne Correspondence (1892-1923), OU MO 01 14 36, IOC Archives.


Chapter One

121 British Olympic Association, Inaugural Committee Meeting Report, May 24, 1905. Grande-Bretagne Correspondence (1892-1923), OU MO 01 14 36, IOC Archives.

122 The British Olympic Council (BOC) was a small group composed of members of the British Olympic Association (BOA). Members consisted of the chief founders of the BOA, combined with one representative from each of the nation’s leading governing sport associations. It was the aim of the BOC to establish the best methods of securing the influence and representation of Great Britain at the Olympic Games. See, Cook, International Sport, 144-160.

123 British Olympic Association: Provisional Council, MBR-DESBO-CORR (1906-1915), ID: 6737, IOC Archives. The Provisional Council was comprised of the following gentlemen: W. H. Grenfell, Colonel Sir Howard Vincent, Sir Lees Knowles Bart, W. Hayes Fisher (National Skating Association), C. Herbert (Amateur Athletic Association), G. Rowland (Rugby Football Union), F. J. Wall (Football Association), Captain A. Hutton (Amateur Fencing Association), E. Lawrence Levy (Amateur Gymnastic Association), Colonel H. Walrond (Royal Toxophilite Society), Theodore Andrea Cook, Reverend Courcy Laffan, T. W. J. Britten (National Cyclists Union), E. Syers (Ski Club of Great Britain), and Lord Montague of Beaulieu.

124 In accordance with the Julian calendar used by the Greeks at the time, the 1906 Athens games actually took place from April 9-19, 1906—a thirteen day difference from the more universal Gregorian calendar.


129 “Committee of the Olympic Games at Athens: Regulations,” (Athens, 1905), 6, Records of Lord Desborough, D86/13B/1, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, County Hall, Walton Street, Aylesbury, England (hereafter cited as Bucks Archive).


133 Amateur Athletic Association, General Committee Minutes, January 20, 1906, Amateur Athletic Association (AAA)/1/2/2/4. The University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, England.

134 Amateur Athletic Association, General Committee Minutes, January 20, 1906, AAA/1/2/2/4.


141 Foreign Office Minute, February 2, 1906. FO 371/ 81 365721, The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU (hereafter cited as NA)

142 Foreign Office Minute, February 2, 1906. FO 371/ 81 365721, NA.

143 Edward Grey to Sir F. Elliot, February 14, 1906. FO 371/ 81 36572, NA.

144 Sir F. Elliot to Edward Grey, March 14, 1906. FO 371/ 81 365721, NA.


146 Lord Desborough to Sir Charles Hardinge, March 15, 1906. FO 371/ 81 365721, NA.

147 E. Gorst to R. C. Bosanquet, March 22, 1906. FO 371/ 81 365721, NA.
Figures gleaned from information provided in Bill Mallon, *The 1906 Olympic Games: Results for All Competitors in All Events, with Commentary* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1999), 188-190.


“Irish Athletes Leave for Athens,” *Irish Independent*, April 16, 1906, p. 2. The three Irish athletes traveled a few days earlier in order to join the rest of the British contingent in London on August 16.


Theodore Andrea Cook to Lord Desborough, Travel Arrangements to Athens, n.d. 1906, D86/13B/11, Bucks Archive. For a far more detailed and insightful description of the British fencing team’s journey to Athens see Cook, *The Cruise of the Branwen*.


Invitation from King George I to Lord Desborough to Lunch at the Royal Palace, May 2, 1906, D86/13B/19; Invitation from the Crown Prince to Lord Desborough, n.d., 1906, D86/13B/12; Invitation from Madame Henri Schliemann to Lord Desborough, April 28, 1906, D86/13B/14, Bucks Archive.


162 Mallon, The 1906 Olympic Games, 9-10.


164 A variety of British newspaper provide fairly expansive coverage of Britain’s performances in the 1906 Athens games, see The Times, Observer, Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail, Daily Express, Morning Post, and the Scotsman.

165 For a detailed discussion of the fortunes of the British fencing team in Athens see Cook, The Cruise of the Branwen.


167 John Kevin McCarthy, Irish Involvement in the Olympic Games 1896-1920 (With Specific Reference to its Impact on Nationalism and National Identity). PhD Dissertation (National University of Ireland, Cork, 2007), 124

168 Mark Quinn, The King of Spring: The Life and Times of Peter O’Connor (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2004).


McCarthy, *Irish Involvement in the Olympic Games.*

Quinn, *The King of Spring,* 181.

David Guiney, “The Olympic Council of Ireland,” *Journal of Olympic History* 4 (Autumn 1996): 31-33. In opposition to all newspaper accounts of the time, O’Connor claimed that he made a nationalistic demonstration after the long jump event, not the triple jump.


193 Mike Cronin, Sport and Nationalism: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity since 1884 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999).


200 Dyreson, Making the American Team.

201 Mallon, The 1906 Olympic Games.

202 “The Olympic Games at Athens,” The Times, May 16, 1906, p. 17


222 Ibid, 8.
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224 Ibid, 28-29.


226 Reverend Robert S. de Courcy Laffan to Pierre de Coubertin, January 5, 1906, Grande-Bretagne Correspondence (1892-1923), OU MO 01 14 36, IOC Archives.

227 As cited in Reverend Courcy Laffan to Pierre de Coubertin, February 19, 1906, Grande-Bretagne Correspondence (1892-1923), OU MO 01 14 36, IOC Archives.

228 Theodore Andrea Cook. *The Sunlit Hours: A Record of Sport and Life* (New York: George H. Doran, 1925), 236.


232 Amateur Athletic Association, General Committee Minutes, October 27, 1906, AAA/1/2/2/4.


234 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, November 19, 1906, BOF Archives.


239 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, December 20, 1906, BOF Archives.

240 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, February 4, 1907, BOF Archives.


244 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, March 11, 1907, BOF Archives.

245 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 24, 1907, BOF Archives.

246 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, June 6, 1907, BOF Archives.

247 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, February 18, 1907, BOF Archives.

248 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 24, 1907, BOF Archives.

249 Amateur Athletic Association, General Committee Minutes, February 2, 1907, AAA/1/2/2/4; British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, October 24, 1907, BOF Archives.


251 Mallon and Buchanan, The 1908 Olympic Games, 200 and 293.


“Olympic Golf,” The Scotsman, January 22, 1908, p. 11.


Mallon and Buchanan, The 1908 Olympic Games, 299.

British Olympic Association, Meeting of the International Olympic Committee at The Hague, n.d., BOF Archives.

British Olympic Association, Programme Committee Minutes, November 27, 1907, BOF Archives.


British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, November 15, 1907, BOF Archives.

F. A. M. Webster, The Evolution of the Olympic Games, 1829 B.C.—1914 A.D. (London: Heath, Cranton & Ouseley, 1914), 207. In fact, the obverse side of the Olympic medals from the 1908 London games, as proposed by Mr. Bertram Mackennal, became the standard design for all future Olympiads. The host nation has the freedom to redesign the reverse side of the medal to their own unique specifications.

Ibid., 204-205.


Cook, The Fourth Olympiad, 761.


Ibid, 624.


“Olympic Games: 2,000,000 Tickets for Sale,” *Daily Mail*, June 22, 1908, LDPC.

“Lord Desborough: Presiding Genius of the Fourth Olympiad,” *Empire*, June 2, 1908, LDPC.

British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 30, 1907, BOF Archives.

British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, December 20, 1906, BOF Archives.

British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, February 4, 1907, BOF Archives.


British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, February 18, 1907, BOF Archives.

British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, March 11, 1907, BOF Archives.


Webster, *The Evolution of the Olympic Games*, 204-205.


British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 24, 1907, BOF Archives.

British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, May 8, 1907, BOF Archives.
Amateur Athletic Association, General Committee Minutes, February 8, 1908, AAA/1/2/2/4.


Mallon and Buchanan, *The 1908 Olympic Games*, 205.


As cited in John Kevin McCarthy, *Irish Involvement in the Olympic Games 1896-1920 (With Specific Reference to its Impact on Nationalism and National Identity).* Ph.D Dissertation (National University of Ireland, Cork, 2007), 151.


304 Mallon and Buchanan, *The 1908 Olympic Games*, 462.

305 British Olympic Association, Finance Committee Minutes, December 2, 1907, BOF Archives.


307 British Olympic Association, Finance Committee Minutes, February 26, 1908, BOF Archives.

308 British Olympic Association, Finance Committee Minutes, March 13, 1908, BOF Archives.


310 Ibid, 1012.

311 For instance see, “The Great Little Games,” *Punch* (July 22, 1908): 56.

312 “The Olympic Games,” *The Times*, March 5, 1908, p. 4.

313 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 25, 1908, BOF Archives.

314 “An Appeal,” *Daily Mail*, July 3, 1908, LDPC.

315 “A Point of Honour,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, July 2, 1908, LDPC.

316 “Olympic Fund,” *Daily Mail*, July 11, 1908, LDPC.

317 “Strange English Hospitality,” *Irish News*, July 8, 1908, LDPC.

318 “Appeal to Sport-Lovers: Sandow’s £1,500 Cheque,” *Weekly Dispatch*, July 5, 1908, LDPC.

319 “£12,000: Appeal Over-Subscribed,” *Daily Mail*, July 9, 1908, LDPC.

320 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 8, 1908, BOF Archives.

Chapter Three

The absence of an American flag flying in the stadium appears to have been the result of an administrative oversight. The responsibility lies with Imre Kiralfy’s three sons who were in charge of stadium decoration. All three were American citizens. Indeed one of them was a sprinter on the American Olympic team in London, strongly suggesting that no personal affront was aimed as the U.S. squad. Note that the flag of Sweden was also
missing and that there were still a number of American flags and national emblems situated around the stadium grounds. See Theodore, Andrea Cook, “The Olympic Games of 1908 in London: A reply to certain criticisms made by some of the American officials. British Olympic Association, 1908, BOF Archives, 42-43.


344 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 20, 1908, BOF Archives.


346 Bill Mallon and Ian Buchanan, The 1908 Olympic Games: Results for All Competitors in All Events, with Commentary (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 268-271.


349 William M. Sloane to Pierre de Coubertin, 16 August, 1908. William Milligan Sloane Correspondence, Notice: 0058509 OU M00 (1894-1924), IOC Archives.


“Olympic Games: 2,000,000 Tickets for Sale,” *Daily Mail*, June 22, 1908, LDPC.

British Olympic Association, General Council Minutes, April 30, 1908, BOF Archives.

Reverend Courcy Laffan to Imre Kiralfy, May 9, 1908, as cited in British Olympic Association, Finance Committee Minutes, May 8, 1908, BOF Archives.

British Olympic Association, Finance Committee Minutes, June 24, 1908, BOF Archives.


Ibid.

“Trying to Fill the Stadium,” *Daily Express*, July 18, 1908, LDPC.


British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 18, 1908, BOF Archives.


Theodore Andrea Cook, *The Sunlit Hours: A Record of Sport and Life* (New York: George H. Doran, 1925), 245.


368*“The Olympic Games,” Athletic News and Cycling Journal, July 13, 1908, p. 3.

369*“By the Seaside,” London Opinion, July 28, 1908, LDPC.


374*“Official Programme of the 1908 Olympic Games, 1908,” (London: British Olympic Association, 1908), 1, CIO MA 327+2, IOC Archives.

375Mallon and Buchanan, The 1908 Olympic Games, 52-57.


379*“The Olympic Games,” Academy, July 25, 1908, LDPC.

380Amateur Athletic Association, General Committee Minutes, October 3, 1908, AAA/1/2/2/4.

381Cook, “The Olympic Games of 1908 in London”; Casper Whitney, “American Committee Report”; “The Olympic Games: An Answer to Mr. Francis Peabody, Jr., and ‘A Member of the British Olympic Committee,’ By a Member of the American Olympic Committee,” (n.p., 1908) CIO MA 910, IOC Archives.

British Olympic Association, General Council Minutes, July 15, 1908, BOF Archives; Bruce Kidd, *Tom Longboat* (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited, 2004), 26-34.


British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 25, 1908, BOF Archives.


Martin and Gynn, *The Olympic Marathon*. 76.


“The Olympic Games,” *Academy*, July 25, 1908, LDPC.


“The Olympic Squabbles,” *Collier’s* 41 (September 12, 1908), 10.


Casper Whitney to Lord Desborough, July 31, 1908, LDPC.

Casper Whitney further expounded upon his proposal in a series of periodical articles, see: Casper Whitney, “The View-Point: Reflections,” *Outing* 52 (September, 1908): 763-764.


William M. Sloane to Pierre de Coubertin, 16 August, 1908, William Milligan Sloane Correspondence, Notice: 0058509 OU M00 (1894-1924), IOC Archives.

William M. Sloane to Pierre de Coubertin, 26 January, 1909, William Milligan Sloane Correspondence, Notice: 0058509 OU M00 (1894-1924), IOC Archives.


Whitelaw Reid to Theodore Roosevelt, August 11, 1908, Reel 84, TR Papers.

Theodore Andrea Cook to Theodore Roosevelt, September 8, 1908, reel 84, TR Papers.

Theodore Roosevelt to Theodore Andrea Cook, October 20, 1908, reel 351, TR Papers.

Theodore Andrea Cook to Theodore Roosevelt, November 2, 1908, reel 88, TR Papers.

Cook, “The Olympic Games of 1908 in London.”

Theodore Andrea Cook to Theodore Roosevelt, November 2, 1908, reel 88, TR Papers.

Theodore Roosevelt to Theodore Andrea Cook, November 17, 1908, reel 352, TR Papers.

Theodore Roosevelt to James Bryce, November 25, 1908, reel 352, TR Papers.


440 Finley Peter Dunne, “‘Mr. Dooley’ on the Olympic Games,” *American Magazine* 66 (October 1908): 617.

441 Dyreson, *Making the American Team*, 150.

442 “The Olympic Games,” *Academy*, July 25, 1908, LDPC.


446 “The Olympic Games,” *The Times*, November 2, 1908, p. 17.


453 Mark Dyreson, “‘To Construct a better and More Peaceful World’ or ‘War Minus the Shooting’?: The Olympic Movement’s Second Century,” in Onward to the Olympics: Historical Perspectives on the Olympic Games, Gerald P. Schaus and Stephen R. Wenn eds.(Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 337-351.


Chapter Four

458 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, February 25, 1909, BOF Archives.

459 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, March 19, 1909, BOF Archives.


463 For instance see, Theodore Andrea Cook to Pierre de Coubertin, May 17, 1911, and August, 1911, IOC Archives, MBR-COOK-CORR (1909-1926), ID 6711.

464 Bill Mallon and Ian Buchanan, The 1908 Olympic Games: Results for All Competitors in All Events, with Commentary (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 16-17.


467 Reverend Robert S. de Courcy Laffan to Pierre de Coubertin, December 23, 1912, IOC Archives, Grande-Bretagne Correspondence (1892-1923), OU MO 01 14 36.

468 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 18, 1911, BOF Archives.

469 Ibid.

470 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, November 28, 1911, BOF Archives.

471 Ibid.

473 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 16, 1912, BOF Archives.

474 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, November 28, 1911, BOF Archives.

475 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, January 16, 1912, BOF Archives.

476 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 16, 1912, BOF Archives.

477 Ibid.

478 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, March 12, 1912, BOF Archives.

479 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, February 13, 1913, BOF Archives.


482 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 25, 1911, BOF Archives.

483 Ibid.


486 Bill Mallon and Ture Widlund, The 1912 Olympic Games: Results for All Competitors in All Events, with Commentary (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 139.

487 As cited in Reverend Robert S. de Courcy Laffan to Pierre de Coubertin, April 18, 1911, IOC Archives, MBR-COURCY-CORR, 0056930 (1902-1929).


British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 18, 1911, BOF Archives.

Amateur Athletic Association, General Olympic Committee Minutes, January 12, 1912, AAA/1/2/2/4.

Amateur Athletic Association, General Olympic Committee Minutes, March 9, 1912, AAA/1/2/2/4.

The Festival of Empire: An Imperial Meeting of Sportsmen,” The Times, February 24, 1911, p. 15.


Ibid., 7.

British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 18, 1911, BOF Archives.

British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, January 16, 1912, BOF Archives.

The Olympic Games at Stockholm,” The Times, March 15, 1912, p. 13.


Reverend Robert S. de Courcy Laffan to Pierre de Coubertin, December 14, 1911, IOC Archives, Grande-Bretagne Correspondence (1892-1923), OU MO 01 14 36.

The British Olympic Council,” The Times, January 18, 1912, p. 11; King Gustaf V to Lord Desborough, March 9, 1912, Records of Lord Desborough, D86/13A/7, Centre for
Buckinghamshire Studies, County Hall, Walton Street, Aylesbury, England (hereafter cited as Bucks Archive).


507 Amateur Athletic Association, General Olympic Committee Minutes, November 25, 1911, AAA/1/2/2/4.

508 Amateur Athletic Association, General Olympic Committee Minutes, March 9, 1912, AAA/1/2/2/4.

509 F. A. M. Webster, Olympian Field Events: Their History and Practice (London: George Newnes), 1913, 3. Irish shot putter Denis Horgan won a silver medal at the 1908 London games.


515–Association Football: The United Kingdom Eleven at the Olympic Games,” The Times, September 11, 1911, p. 11.

516 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, May 19, 1909, BOF Archives


519 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 26, 1910, BOF Archives


524. All facts and figures gleaned from Mallon and Widlund, *The 1912 Olympic Games*.


545. “The Olympic Games: Sir A. Conan Doyle’s Suggestions,” *The Times* (London), 30 July 1912, p. 6. This letter was Conan Doyle’s second correspondence to the *Times* on this issue; the first was dated July 18, 1912. Conan Doyle’s proposal advocated both the creation of a representative Empire team and also the initiation of annual or bi-annual national or imperial games. Furthermore, Conan Doyle expressed his belief that the Olympic Games should take priority over the more traditional British sports and that the nation’s athletes should be housed and trained in special quarters. For a detailed discussion of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s involvement in British Olympism see Peter Lovesey, “Conan Doyle and the Olympics,” *Journal of Olympic History* 10 (2001): 6-9.

546. Webster, *Olympian Field Events*, 5.


549. British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, August 16, 1912, BOF Archives.


555 Dyreson, Making the American Team, 147.


557 “Cricket Notes: Cricket and Olympiads,” Morning Post, July 29, 1912, p. 10.

558 “Games versus Athletics,” Living Age 274 (August 17, 1912): 439.

559 “The Effect upon Amateur Sport,” The Times, August 10, 1912, p. 10.


564 “International Athletics,” Morning Post, August 12, 1912, p. 5.


567 “The Olympic Games and the Public,” The Field, 3 August 1912, p. 234.
Chapter Five


569 David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London: Longman, 1991). From the period, 1860 to 1913, Great Britain went from controlling a 19.9 percent share in world manufacturing output to only a 13.6 percent share. Moreover, the nation’s annual percentage growth declined from a 1.2 increase between the period 1873-1899, to only a 0.5 increase in the period 1899-1913. Also see, Aaron L. Friedberg. *The Weary Titan: Great Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1988).


576 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, August 16, 1912, BOF Archives.

577 Pierre de Coubertin to Lord Desborough, May 12, 1913, Records of Lord Desborough, D86/13B/1, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, County Hall, Walton Street, Aylesbury, England (hereafter cited as Bucks Archive).

578 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, February 13, 1913, BOF Archives; IOC Congress on Sports Psychology and Physiology, Lausanne, Switzerland, May 7-11, 1913, IOC Archives. Somerset was admitted into the IOC on May 8, 1913.


The “Special Committee for the Olympic Games in Berlin” was comprised of the following members: Mr. J.E.K. Studd (chairman), Mr. P.L. Fisher, Mr. J.C. Hurd, Mr. H.W. Forster, Mr. B.J.T. Bosanquet, Mr. G.S. Robertson, Mr. E. Mackay Edgar, Mr. T.A. Cook, Mr. A.E.D. Anderson, Sir Claude McDonald, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 24, 1913, BOF Archives.


British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 24, 1913, BOF Archives.

Amateur Athletic Association, General Olympic Committee Minutes, January 4, 1913, AAA/1/2/2/4. Additional AAA suggestions included the introduction of scratch races, university Olympic competitions, gymnastic clubs, and the awarding of Standard Medals to athletes beating standard Olympic distances.

British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, June 12, 1913, BOF Archives.


Amateur Athletic Association, General Olympic Committee Minutes, July 16, 1913, AAA/1/2/2/4; British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, June 12, 1913, BOF Archives.

*Aims and Objects of the Olympic Games Fund*, 31.

Amateur Athletic Association, General Olympic Committee Minutes, February 20, 1914, AAA/1/2/2/4.


*Aims and Objects of the Olympic Games Fund*, 31-35. Proposals were also received by the following governing bodies of British sport: the Irish and Scottish branches of the


594 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 22, 1913, BOF Archives. Badges and diplomas were awarded on the following basis: bronze badges and diploma to successful candidates whose sixteenth birthday falls within the year; silver badge and diploma to successful candidates whose seventeenth birthday falls within the year; silver badge, with two bars, and diploma to successful candidates whose eighteenth birthday falls within the year; and gold badge and diploma to successful candidates whose nineteenth birthday falls within the year. Rules posited that athletes must obtain the lower grade badge before attempting to qualify for one higher.

595 “Olympic Games Fund: The Attitude of the Special Committee,” The Times, September 5, 1913, p. 11.

596 As cited in “Ill Training and Snobbery in British Athletics,” The Literary Digest 45 (August 31, 1912): 30.


599 British Olympic Association, Council minutes, September 4, 1913, BOF Archives.


601 British Olympic Association, Council minutes, September 4, 1913, BOF Archives.


British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 22, 1913, BOF Archives. BOA archives, reveal that the failure of the Special Committee to obtain aristocratic support originally delayed the emergence of the appeal. As early as April of 1913, it had entrusted R.H. Powell with the task of persuading eminent statesmen such as Lord Desborough and Lord Harris to issue a public appeal for funds in its name. Despite Powell’s endeavors, by May 27 only the signature of Lord Rothschild had been secured, prompting the BOA to caution “that unless the Appeal was made very shortly the possibility of a public response was very small.” The Special Committee reaffirmed the BOA’s trepidation when it noted that “any further delay in asking for and obtaining funds would be disastrous.”

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“Great Britain and the Olympic Games: Appeal for National Subscriptions,” *The Times*, August 18, 1913. The appeal was by signed by the following: Lord Grey, Lord Harris, Lord Roberts, Lord Rothschild, Lord Strathcona, and the Duke of Westminster.

*Aims and Objects of the Olympic Games Fund*, 18.


Ibid.

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*Aims and Objects of the Olympic Games Fund*, 18.
617 Frederic Harrison led the Positivist movement in Great Britain. Positivism is a political movement based on the philosophical writings of Auguste Comte. See Frederic Harrison, Autobiographic Memoirs (London: McMillan, 1911).

618 “Professionalism and Gate Money,” The Times, August 26, 1913, p. 9.

619 Ibid.

620 “A Remonstrance: Nowell Smith,” The Times, August 27, 1913, p. 3.


622 The Appeal a ‘Degradation,’” Manchester Guardian, September 7, 1913, p. 11.


626 “Duke of Westminster’s Reply to Mr. Harrison,” The Times, August 27, 1913, p. 3.


630 Aims and Objects of the Olympic Games Fund, 38.


635“Olympic Games Fund: The Attitude of the Special Committee,” *The Times*, September 5, 1913, p. 11.


637“‘The ‘National Disaster’ of 1912,’” *Punch* 145 (1913): 209.


640British Olympic Council Minutes, October 16, 1913, BOF Archives.

641Ibid., 4.


643British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, November 20, 1913, BOF Archives.

644*Aims and Objects of the Olympic Games Fund*, 30.


646“The Olympic Games: Retirement of the Special Committee,” *The Times*, January 16, 1914, p. 50.


648British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, January 15, 1914, BOF Archives. The appeal for national subscriptions actually only raised £5,393; while an additional £4,500+ was pledged in conditional promises. Of the money available to the Special Committee (£5,393), £1,500 was allocated to the BOA, £3,000 to the AAA, £600 to the ASA, £250
to the NCU, and £43 balance was available as petty cash. Of the £3,000 allocated to the 
AAA, the Special Committee resolved that the money should be devoted to the payment 
of professional trainers as follows: Mr. W.R. Knox as chief trainer at £400 per annum and 
£150 per annum traveling expenses, and nine supplementary trainers for two years at 
about £3 each per week. Supplementary trainers were located throughout the Britain Isle.

164.

650. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Memoirs and Adventures (Boston: Little, Brown, and 
Company, 1924), 230.

651. Webster, The Evolution of the Olympic Games, 246.


653. Ibid.


655. Doyle, Memoirs and Adventures, 231.


657. Ibid. The following gentlemen were appointed to serve on the “Ways and Means 
Committee”: The Right Hon. W. Hayes Fisher (Chairman), Sir Claude McDonald, 

658. Amateur Athletic Association, General Olympic Committee Minutes, February 29, 
1914; British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, March 5, 1914, BOF Archives.


660. Theodore Andrea Cook to Robert G. Vansittart, June 2, 1914, FO 371/2186

661. As cited in Martin Polley, “‘No business of ours’?: The Foreign Office and the 
Olympic Games, 1896-1914,” International Journal of the History of Sport 13 (August 

662. Robert G. Vansittart to Sir Eyre Crowe, June 8, 1914, FO 371/2186

663. Foreign Office Minute, undated, FO 371/2186

664. Reynolds, Britannia Overruled.
Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 132.


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Ibid.

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The Olympic Games in Antwerp,” The Times, April 14, 1919, p. 5.


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For example see Reverend Robert S. de Courcy Laffan to Pierre de Coubertin, January 22; June 3; July 8; July 12, 1915, MBR-COURCY-CORR, 0056930 (1902-1929), IOC Archives.

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693 Major George Wuthe, Captain Joseph Mills Hanson, and Captain Carl V. Burger, eds., The Inter-Allied Games (New York: Games Committee, 1919), 25 & 499.

694 Ibid., 49.


702 Duke of Somerset to Theodore Andrea Cook, April 18, 1915, MBR-COOK-CORR (1909-1926), ID 6711, IOC Archives.


Ibid., 38.


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British Olympic Association, Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes, March 31, 1920, BOF Archives. House of Commons Committee was comprised of Right. Hon. Walter Long; Right Hon. Sir Donald Maclean; Hon. F. S. Jackson; Mr. Kennedy Jones; Mr. Charles Palmer; Sir Park Goff.
721 British Olympic Association, Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes, April 29, 1920, BOF Archives.

722 British Olympic Association, Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes, April 15, 1920, BOF Archives.


724 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, April 26, 1920, BOF Archives.


729 John Kevin McCarthy, Irish Involvement in the Olympic Games 1896-1920 (with specific reference to its impact on nationalism and national identity).” PhD Dissertation (National University of Ireland, Cork, 2007), 245-246. This entire issue is chronicled in extensive detail by McCarthy.


732 “Will Not Admit Ireland to Olympic Games as a Nation,” New York Times, July 21, 1920, p. 23. Curiously, no record of this discussion can be traced in the minutes of the BOA.


735 Proces Verbaux, du Comite International Olympique, August 17-??, 1920, p. 5, IOC Archives.

736 British Olympic Association, Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes, April 29, 1920, BOF Archives.

737 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, May 13, 1920, BOF Archives.

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743 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, June 7, 1920, BOF Archives.

744 British Olympic Association, Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes, June 7, 1920, BOF Archives.

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746 Ibid.

747 British Olympic Association, General Council Minutes, June 29, 1920, BOF Archives.


750 Beck, Scoring for Britain, 102-103.

751 Mike Huggins and Jack Williams, Sport and the English, 1918-1939 (London: Routledge, 2006), see chapter seven.

Foreign Office Minute, May 5, 1920, FO 371/3647 C365792


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Ibid.


771 British Olympic Association, Council Minutes, July 13, 1920, BOF Archives.

772 Ibid.


774 British Olympic Association, Finance and General Purposes Committee Minutes, August 5, 1920, BOF Archives. By August 5, 1920, the BOA reported that £3,537 had been subscribed to date. Exactly how Sydney Colston was inspiring public beneficence is unknown since no record of his propaganda activities are discussed in BOA archival minutes and there was not an upsurge in newspaper coverage of the appeal.


785 Ibid.
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892. All results taken from Ian Buchanan, British Olympians: A Hundred Years of Gold Medalists (Middlesex: Guinness, 1991); Webster, Olympic Cavalcade, 128-144.

893. Ibid.


896. Ibid., 83.


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920. British Olympic Association, The Chairman’s Annual Statement, 1924, BOF Archives.


924. For an examination of the increasingly conservative tone of inter-war British sport see Huggins and Williams, Sport and the English.


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962 Lord Rochdale to Comte Baillet Latour, September 17, 1927, Grande-Bretagne Correspondence (1925-27), OU MO 01 14 36, IOC Archives.

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