

# British Empire Games and Scotland in the Early Years

## —National, Imperial, and Sporting Dimensions of the 1930s—

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初期のエンパイア・ゲームズとスコットランド  
—1930年代のネーション、帝国、スポーツの諸相—

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the movement of the British Empire Games (BEG), and the Scottish involvement and their attitudes about the games. This paper is presented from the viewpoint of the sporting organisations in Scotland, by means of reconstructing the activities in the 1930s of the Scottish National Sports Federation (SNSF) as the Scottish organisation for the BEG. Revealing some phases of interaction between nationalism and imperialism in the context of imperial and sports history, I argue about an aspect in which 'Scottishness' clearly emerged through imperial cultural activity in the early period of the British Empire-Commonwealth regime.

Reconstructing the activities of the SNSF in its initial stage, I highlight some of the unexpected conditions of participating in the games in the early period. The Scottish took the lead in organising the national body for the BEG but they seemed to be neglected in some important decisions for the Games. They struggled with raising funds in order to send the athletes to the games held in the overseas Dominions, and protested against the English counterpart concerning the national flag and anthem.

It should be noted that the formation of an over-all national organisation in Scotland was fuelled by an imperial sporting event. The Statute of Westminster was enacted in the same year that the SNSF was established, but the federation would be part of other spheres of the commonwealth outside of the political "British Commonwealth of Nations". The institutionalisation and internationalisation of sports were intertwined with national and imperial initiatives and those would form the embryo of a peculiar global network endorsed by the Commonwealth Games.

**Keywords:** British Empire Games, British Empire, Scotland, sports history, Commonwealth of Nations

キーワード: エンパイア・ゲームズ、イギリス帝国、スコットランド、スポーツ史、コモンウェルス

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## Introduction

Many have discussed the relationship between Scotland and the British Empire as historical processes in which the former as a nation was forged through the latter. Various phenomena have been examined, from economic activities and imperial administration to religious missions and academic contributions. Included as well in this framework are the sports and sports events that the British diffused and which some Africans and Asians voluntarily acquired. This sports field of concern was largely initiated by J.A.Mangan, the author of *The Games Ethic and Imperialism* and the founding editor of *The International Journal of the History of Sport*. Since then many researchers have developed — and are still developing — new themes. This article contributes to this trend.

My initial concern is about a making and an unmaking of national identities in Britain through event, such as the international exhibitions and the historical pageants, which I consider as part of imperial propaganda.<sup>(1)</sup> In this paper I will focus on the activities of holding and attending the British Empire Games (BEG), the Scottish involvement and their attitudes on the games, from a viewpoint of the sporting organisations in Scotland. Those activities and attitudes indicate some phases of interaction between nationalism and imperialism in the context of imperial and sports history. I will argue about an aspect in which Scottishness did emerge through imperial cultural activity in the early period of the British Empire-Commonwealth regime.

As the archives of the Commonwealth Games Council for Scotland has been moved to the University of Stirling Archives in Scotland, it is now possible to examine this bulk of the historical documents.<sup>(2)</sup> Thanks to these documents, we can now reconstruct in detail the initial stage of an emerging Scottish national sporting organisation and trace some of the unexpected conditions of participating in the BEGs in this period for the teams from Great Britain. The continuous struggles the Scottish faced on the platform of Commonwealth sports will be also highlighted throughout this paper.

### I The first Games and Scotland

The first BEG was held in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, in 1930. Katherine Moore revealed how the games were organised and argued that they were a representation of imperial solidarity, while Daniel Gorman recently explored the first games in the context of amateurism, imperialism and internationalism of the period.<sup>(3)</sup> Both referred to the personal and enthusiastic struggle of Melville Marks Robinson, the manager of the Canadian athletics team for the 1928 Olympic Games, with sporting organisations of the countries in the empire, because some countries were relatively 'reluctant' to send their competitors to Canada mainly for financial reasons.<sup>(4)</sup>

We know, thanks to previous studies, how M.M.Robinson won the confirmation of those overseas teams to attend the Hamilton games. For the organisers of the games in Canada, it was important to ensure that the United Kingdom would endorse this imperial sporting event. Gorman described in detail Robinson's efforts to persuade the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) in England to send athletes to the games in Hamilton.<sup>(5)</sup> The AAA was apparently less enthusiastic with the idea of an imperial sporting competition. This is most likely because, as Gorman pointed out, "imperial unity was honoured more in the breach than in practice,"<sup>(6)</sup>

although it should be also noted that the AAA championship had obviously been represented as an international competition since the 1880s.<sup>(7)</sup> Robinson visited London in February 1930 to lobby the General Committee of the AAA and successfully persuaded them to send their competitors to Canada.<sup>(8)</sup> The significance of the AAA's decision is indicated by the fact that it was soon followed by other sporting organisations such as swimming and bowling.<sup>(9)</sup> It was still uncertain, however, whether the AAA would send the best-performing athletes. Although England might generously have paid for an athlete representing British Guiana,<sup>(10)</sup> Lord Derby and other officials of the council for Great Britain in connection with the Games appealed for funding to attend the games only in late June.<sup>(11)</sup> It was not until 16 July, exactly one month before the opening of the games, that the official announcement of the English team was made public, and they were almost late for the games because of bad weather en route.<sup>(12)</sup>

Remaining unclear, however, was the form of participating countries especially those from the United Kingdom, which separately sent (and still send) their own teams instead of a British team as they do to the Olympics. According to a newspaper article in February 1930, it was "the desire of those who are organizing the Games in Canada" that "in place of having a team to represent Great Britain there should be teams from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland..."<sup>(13)</sup> The British realised this "desire", while participating sporting bodies, most of which had members affiliated throughout Great Britain, were to select competitors for each nation. Most organisations, on the other hand, could not afford the travel expense, despite a provision from the Canadian organiser, so the appeal for funding was necessary, as we have seen, even for the teams from Great Britain, which were ostensibly affluent.

The Scottish also faced financial difficulties. In this period, many athletes and their supporters, just after being selected by the qualified sporting body, started to make every effort to raise money to visit the town holding the competition. While some portion of the fund raised by the Council for Great Britain might well have come to the north, the Scottish representatives seems to have had their own fund. This surplus consequently put the basis of the newly founded national organisation in Scotland.

## II Founding the national organisation for overall sports

The first meeting of the Scottish National Sports Federation (SNSF) was held at the office of G.W.Ferguson, an original member of the "old committee", in Edinburgh, on 30 April, 1931.<sup>(14)</sup> Officials of the Scottish organisations for athletics, boxing and swimming played their crucial role as the members of the "old committee" organised for the purpose of sending the Scots to the first BEG in Hamilton. At first, in this meeting, they unanimously agreed to admit representatives of the Scottish organisations for bowling and wrestling. The original affiliated bodies of SNSF are therefore five Scottish national organisations for athletics, swimming, boxing, bowling, and wrestling.

Here the surplus of Scotland's expenses at the BEG in 1930, £ 63 14s. 9d., was formally handed over to the SNSF. The recommendation by the "old committee" was submitted and it was agreed that F.B.Wardlaw, one of the SNSF original members from the Scottish Amateur Athletic Association (SAAA), should receive a commendation "for his valuable services in connection with the raising of funds and administrative works on the old committee." They elected John Orr, a representative of the bowling association, as Chairman of the

SNSF, and Ferguson, from the swimming association, as their Secretary and Treasurer, and along with G.Hume of the SAAA, they were elected as the delegates to the British Empire Games Federation (BEGF) which had not yet been formed. They also discussed the arrangements and policies for raising fund to visit South Africa for the Empire Games in 1934. Even home countries including England struggled to raise money to send their teams to the games. It is clear that they needed to start seeking fund for participating in the games as early as possible.

It is intriguing that, though the SNSF was directly and formally derived from the Empire Games in 1930, the name of this new organisation originally contained neither the word "Empire" nor "Empire Games". As is presumed by the name of the SNSF, it was initially hoped that matters of mutual interest to all amateur sports in Scotland could be considered. "After unsuccessful effort", however, "to unify the amateur regulations of the different sports, the comprehensive designation was quietly replaced by its subtitle "British Empire Games Council for Scotland."<sup>(15)</sup>

On the other hand, it is most likely that there was great pride about their formation as an independent Federation at such an early stage. The minutes of the second meeting of the SNSF held on 29 April 1932 recorded the fact that their counterpart in England had not formed yet and that the SNSF sent the copy of its constitution to England for their use as a model.<sup>(16)</sup> A paper bound in the Minute Book in the 1960s revealed a letter dated 27th April 1932 to E.Hunter, an English official engaged in the Empire Games, reading as follows:<sup>(17)</sup>

...(I) am delighted to hear that England is at last awake and about follow the good example of Scotland and form a Council for England of the Empire Games Federation. I accordingly, and with the compliments of Scotland, send to our weaker brother a copy of our Constitution with the advice "Go ye and do likewise!"

The draft also quoted "the resolution" from a minute of a meeting on 9th May 1933 of the English governing bodies of amateur sport and asserted a "Council of England of the British Empire Games Federation" was founded on that day. In addition to the 1961 draft, a copy of another letter suggests a critical fact concerning the date of the founding of the BEGF itself. The anonymous letter noted in 1957 that the BEGF "did not become a "fait accompli" with duly accepted Constitution until the 1932 Olympics".<sup>(18)</sup> Although previous research has been ambiguous about the year of founding, it was noticeably not until the beginning of 1933 that the three representatives each from participating countries, which Robinson described as "the basis of the organization of the Federation", gathered at the meeting in London.<sup>(19)</sup>

Whatever the exact or effective date of founding the BEGF, Scottish sporting people most certainly took an initiative in Great Britain in founding a national association for the Empire Games and they were clearly proud of this in relation to the formation of the central Federation.

### III A distance from the heart of a sporting empire

This does not mean, however, that the Scots led the movement of the Empire Games. The next games in 1934 were discussed in the second meeting. One of the minutes of this meeting said "although press reports

has been published to the effect that South Africa were[*sic.*] not to hold the Games in 1934 no official intimation to this effect was yet to hand." Until this time, the Scottish officials seem to have supposed that South Africa would hold the next games. Among the press reports referred to was an article in *The Scotsman* on the 1st of April which cited that A.V.Lindbergh, the chairman of the South African Olympic and BEG Association, "intimated that, although the next Empire Games had been offered to the Union, South Africa could be unable to accept, on account of the prevailing economic conditions."<sup>(20)</sup>

"Economic conditions" is a plausible excuse for the association of South Africa, and at the same time it is reported that they stated it was doubtful for them to be able to send athletes to the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, USA, for the same reason.<sup>(21)</sup> As far as the Empire Games was concerned, it is probable that, as Bruce Kidd suggested, the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (AAUC) and the associations in several countries refused to hold the games in South Africa because SA had made it clear that black athletes would not be welcome in a recent case.<sup>(22)</sup> It is not certain, however, that the SNSF members were promptly informed of the real reason that South Africa would be virtually stripped of the opportunity to hold the games. As they sought the official confirmation "or otherwise through the medium of London", the SNSF seems to have had little information in April 1932. An account appeared in the minutes of the 4th meeting of the SNSF, held in the following year, which intimates the existence of "certain items... not for the press" in the minutes of the BEGF meeting in January 1933.<sup>(23)</sup>

In the case of the 1938 games the SNSF was once again dismayed by the process of holding and organising the games. Two countries, Australia and Canada, applied to hold the next games at the meeting of the BEG Federation during the second games in London. It seems somewhat odd the chairman of BEGF consulted the SNSF in September 1935, about the approximate number of competitors Scotland would expect to send in each case, explicitly asking "earnestly to consider these letters [from both countries enclosed]".<sup>(24)</sup> But the secretary Ferguson explained at the SNSF meeting three weeks later that he had confirmed the press report to the BEGF that Australia was offered the games. They discussed this matter at such length as to write to the BEGF that "while we have every sympathy with Australia's claims as the next venue, we hope that a more detailed offer would come to hand from Canada before the final decision was reached."<sup>(25)</sup> Although the Scottish representatives to the BEGF were involved in the official decision in November 1935, it seems obvious that they were not so well informed in advance that Australia would host the 1938 games.<sup>(26)</sup>

As a result the SNSF inevitably struggled to raise funds to send a minimal team of ten athletes and one manager to Sydney, because the grant Australia offered to the participating countries in order to cover a part of the cost of travelling was not enough even for the relatively affluent home countries. The SNSF selected a Mr. G.S.C.Murray as the organiser of the Appeal Fund, offering remuneration of 10% of the gross amount he collected.<sup>(27)</sup> Some sporting bodies implicitly complained of the 10% commission based on all of the funds, which might include the money they had offered since they instead responded directly to the SNSF appeal. Along with the confirmation by J.Proctor, representing the Boxing Association, at the meeting of the Executive Committee in February 1936, a discussion at the annual general meeting of the SNSF in February 1937 arose from representative associations as to the 10% commission.<sup>(28)</sup> The funding drive eventually reached the £ 600 target, apart from the organiser's commission, which allowed the team to travel to Sydney for four months.<sup>(29)</sup>

The Scottish were also displeased at the behaviour of their English counterpart concerning the national

anthem. In the meeting of the SNSF council in February 1934, when the second games were approaching within six months, the secretary Ferguson raised the question of England's action at the Games in Hamilton of flying the Union Jack and using "God Save the King" as their national anthem. The council consequently agreed to make a strong protest to England that "this flag and anthem belonged to the Empire and no one country should be allowed to adopt the same." The SNSF simultaneously decided that their flag was the St. Andrew's Cross and their anthem was to be "Scots Wha Hae" as they had used in the Games in 1930.<sup>(30)</sup> Nevertheless, according to the minutes of the meeting of the English association cited in the SNSF minute book, England suggested that they would still use the St. George's Cross and "God Save the King."<sup>(31)</sup> Scotland made repeated claims to the BEGF in this matter. In July, as England insisted on their original choice of "God Save the King", the SNSF decided to give notice to England that the Scottish anthem would be "God Save the King" instead of "Scots Wha Hae," and the Scottish team actually honoured the latter as the anthem up to and including the 1954 Games in Vancouver.<sup>(32)</sup>

## Conclusion

These stories reconstructed here suggest that the sporting officials of home countries and the Dominions were diversely involved in organising the games. The Scottish established their own national association for the Empire Games earlier than the Welsh and the English, which they were so proud of as to offer instruction in setting up the new organisation for the Games. Though they sent representatives to the central organisation BEGF, which they helped to establish, they had nothing to do with some of the more important decisions made in the early years, nor with some discussions concerning the Games. Those present at the SNSF meeting were often displeased with the decisions in London apparently led by such officials as Leigh-Wood, who was the chairman of both the BEGF and the BEG Council of England.

It should be noted, however, that the formation of an over-all national organisation in Scotland was fuelled by an imperial sporting event. The Statute of Westminster was enacted in the same year that the SNSF was established, but the federation would be part of other spheres of the commonwealth outside of the political "British Commonwealth of Nations", or, by the wording of T.M.Shaw, one of the plural commonwealths.<sup>(33)</sup> The institutionalisation and internationalisation of sports were intertwined with national and imperial initiatives and those would form the embryo of a peculiar global network endorsed by the Commonwealth Games.

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<sup>(1)</sup> M.Kawamoto, 'Exhibitions and the Empire in Britain, 1886-1938: Representations of Britishness and Otherness', unpublished M.A. thesis for the University of Kent at Canterbury, 1998; *id.* 'City and its Local Event during the Pageant Boom: a Study of Dover Pageant (1908)', *Kainan Shigaku*, 47 (2009) (in Japanese), *et.al.*

<sup>(2)</sup> I am very much indebted to Karl Magee, the archivist of the University of Stirling.

<sup>(3)</sup> K.Moore, "The Warmth of Comradeship": the first British empire games and imperial solidarity', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 6(2) (1989); D.Gorman, 'Amateurism, Imperialism, Internationalism and the First British Empire Games', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27(4) (2010).

<sup>(4)</sup> Moore, *op.cit.*, pp.246-247; Gorman, *op.cit.*, pp.614-615.

<sup>(5)</sup> In the argument here it is important that the AAA was actually, as Gorman worded, "the British" organisation for athletics although it is situated in England and also led by eminent sporting figures there.

- (6) Gorman, op.cit., p.614.
- (7) M.Watman, *The Official History of the AAA*, London, 2011; P.Lovesey, *The Official Centenary History of the Amateur Athletic Association*, Enfield, 1979.
- (8) Gorman, op.cit., p.614.
- (9) *The Times*, 14 Apr., 1930, p.5.
- (10) Gorman, op.cit., p.615.
- (11) *The Times*, 27 June, 1930, p.20.
- (12) Moore, op.cit., p.247.
- (13) *The Times*, 14 Feb., 1930, p.6.
- (14) 'Minute of First Meeting of the Scottish National Sports Federation held at No.40 Melville Street, Edinburgh on 30th April, 1931 at 7.30 p.m.', in Scottish National Sports Federation Minute Book, No.1 (referred as "the Minute Book No.1" hereinafter). A draft (referred as "the 1961 draft" hereinafter) was attached to the front hardcover of the British Empire Games Council (Scotland) (Scottish Amateur Sports Federation) Minute Book, No.3 (16 Mar 1960 to 29 Apr 1965), mentioning that the formation of the SNSF was already agreed in principle in November 1930 but that "actual official formation date is... 30th April 1931." It is assumed that the 1961 draft would be typewritten for a speech or as a statement in "1961" by or for "Lord Milligan", since "1961" and "Lord Milligan" were handwritten and deleted on the upper blank of the paper. William R.Milligan was a member of British Empire Games Council (Scotland), the succeeding organisation of the SNSF, in those days.
- (15) The 1961 draft.
- (16) 'Minute of Second Meeting of the Scottish National Sports Federation held at No.40 Melville Street, Edinburgh on 29th April, 1932', in the Minute Book No.1.
- (17) The 1961 draft.
- (18) A letter to K.S.Duncan, the secretary of the BEGF, on 10 November, 1957, attached to the front hardcover of the Minute Book No.1.
- (19) "Amateur Athletic Union of Canada Minutes of the 45th Annual Meeting 1932" in LAC (Library and Archives Canada) MG28-I150, vol.20, pp.89-90. Robinson then stated that he didn't intend to go through with the complete committee in the AAUC for the Empire Games because of the "indefinite nature of the scheme" and uncertainty of the Empire Games being held in 1934.
- (20) *The Scotsman*, 1 Apr., 1932, p.13.
- (21) *New York Times*, 1 Apr., 1932, p.25.
- (22) B.Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*, Toronto, 1996, p.73.
- (23) 'Minute of Fourth Meeting of the council of the Scottish National Sports Federation held at No.40 Melville Street, Edinburgh on 25th April, 1933', in the Minute Book No.1.
- (24) A letter from Sir James Leigh-Wood to G.W.Ferguson on 16 Sept., 1935, in the Minute Book No.1.
- (25) 'Minute of Meeting of the Scottish National Sports Federation held at Edinburgh on Wednesday 9th October, 1935, at 6.30 p.m.', in the Minute Book No.1.
- (26) "Amateur Athletic Union of Canada Minutes of the 48th Annual Meeting 1935" in LAC(Library and Archives Canada) MG28-I150, vol.20.
- (27) 'Minute of Meeting of the Executive Committee of the SNSF held at Edinburgh on Monday 15th. June 1936', in the Minute Book No.1.
- (28) 'Minute of Meeting of the Executive Committee of the SNSF held at Edinburgh on Thursday 18th. February 1937 at 7.15 p.m.' and 'Minute of Annual General Meeting of the Scottish National Sports Federation held at Edinburgh on Wednesday 21st April, 1937, at 6.30 p.m.', in the Minute Book No.1.
- (29) 'Minutes of Meeting of the Council of the SNSF held at Edinburgh on Tuesday 10th August, 1937, at 6.30 p.m.', in the Minute Book No.1.
- (30) 'Minute of Fifth Meeting of the council of the Scottish National Sports Federation held at No.40 Melville Street, Edinburgh on 13th February, 1934', in the Minute Book No.1; The 1961 draft.
- (31) 'Minute of Annual General Meeting of the Scottish National Sports Federation held at No.40 Melville Street, Edinburgh on 24th April, 1934', in the Minute Book No.1.
- (32) 'Minute of Meeting of the council of the Scottish National Sports Federation held at No.40 Melville Street, Edinburgh on Wednesday, 4th July, 1934', in the Minute Book No.1; the 1961 draft.
- (33) T.M.Shaw, 'The Commonwealth(s) and Global Governance', *Global Governance*, 10 (2004).

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