

A Review and Interpretation of the Events of the 1994 Commonwealth Games

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The Globe and Mail's coverage of the 1994 Commonwealth Games, and therefore how its readers would interpret the events of the Games, will be evaluated in order to determine whether the Games are being understood according to the aspirations of the Commonwealth Games Federation. Preferably, the Federation's ideals, represented by their core values of "humanity, equality, and destiny"¹, should flourish in the media coverage of the games, thereby demonstrating the successful reproduction of the Federation's principles.

The Vision of the Federation is "To promote a unique, friendly world class Games and to develop sport for the benefit of the people, the nations and the territories of the Commonwealth, and thereby strengthen the Commonwealth."² Notable objectives of the Federation include "To promote other sports events (including cultural activities and festivals attached to such events), to encourage and assist sport and sport development and physical recreation throughout the commonwealth, and to promote the shared values of integrity, fair play, competence, commitment to excellence, respect for gender equality and tolerance, including the fight against the use in sport of drugs and of unhealthy or performance enhancing substances."³ Finally, a noteworthy "Condition of Entry" in the Federation's Constitution states, "there shall be no discrimination against any country or person on any grounds whatsoever, including race, colour, gender, religion, or politics."⁴

The commonwealth is a voluntary association of seventy-two nations and territories who sees the Games as a very important tool, which can be used to achieve their common beliefs. Chief Emeka Anayaoku, the Secretary General of the

¹ "The Role of the CGF." www.commonwealthgames.com. March 17, 2004.

² "Commonwealth Games Federation." <http://www.thecgf.com/about/constitution.pdf>. March 17, 2004.

³ Ibid

Commonwealth, explains that sport enriches human life and is an essential part of human nature. Anayaoku also states that sport can teach valuable lessons, as well as create great opportunity for development.⁵

The Commonwealth games are unique in that they are the only games in which all the participants are able to speak in the English language. This commonality creates an atmosphere, which has led to the Commonwealth Games acquiring the unofficial title of “The Friendly Games”.⁶ This title also stems from Games’ charitable attempt to encourage the pursuit of health and fitness and to inspire youth to strive for excellence.

The 15th Commonwealth Games were covered by media outlets based out of most participating Commonwealth countries. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation sent “more than 800 reporters, camera operators, technicians and production staff”⁷ to Victoria to cover the occurrence of the games. CBC broadcasted the events of the games, which it perceived to be most important and entertaining. Similarly, *The Globe and Mail* newspaper reported on the Games, emphasizing the aspects various employees within the media outlet, decided were most important.

In general, *The Globe and Mail’s* coverage of the Games included articles referring to: the City of Victoria, the tradition of the Queen’s baton, the return of South Africa to the Games, the involvement of Aboriginals, the inclusion of physically disabled athletes, and reports referring to the actual athletic competition. The large majority of

⁴ Ibid

⁵ “Our Association: The Commonwealth and Sport.”

http://www.commonwealthgames.ca/html/site/InsidePages/index_e.aspx?ArticleID=190. March 17, 2004.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Canadian Press, “CBC has 800 in Victoria for Commonwealth coverage.” *The Globe and Mail* 13 August 1994, A14.

The Globe and Mail's coverage of the athletic competition was focused both on individuals' athletic dominance and various scandalous occurrences.

The events and related information of the 15th Commonwealth Games, a perception acquired primarily from articles taken from *The Globe and Mail* includes the following information.

The fifteenth Commonwealth Games in Victoria lasted tens days, and were held from August 18-28, 1994.⁸ More than 32 000 athletes from 63 nations competed in the games.⁹ The 1994 Games marked the fourth time the games were held in Canada.¹⁰ Having previously been held in Hamilton, Vancouver, and Edmonton. The athletes competed for 952 medals in ten sports, which were featured at the Victoria Games.

The rules of the Commonwealth Games “permit host cities to choose eight additional sports from a list of 15 approved disciplines.”¹¹ During the planning of the Victoria Games, however, other Commonwealth countries made plain their preferences: they strongly discouraged organizers from choosing sports requiring expensive equipment, such as yachting and rowing, and urged them to include others with large following outside Canada. Among the latter was lawn bowling.¹² The sports chosen for the Victoria Games included: athletics, aquatics, badminton, boxing, cycling, gymnastics, lawn bowls, shooting, weightlifting, and wrestling.¹³

⁸ Chris Wood, “The athletic empire: Victoria prepares for the 15th Commonwealth Games,” *Maclean's* 14 (1994): 51-52.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ “1994 Commonwealth Games.” www.commonwealthgames.com. March 17, 2004.

¹¹ Chris Wood, “Dreams of glory: athletes from 51 countries begin the quest for gold in 10 official sports,” *Maclean's* 34 (1994): 32-35.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

The city of Victoria had to build or renovate a number of facilities in preparation for the Games. The most imposing permanent facility built specifically for the Games was a \$23 million diving and swimming pool complex.¹⁴ A new open-air cement cycling velodrome, lawn bowling facilities, and shooting range were also constructed for the ten days of events.

Various environmental issues had to be dealt with throughout the planning and staging of the games. The Games committee exceeded all former measures of environmental damage control and implemented numerous strategies to lessen the negative effect the Games would have on the local environment. A number of electric and zero-emission vehicles were used by event staff, a series of sand traps were constructed at large parking areas in order to catch and filter the runoff from the frequently used parking lots, recycling bins were very prominent, and battery collection boxes were used to prevent the toxins present in discarded batteries from the media operations to end up in Victoria landfills.¹⁵ Despite the efforts to protect the beautiful British Columbian environment, “A group of about 50 environmentalists refused to withdraw their threats to seize the international spotlight.”¹⁶ Nonviolent protests were conducted throughout the games, campaigning for and against various environmental issues.

A traditional element of the Games, which received an enormous amount of attention, was the Queen’s baton. “Once every four years, the Queen inserts an inspirational message into a specially handcrafted baton, which is then conveyed to

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Christie, James, “Colour Games a friendly green.” *The Globe and Mail* 22 August 1994, D2.

various capitals of her former Empire on its way to the host city of the Commonwealth Games.”¹⁷ In a ceremony at Buckingham Palace on March 14, the Queen inserted a message into a hallow silver baton, which was crafted for the occasion by three Vancouver Island aboriginal artists.¹⁸ The Queen read the message to the athletes at the opening ceremonies of the games, which were held at Victoria’s Centennial Stadium. The baton was brought into “the stadium by Olympic biathlon double gold medallist Myriam Bedard, who ‘skied’ into the stadium on in-line roller skates.”¹⁹

The involvement of Aboriginal people during the 15th Commonwealth Games in Victoria was a prominent aspect of the games. The Queen’s elaborate silver baton was decorated with aboriginal engravings, which showcased wildlife native to Canada’s west coast.²⁰ The Commonwealth medals were also adorned with Aboriginal engravings. The most visible manifestation of the local Aboriginal artists was seen daily during CBC coverage of the Games. It was “a nine-foot red cedar totem pole carved by Tom LaFortune, 35, of the Salish nation.”²¹ The extensive inclusion of Aboriginals in the Games festivities was “meant to pay respect to the natives who have laid claim to the land on which the Game are being contested.”²²

Yet, because of the extensive coverage and promotion of the Aboriginal people of Vancouver Island, it was suggested that the Games’ international audience would

¹⁶ Chris Wood, “Dreams of glory: athletes from 51 countries begin the quest for gold in 10 official sports,” *Maclean’s* 34 (1994): 32-35.

¹⁷Ibid

¹⁸ Chris Wood, “The athletic empire: Victoria prepares for the 15th Commonwealth Games,” *Maclean’s* 14 (1994): 51-52.

¹⁹ Miro Cernetig and James Christie. “Commonwealth on its mark.” *The Globe and Mail* 19 August 1994, D12.

²⁰ Christie, James. “An Enduring Tradition.” *The Globe and Mail* 13 August 1994, A14.

²¹ Christie, James and Miro Cernetig. “Prince above disabled remarks.” *The Globe and Mail* 18 August 1994, D12.

interpret Aboriginals to be the most dominant aspect of Canada and its society. It could be suggested that, “the 300 million around the world exposed to the televised opening of the Commonwealth Games in Victoria would naturally assume native Indians make up a very large portion of [Canada’s] 30 million population.”²³

The 15th Games were also the first Games to involve physically disabled participants. More than 100 athletes with physical disabilities were included for the first time at a major international sports meet as full members of their national teams.”²⁴

Although this act of inclusion was meant as an attempt to equalize and inspire, everyone involved in the Games did not welcome it. A “public relations nightmare” erupted when Arthur Tunstall, the head of the Australian team, “criticized the integration of the disabled with other athletes, something Canadian organizers hoped would be an inspirational mark they could leave on the international event.”²⁵ Tunstall called the inclusion “embarrassing” and bluntly stated, “I do not believe that they should be integrated with the Commonwealth Games.”²⁶ Tunstall’s remarks were seen as particularly unwarranted considering there were 11 disabled athletes on his team.

The idea of allowing physically disabled athletes to participate in the games “was meant to reflect the Games goal of promoting ‘opportunities for human development...and the triumph of personal achievement’ and was heartily supported by

²² Ibid

²³ Allan Fotheringham, “A guilt at the games,” *Maclean’s* 35 (1994): 56-57.

²⁴ Christ Wood. “Dreams of glory: athletes from 51 countries begin the quest for gold in 10 official sports,” *Maclean’s* 34 (1994): 32-33.

²⁵ Cernetig, Miro and James Christie. “Games hit pre-opening snag.” *The Globe and Mail* 18 August 1994, A1.

²⁶ Ibid

top Commonwealth Games officials.”²⁷ The Games officials rejected Tunstall’s idea of giving the disabled athletes their own Games and were clearly upset by his comments.

The disabled athletes were treated the same as the other athletes at the Games. They were given full status as members of their countries teams. They also wore their team’s respective national uniforms and lived in the athlete’s village with the other athletes. The only distinction was that their medals did not feature the logo of the federation.²⁸ People other than Tunstall also argued that the disabled athletes could not be accepted as legitimate competitors, however, the Commonwealth Federation allowed them to participate in events such as wheel chair racing and blind lawn bowling. Judy Kent, the Canadian chef de mission, defended the disabled athletes saying, “watch them compete and you’ll see the athleticism, not the disability.”²⁹ The organizing committee, who hoped that the example set in Victoria would encourage future host cities to also include disabled athletes in competition, deemed the inclusion of disabled athletes in the 1994 Commonwealth Games successful.

The notion of racism, both past and present, was a visible aspect of the 1994 games. The boxing competition was flooded with controversy when several African coaches accused white judges of racism in their decisions.³⁰ The president of the International Amateur Boxing Association even accused the Canadian team of having

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Cernetig, Miro and James Christie. “Friendly Games’ rocked by Australian official’s remark.” *The Globe and Mail*. 18, August 1994, A6.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Chris Wood, “All that glitters: Victoria lowers a curtain on the Commonwealth Games,” *Maclean’s* 35 (1994): 46-48.

round by round scores relayed to them by the host-broadcasting booth to assist their fighters in the contest.³¹

Also, after a 36-year absence, the post-apartheid South Africa returned to the commonwealth competition.³² South Africa had not participated in the Games since 1958 in Cardiff, Wales because of the racist policies of their old regime.³³ The South African team consisted of 112 athletes and coaches, however, only seven athletes and three coaches were from the nation's black majority.³⁴ This revealed that the wounds of apartheid were only beginning to heal, considering that in 1994 non-blacks made up only 15 percent of the South African population.³⁵ When the team from South Africa entered the Stadium at the Game's opening ceremonies "a swell of cheers filled the stadium...bringing spectators to their feet and prompting others to give the closed-fist black-power salute."³⁶ As South Africa returned to Commonwealth competition, Hong Kong participated in the Games for the final time. The territory was going to and has become a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China in 1997.³⁷

Significant athletic related events included:

- Jean-Francois Senecal and Wayne Sorensen won Canada's first gold medals of the games in the 10-metre pairs air rifle competition.³⁸
- Linda Jackson won a silver medal in the women's cycling road race.³⁹

³¹ Kitson, Robert. "Canadian boxers accused of cheating." *The Globe and Mail* 26 August 1994, C10.

³² Allan Fotheringham, "A guilt at the games," *Maclean's* 35 (1994): 56-57.

³³ Christie, James. "An enduring tradition." *The Globe and Mail* 13 August 1994, A14.

³⁴ Chris Wood, "Fun and games," *Maclean's* 35 (1994): 46-48.

³⁵ Miro Cernetig and James Christie. "S. Africa returns to Games in style." *The Globe and Mail* 19 August 1994, A1.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ "1994 Commonwealth Games." www.commonwealthgames.com. March 17, 2004.

³⁸ Christie, James. "Canadian pairs at home on the range." *The Globe and Mail* 20 August 1994, D13.

³⁹ Christie, James. "Jackson wheels to a new kind of success." *The Globe and Mail* 22 August 1994, D1.

- Lisa Alexander won two gold medals in synchronized swimming.⁴⁰
- Linford Christie set a games record and won a gold medal in the 100-metre dash.⁴¹
- Angela Chalmers won a gold medal in the women's 3000 metre race.⁴²
- Michael Smith won gold medal in the decathlon.⁴³
- Canada won the men's 4x100 relay.⁴⁴
- Stella Umeh won a gold and silver medal in women's gymnastics but also failed to live up to expectations.⁴⁵
- Alan Nolet was very successful at the 1994 Games, however, after the games he was not able to train in the Hamilton area because of the lack of appropriate facilities.⁴⁶
- Shane Hinton competed in the boxing competition at the commonwealth games with only 17 previous bouts to his credit.⁴⁷
- Bruny Surin failed to make the final of the 100-metre dash only one month after having surgery on his knee.⁴⁸
- After winning the silver medal in the 100-metre dash, Horace Dove-Edwin was stripped of his medal when it was discovered he tested positive for drug stanozolol, which is a performance-enhancing anabolic steroid.⁴⁹

⁴⁰ Christie, James. "Synchro stars buoy Canada in Commonwealth pool." *The Globe and Mail* 23 August 1994, C6

⁴¹ Christie, James. "Christie breezes to Games record." *The Globe and Mail* 24 August 1994, C6.

⁴² Christie, James. "Chalmers churns up gold." *The Globe and Mail* 24 August 1994, C6

⁴³ Christie, James. "Smith Canada's golden man again." *The Globe and Mail* 25 August 1994, C6.

⁴⁴ Miro Cernetig and James Christie. "Some pain and gain for Canada." *The Globe and Mail* 29 August 1994, D1.

⁴⁵ Sudlow, Ron. "Umeh's finale falls short." *The Globe and Mail* 23 August 1994, C6.

⁴⁶ Christie, James. "High-flying gymnast running out of room despite winning form." *The Globe and Mail* 23 August 1994, C5.

⁴⁷ Christie, James. "Hopes to even score." *The Globe and Mail* 20 August 1994, D14

⁴⁸ The Globe and Mail. "Surin's recovery just short." *The Globe and Mail* 24 August 1994, C6.

- Jim Dan Corbett, a wrestler who won a bronze medal, had to return his medal after testing positive for banned stimulants.⁵⁰

The articles printed reporting on athletic events of the competition predominantly described the medal performances of Canadian athletes. They also reported on stories that are characterized by significant achievements. There existed the occasional story of defeat and hardship. Also, if an incident of significant rule infraction occurred, an article was written about it.

The reports present in *The Globe and Mail* portrayed a considerable portion of the ideals, which the Commonwealth Federation hoped would exemplify the Commonwealth and its multi-sport competition. The readmittance of South Africa back into the Games and the inclusion of disabled athletes were positive aspects, which exemplify the Commonwealth Games Federation's "Condition of Entry" that, "there shall be no discrimination against any country or person on any grounds whatsoever, including race, colour, gender, religion, or politics."⁵¹ However, a significant amount of coverage was given to the accusations of racism and the discrimination against disabled athletes, which was actually a relatively insignificant aspect of the Games. The majority of the coverage was focused on event winners, the facilities that were constructed for the Games, and other scandalous information.

The *Globe and Mail* succeeded in covering the "unique" and "friendly" aspects of the games, which were frequently witnessed in the coverage of "festivals" and "cultural

⁴⁹ Miro Cernetig and James Christie. "Drugs tarnish golden Games." *The Globe and Mail* 29 August 1994, A1.

⁵⁰ White, Scott. "Weightlifter's positive test sparks probe." *The Globe and Mail* 30 August 1994, D6.

activities” that occurred during the games. *The Globe and Mail* alluded to the evident embodiment of the vision of the Commonwealth Games Federation by the 1994 Commonwealth Games committee in Victoria. However, the objectives and vision of *The Globe and Mail*'s target market are likely not the same as the Commonwealth Games Federation's. Therefore the media coverage and other prominent personalities associated with the Games emphasize individual accomplishment over equality and self-interest over humanity.

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⁵¹ “Commonwealth Games Federation.” <http://www.thecgf.com/about/constitution.pdf>. March 17, 2004.

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