

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

by Bill Mallon

Prior to 1906, most competitors went to the Olympic Games primarily as individuals, with no national teams selected, and that was certainly the case with the United States "teams" at the 1896, 1900, and 1904, which really represented only themselves, or their sporting clubs. Beginning with 1906, however, the United States Olympic team has been a representative of the nation. But no Olympic trials were held in the United States in 1906. Rather, the United States 1906 Olympic team was selected based on the athlete's records because it was really too early in the year to hold trials. In addition, the American team wore a national uniform, the first time that this had occurred for the United States at the Olympic Games. National teams were also selected from other nations, and many of them travelled to the Olympics together. The travelling was not always easy.

The American team left Hoboken, New Jersey on the *North German Lloyd Steamer, "Barbarossa"*, at 1100 on 3 April [21 March]. Slightly more than one day later, a huge wave hit the ship and threatened to throw several athletes overboard, notably, Harvey COHN, the distance runner, who was only saved from being thrown overboard by the quick action of Frank BORNAMANN, a diver. James MITCHEL, the weight thrower who was favoured in several weight throwing events, dislocated his right shoulder in the accident, which would later prevent him from competing in the Olympics. Other athletes that were injured were Martin SHERIDAN, Herbert KERRIGAN, and BORNAMANN himself. The "Barbarossa" stopped at Gibraltar on 13 April [31 March], and arrived at Naples on 16 April [3 April]. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* stated, "[The American athletes] visited the scenes of desolation in the vicinity of Mt. Vesuvius, but the majority of them, accompanied by their trainers, practiced."

The American team went from Naples to Brindisi by train, then on to Patras by steamship, the "Montenegro", and from there by train to Athens, arriving on the evening of 19 April [6 April].

The Canadians did not travel with the Americans to Athens. They left Toronto in mid-March and also stopped at Naples, where they stayed for five days. From there they also went to Brindisi by train and then on a small steamer to Korfu, before sailing on to Patras. The Canadians arrived in Athens on 29 March, more than three weeks before the Games started. But they were not the first Canadian Olympic competitors in Greece. The Canadian marathoner, Billy SHERRING, left for Greece in early February, travelling aboard a cattle boat. He ar-

rived near the end of February and trained along the marathon course for the entire two months before the games. It would pay off for him in the end with a victory in the marathon.

The accommodations for the 1906 athletes could not be considered luxurious. The Greek organizing committee had set up housing arrangements in the Zappeion, a large private building that had been the site of the fencing events at the 1896 Olympics. Many of the athletes lived there, and Henry ROXBOROUGH noted in *Canada at the Olympics* (Toronto 1963) that this included, "The majority of the athletic teams - from England, Egypt, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Rumania, Turkey, Sweden, Norway, and Germany." Although this represented somewhat of an early form of an Olympic Village, with all the athletes living together, it had few of the amenities of modern-day Olympic Villages. Hungarian Sándor BARCS described the conditions in *The Modern Olympic Story* (Budapest 1964),

"Their quarters were situated in tremendous exhibition halls, called the Zappeion, which would not come under the category of living quarters worth mentioning. The competitors slept in cubicles which were open at the top, and in that tremendous hall if one section someone spoke loudly, snored or slammed a door, the noise resounded around and around the entire immense area."

Several of the athletes did not stay in the Zappeion. The Canadian team, including SHERRING, joined up with the four Australian Olympians, and found quarters at a boarding house run by a Mrs. MCTAGGART. The Americans began by staying in the Zappeion but quickly found it an untenable situation. In addition to the noise and the crowded quarters, which made it difficult to sleep, the Americans hated the food. BARCS described their consternation thusly,

"Day after day they were served with inedible goat meat. After the third day the Americans had had enough. They called the head chef, and said, 'If we see goat meat on this table once more, we will break everything to smithereens!'"

"The Greek chef became frightened and the following day there was beef. But the change did not last long. On the third day the boiled, rubbery goat meat was again on the table. And the Americans proved the threat was not a joke. As the goat meat was brought in all forty American sportsmen smashed their plates on the floor, swept off all the tableware, and picked up the waiter together with his platter and threw him back into the kitchen. The other large plate, filled with about thirty por-

tions of goat meat, was sent flying after the waiter by Lawson Robertson, the outstanding runner and later the world famous trainer."

The next day the Americans moved out of the Zappeion and stayed during the course of the Olympics at the *Hotel Hermes* throughout the games.

The United States' Olympic team in 1906 consisted of 38 athletes, all men. The bulk of them competed in track & field athletics (31), with four swimmers, one of whom also competed in diving, two tennis players, and two wrestlers, one of whom had also competed in athletics. The athletes and swimmers would achieve the most success.

The most successful American athlete at Athens, and indeed the most successful of any Olympian in 1906, was Martin SHERIDAN. An Irish national, SHERIDAN was born in 1881 in Bohola, County Mayo, Ireland, and he immigrated to the United States in 1897. Many of the top weight throwers in the world in the early 1900s were Irish immigrants, often termed the Irish whales, since most of them were quite large, and often overweight. SHERIDAN was large - he stood 6-3½ but he was not overweight. He weighed 195 lbs. in his prime and was actually quite trim. This enabled him to excel as a jumper and an all-around athlete.

Still, SHERIDAN'S Olympic fame rests primarily on winning the Olympic gold medal in the discus in 1904, 1906, and 1908. He set at least six world records with the discus, although the status of world records in that era was quite variable. His first world record came in 1902 and his last was 141-4½ which he set shortly before his retirement in 1911.



The most outstanding US-American athlete of the 1906 Games: Martin J. Sheridan

At the 1906 Olympics in Athens, SHERIDAN had his greatest performance. He entered 14 events, but mercifully competed only in seven of them. In those seven, he won gold medals in the discus throw and shot put, and silver medals in the stone throw, the standing high jump, and the standing long jump. He was 4th in the Greek-style discus throw and did not finish the pentathlon. He later called his failure to finish the pentathlon his greatest athletic disappointment.

In 1906, the Olympics included a pentathlon based on the Ancient Olympic pentathlon and consisting of the standing broad jump, a sprint of about 200 metres, the Greek-style discus throw, the javelin throw, and Greco-Roman wrestling. SHERIDAN was heavily favoured to win the pentathlon, but a recent knee injury acted up on him, and he withdrew after finishing second in the first event, the standing broad jump.

Had SHERIDAN finished the event in good health, he would have won easily. Based on his Olympic performances, which included an 11th in the running high jump in the 1908 Olympics, he was obviously a superb jumper and weight thrower. But SHERIDAN displayed his other talents in the all-around championship, the early American forerunner of the decathlon.





Ray Ewry

SHERIDAN entered three all-around in his athletic career, the U.S. National Championships of 1905, 1907, and 1909. He won each of them easily, and smashed the world record each time, finally leaving it at 7,385 points, a mark which THORPE broke by only a few points in 1912.

A few purists will demur that SHERIDAN'S Olympic record is overvalued because he won five of his medals, and two golds, at the 1906 Olympics. But SHERIDAN also won four medals and three golds at the 1904 and 1908 Olympics. At the 1908 Olympics he made his most famous statement.

In 1908, the U.S. flag bearer at the opening ceremonies was Ralph ROSE, not SHERIDAN or Johnny GARRELS, as often seen. The legend of SHERIDAN as the flag-bearer seems to have arisen because, several days later, when asked about ROSE'S actions, it was he who made the now famous statement, "*This flag dips to no earthly king!*" The legend reads that the night before the ceremonies, several Irish-American members of the United States team, SHERIDAN, John FLANAGAN, Matt MCGRATH, and ROSE among them, had been hoisting and dipping a few pints of lager and discussing the parade. It is easy to imagine ROSE being strongly influenced by SHERIDAN and the other Celts and agreeing not to dip the flag to any English monarch.

Precious little is known of SHERIDAN'S life off the field. He worked as a policeman as did many of the Irish-American athletes. His fame led him to be the personal bodyguard for the governor of New York whenever he visited the city SHERIDAN never married and left no direct descendants. After his immigration to America, he visited Ireland only after the 1908 London Olympics, spending some time with his mother.

On 27 March 1918, seven years after he retired from athletics, SHERIDAN died from pneumonia. In the *New York Herald-Tribune*, Jim THORPE proclaimed that "*Sheridan was the greatest athlete in the world. He could do things I never could*"

Four other Americans won two medals at the 1906 Olympic Games, all in athletics - Ray EWRY, James LIGHTBODY, Paul PILGRIM, and Lawson ROBERTSON. EWRY and PILGRIM won two gold medals.

Ray EWRY was the greatest standing jumper in the early part of the 20th century, and probably of all-time. He had won two gold medals at the 1900 Olympics in the standing high jump and standing long jump. In 1904, he won three gold medals in the standing jumps-high, long, and triple. After his performance at Athens, he again won three gold medals in the standing jumps at the 1908 Olympics.

Paralyzed by polio as a child, EWRY developed immense strength in his legs but by dint of diligent exercise. He attended Purdue from 1890 to 1897, where he captained the track team and also played football. After gaining a graduate degree in mechanical engineering he competed briefly for the *Chicago Athletic Association* before moving to New York, where he worked for the city as a hydraulics engineer and joined the *New York Athletic Club*.

He won the first of his 15 AAU (*Amateur Athletic Union*) titles in 1898 at the age of 25 and the last in 1910. He was undoubtedly deprived of many more titles when the standing jumps were dropped from the AAU program from 1899 to 1905. EWRY and SHERIDAN both retired in 1911. It was expected that they would both compete again in 1912, but while training together one day, they both realized that they were now past their prime and decided immediately to stop competing.

Paul PILGRIM was the most unlikely of medal winners at the 1906 Olympic Games. Although PILGRIM was on the *New York AC* team that won the four-mile team race at the 1904 Olympics, he will be best remembered for his double victory at Athens in 1906 in the 400 and 800 metres, a double only repeated by Alberto JUANTORENA at the 1976 Olympics.

PILGRIM was a last-minute choice for the 1906 Olympic team and owed his selection to the insistence of his trainer, Matt HALPIN, who served as manager of the USA Olympic team in 1906. When fundraising efforts were very successful, James SULLIVAN, director of the *American Olympic Committee*, told HALPIN he could add one more athlete to the team, and HALPIN chose PILGRIM. Clearly he fully justified his inclusion on the team, but at his third Olympics in 1908 he was eliminated in the heats of the 400 metres. PILGRIM later served as Athletic Director of the *New York AC* from 1914 to 1953.

James LIGHTBODY was the defending Olympic champion in the 800 and 1,500 metres. He was certainly the favourite in both events as he had won the 880 yards and mile at the 1905 AAU (*Amateur Athletic Union*) championships in the United States. At Athens, he successfully defended his 1,500 metre title, and earned a silver behind PILGRIM in the 800 metres. In 1908 he made his third Olympic appearance, competing in the 800 metres, 1,500 metres, and steeplechase, but he was eliminated in the heats of all three events. LIGHTBODY attended the University of Chicago and later represented the *Chicago Athletic Association*.

Lawson ROBERTSON was the fourth American to win two medals in track & field athletics. These were a silver medal in the standing high jump and a bronze in the standing long jump. Robertson had competed at the 1904 Olympic Games, where he won a bronze in the standing high jump. Lawson



Paul Pilgrim

ROBERTSON was appointed coach of the *Irish-American Athletic Club* in 1909. Although he enjoyed moderate success as an athlete, ROBERTSON will be best remembered as an outstanding coach. He remained as coach of the Irish-American team until 1916 when he took up an appointment at the University of Pennsylvania. ROBERTSON remained at Penn for 31 years, except for a brief period during World War I, when he served as a lieutenant in the air service. ROBERTSON was assistant coach to the U.S. Olympic teams in 1912 and 1920 and was head coach in 1924, 1928, 1932, and 1936.

ROBERTSON is perhaps best remembered as the coach of the 1936 Olympic track & field team and for his role in the selection of the runners for the 4 x 100 metre relay. The original team was to consist of Marty GLICKMAN, Sam STOLLER, Foy DRAPER, and Frank WYKOFF. The best two American sprinters were Jesse OWENS, who had already won three gold medals in Berlin, and Ralph METCALFE. It was not felt that they were needed for the Americans to win. But the



Charles Daniels

and STOLLER with OWENS and METCALFE. The choice was highly controversial because GLICKMAN and STOLLER were the only Jews on the U.S. track & field team, and with the German hatred of Jews, rumours abounded that ROBERTSON had made this choice to appease their German hosts.

One other American track & field athlete in 1906 would eventually achieve some fame in another field. This was Hugo FRIEND. Hugo FRIEND'S parents immigrated to America when he was two years old and initially settled in Great Bend, Kansas, before moving to Chicago in 1890. Friend later en-

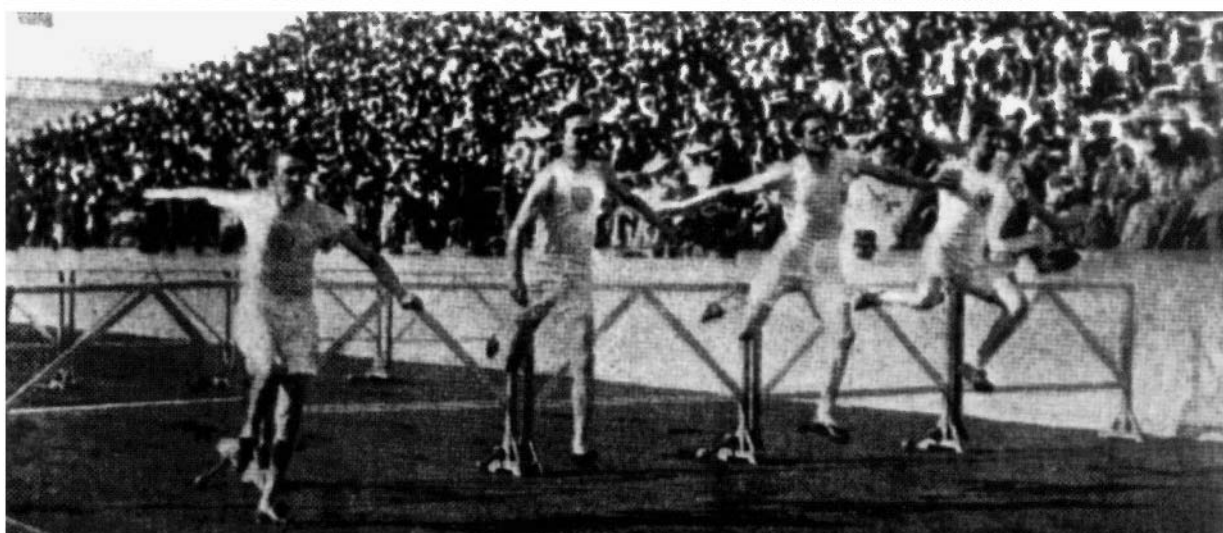
rolled at the University of Chicago and, in 1905, captained the first Chicago team to win the Big Ten Championship. Later in the season he scored a double in the long jump and the high hurdles at the AAU championships. After graduation, FRIEND joined the Chicago AA and at the 1906 Olympics, placed fourth in the hurdles in addition to winning a long jump bronze medal in Athens.

FRIEND practiced as a lawyer but was soon appointed to judge, and he was the presiding judge at baseball's most notorious trial, the *Chicago Black Sox* scandal of 1919. After the jury acquitted the accused players, Friend congratulated them for "a just verdict." But the jury was of little help to the players' baseball career, as the commissioner of *Major League Baseball*, Judge Kenesaw Mountain LANDIS, banned all eight accused players from ever again playing in the major leagues.

Outside of the athletics stadium, the United States' only other significant success occurred in the swim "stadium," although actually the swimming events were contested in Neo Phaliron Bay, off the coast of Piraeus. The US had four entrants - Charles DANIELS, Marquard SCHWARZ, Frank BORNAMANN, and Joseph SPENCER. BORNAMANN also competed in diving, but failed to finish that event. SCHWARZ and DANIELS had also competed at the 1904 Olympics. The four swimmers competed in the 4 x 250 metre freestyle relay, finishing fourth. But in the 100 metre freestyle, Charles DANIELS won the gold medal, narrowly defeating the defending Olympic champion, Zoltán von HALMAY of Hungary.

In 1904 at St. Louis, von HALMAY had defeated DANIELS in the 100 yard freestyle. But DANIELS had won gold in the 220 yard and 440 yard freestyle races in St. Louis. DANIELS would return to the Olympics again in 1908 and repeated his 100 metre freestyle victory. He eventually won eight Olympic medals, which among American men swimmers, has been surpassed only by Mark SPITZ, Matt BIONDI, and Gary HALL, Jr., and equalled by Michael PHELPS. He won 31 national championships. In addition to his outstanding abilities in the pool, DANIELS was also the bridge and squash champion of the *New York AC* and later became a top amateur golfer. He began the American dominance of swimming and was the greatest American swimmer prior to Johnny WEISSMULLER.

Although the team consisted of only 38 athletes, the United States athletes won 24 medals at the 1906 Olympic Games, with 12 gold medals, and six silver and bronze medals. It was the first team selected as a group, it was the first team that wore a US national uniform, and it was the first team that marched in to the Olympic Stadium at the Opening Ceremony as a whole group, led by Matt HALPIN carrying the United States' flag. A tiny team com-



Some other victories by US athletes. Archie Hahn wins the 100 m flat (top), Robert Leavitt becomes first over the 110 m hurdles (centre) and Paul Pilgrim runs for gold over 800 m.

pared to modern US Olympic contingents, which number several hundred, the 1906 US Olympic team was significant not only for its success, but because it was really the first team that represented the United States of America.

Sources

The primary sources for the above are my own books, *The 1906 Olympic Games: Results for All Competitors in All Events, with Commentary* (Jefferson, NC 1999) and *Quest for Gold: The Encyclopedia of American Olympians*, with Ian Buchanan (New York 1984). A few other sources are noted above. This material was also presented at an Olympic symposium on the 1906 Olympic Games in Volos, Greece in April 2004.