

Grappling on the Grain Belt:  
Wrestling in Manitoba to 1931

by

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### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

“Grappling on the Grain Belt: Wrestling in Manitoba to 1931,” explores the history of wrestling in the geographic region now demarcated as Manitoba, from the pre-Confederation period to the Great Depression, with particular emphasis on the period after 1896 when the Canadian West experienced its most remarkable demographic growth. Wrestling was a frequently controversial, often divisive, but ultimately dynamic, popular, and persistent cultural form that proved adaptable to changing social conditions. Far from being ‘merely’ a sport, residents of Manitoba found greater meaning in its practice beyond the simple act of two people struggling for physical advantage on a mat, in a ring, or on a grassy field. This study examines wrestling as a social phenomenon that echoed larger, and fluid, debates over sport’s ‘proper’ purpose, expressions of masculinity, respectable public conduct, and views concerning the position of immigrant and minority communities in a predominantly Anglo-Protestant society. It likewise explores the meanings that various groups in the province, demarcated by such factors as ethnicity and occupation, attached to wrestling in the decades before the Great Depression. In doing so, it illuminates wrestling as a complex and socially-significant cultural activity which, to date, has been virtually unexplored by Canadian historians looking at the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to Randy Rostecki, one of the finest researchers, historians, and human beings I know.

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## Introduction

A pair of electric lamplights, strung pendulously from the wooden board ceiling, cast their luminescent glow at the scene unfolding below in Winnipeg's Industrial Exhibition Board of Trade Building on Tuesday, 3 April 1923. Approximately 2,000 people were gathered in the convention hall, one of several facilities housed in the impressive looking (although rather shoddily constructed) edifice located at the corner of Main and Water Streets in the city's downtown centre. Most of those present were seated on wooden folding chairs. Some, almost exclusively located in the back rows of the two separate balconies which were situated one directly over top of the other, stood for a better view. A small number also perched themselves in the hall's wide wooden rafters, located adjacent to the walls in the uppermost balcony, seeking to obtain the highest angle from which to see the show. At seventy degrees Fahrenheit, the room was a comfortable temperature, far removed from the sweltering August heat experienced in the same facility, at a similar event, eight months earlier. Still too warm to entertain wearing an overcoat for an extended period, many in attendance also used the rafters as makeshift coat racks. A sign reading "No Smoking" affixed to the top balcony was as much a precautionary measure against setting the wooden interior ablaze and ensuring orderly behaviour as it was an effort to preserve public health. Directly below, those without the benefit of rafters, draped their jackets over the plank railing in front of the bottom balcony. Several rows of seating also filled the convention hall floor, and most of them, but by no means all, were occupied. In particular, chairs located in the back-most row remained vacated, as people exercised their option to be as close to the action as possible. The crowd ranged considerably in age, from the adolescent to the elderly. Overwhelmingly, however, they were male and clad in suit and tie. Still, conspicuous by their presence, were perhaps no more than a dozen women, who, clad in their rolled-brim hats, had decided to partake in the predominantly masculine spectacle.

Near the room's centre stood a raised rectangular wooden platform. An apron, frayed in places, shielded its underside from public view. On the apron were hung handwritten placards, one saying



“Tribune” and the other “Athletic Commission,” indicating the privileged positions that were allocated for the press and civic authorities at the event. A square ring had been constructed on top of it, equidistant from the rectangular structure’s shortest sides. Four unpainted wooden posts demarcated the square’s outermost periphery, and three horizontal ropes, held in place by metal eye bolts, encircled the posts’ innermost sides. Stains mottled the middle rope which, wrapped in white tape, hinted at contact with sweat and bare skin. A single canvas sheet layered the inside of the ring, under which only a thin facade of padding could shield those above from the unyielding boards below. If the ring ropes hinted at the source for their discoloration, the strikingly irregular pattern of blotches on the mat spoke unequivocally of contact with dirt, sweat and blood. Some of it was a by-product of the three boxing matches staged earlier in the evening, although reminders of past contests certainly accented the uneven hue.

Inside the ring in one corner was Alex Stewart, a Scottish immigrant of diminutive stature, whose tailored suit hid an athletic physique. In his position as referee, Stewart’s task was to ensure that the participants in the night’s performance did not extend themselves too far beyond his already-liberal enforcement of the written rules. Behind the next post, located to Stewart’s left, a second man, his hair parted in the middle, stood with a thick folded robe draped over his right arm. In a moment, he would pull the wooden folding chair in front of him out of the ring. To Stewart’s right, in the third corner, a second robe and a clean white towel were flopped casually over the top rope, left there by a burly figure with a shaved head and columnar neck.

Nearer toward the ring’s centre, two large men, shirtless, their right hands grasped in salutary embrace, eyed one another with steely glares. The first of the pair, Paul Martinson, was an American of Danish descent and recently arrived to the city. At five feet, ten inches in height, and weighing 237 pounds, Martinson was bulkily built, with dark hair, a short neck, broad chest, and thick waist. On his left elbow a white bandage provided tentative shielding for an abrasion incurred when skin made swift and pressured contact with coarse canvas. Left uncared for, the wound could become infected and lead to serious complications. Nonetheless, one day earlier, Winnipeg physician William Black had declared him medically fit. It was certainly not the first time that Martinson had sustained such an injury, and,

necessity overriding caution, it was quite possible that he would sustain another that night. Wearing only dark shorts, his bare knees bore testimony to similar scrapes, incurred under similar circumstances, throughout his adult life. Sparing the arches of his feet as well as his toe knuckles from similar abuse were a pair of tightly-fit black ankle high leather shoes. With thin soles, they granted the skin a measure of protection while simultaneously ensuring that the foot itself retained its tactile sensitivity to the external environment.

At the other end of Martinson's grasp stood Jack Taylor, a Canadian by birth and well-known to the Winnipeg public. Physically, the Canadian bore little resemblance to the Dane. At six feet, one inch in height and 216 pounds, Taylor sported a freshly shaven head atop a lean muscular torso which had, several years prior to Charles Atlas' rise to fame, earned him the title of the World's Most Perfectly Developed Man. Still impressive, Taylor's physique was not, if one looked closely, as striking it once had been. At thirty six, he was not a young man for his chosen vocation, nor was Martinson. Although not as thickly-built as his counterpart, Taylor possessed rounder shoulders, larger biceps, and enormous forearms which testified to his ability to perform various feats of grip strength for the amazement of onlookers.

Clothing also differentiated him from the Dane. Wool tights covered the length of Taylor's legs, onto which were sewn padding to protect his knees. The tights, however, like his leather shoes, served a double purpose, allowing for sweat absorption and the procurement of an unyielding grip once the legs were secured around their selected target. In spite of the marked differences in their appearances, both men shared one common physical trait: a pronounced deformation in the external ear caused by repeated forceful blows. Whether fully clothed or in their present state, this condition, medically termed traumatic auricular hematoma, or more colloquially, cauliflower ear, identified them according to their occupations as professional wrestlers. Over the course of sixty minutes and thirty seconds following the handshake, they would showcase their skills to the enthusiastic crowd which surrounded them in the convention hall.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Archives of Manitoba, L.B. Foote Collection 1232, Negative 2209; Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg-Buildings- General-Industrial Bureau 8, Negative 5276; Alex Colter Bell Stewart Attestation Paper, Library and Archives Canada, RG150,

When Paul Martinson and Jack Taylor met at Winnipeg's Industrial Exhibition Building, they were participating in a form of cultural expression which was beloved, for a host of reasons, by thousands of people living in Manitoba.<sup>2</sup> On a grander scale, it was an activity whose basic origins extended beyond the sparse veneer of time deemed fruitful by historians for study. Born deep in humankind's Palaeolithic prehistory, wrestling has survived, in innumerable forms and in virtually all cultures, down to the present day. That it has done so speaks to the widespread propensity for human beings to attach meaning to expressions of physicality that, at their core, necessitate the struggle of one person to gain mastery over another.<sup>3</sup> This study, far more limited in both temporal and geographic scope, examines wrestling in Manitoba during the sixty years following the province's entry into Confederation in 1870, but with particular emphasis on the years after 1896. The period prior to 1870, warranting detailed investigation, receives only cursory treatment here. Although wrestling is the focus throughout, this study's primary aim is to illuminate the larger social context in which wrestling took place. It is therefore, not merely an analysis of the sport itself but an attempt, using wrestling as a lens, to garner a greater understanding of the values and attitudes held by people living in Manitoba during the sixty years between Confederation and the Great Depression, and especially during the period following 1896 when the West became a major destination for incoming immigrants.

Guiding the enquiry are several key questions: What groups within Manitoba society participated in wrestling and what purpose(s) did they attach to it? Did various distinct groups, demarcated by such variables as class and ethnicity, attach their own particular meanings to the sport? How, if at all, did

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Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9300 – 66; Canadian Census 1901, Ontario, District 48 East Bruce, Sub-District 4, Polling Sub-Division 5, Greenock township, Page 2; Manitoba Free Press, 2 August 1922; 3 April 1923; 4 April 1923; Winnipeg Tribune, 4 April 1923; Edmonton Journal, 23 May 1956.

<sup>2</sup> In examining wrestling's history in Manitoba, the author admits to a decidedly 'presentist' view with respect to geography. Manitoba's initial borders, established following its entry into Confederation in 1870, were subsequently expanded in 1877, 1881, and finally, in 1912. However, the discussion contained herein focuses on wrestling within the current provincial borders, even if some activities prior to 1912 may have occurred outside of their confines. For a visual representation of Manitoba's geographic expansion, see John Warkentin and Richard I. Ruggles, Historical Atlas of Manitoba, 1612-1969 (Winnipeg: Manitoba Historical Society, 1970), 164-165. A more detailed discussion related to the province's border changes can be found in Manitoba Historic Resources Branch, Manitoba's Boundaries (Winnipeg: Queen's Printer, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Elis Cashmore notes in Making Sense of Sport (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 45, that wrestling is certainly among the most archaic forms of human competition and, "As such, it seems to have held wide appeal both for participants seeking a means to express their strength and resilience and for audiences who to this day are enraptured by the sight of humans disputing each other's physical superiority."

public attitudes toward wrestling change during the 60 year period under study, and what factors affected these changes? Was public support for wrestling always contingent upon its adherence to specific social norms and did violating these norms result in a decline in the sport's popularity? Far from being simply an amusing past-time, it will be shown that wrestling was a social phenomenon that echoed larger, and fluid, debates over sport's 'proper' purpose, expressions of masculinity, respectable public conduct, and the position of immigrant and minority communities in a predominantly Anglo-Protestant society.

In exploring wrestling's social significance, it is first critical to delineate the meanings applied to various key terms as well as some basic limitations imposed on the study. Wrestling falls within the larger etymological category of sports, so it is therefore necessary to begin with a definition for the latter term. Sociologists Don Ball and John W. Loy humorously note that, "The meaning of sport, like time, is self-evident until one is asked to define it."<sup>4</sup> Ball and Loy as well as others argue that attempts to provide some form of classification for the phrase will be somewhat inexact and open to contestation.<sup>5</sup> Academic work in various fields has nevertheless attempted to define sport, along with related terms such as play and game, and in the process provide detailed criteria for demarcating each in relation to the others.<sup>6</sup> Scholars, however, have been less than unanimous in their support for previous categorizations. The intention here is thus not to add further to the debate but instead to draw upon certain commonalities in positing a brief definition.

Consistent in most discussions related to sport is the necessity for bodily exertion and competition between two or more parties according to institutionalized standards or rules which establish the conditions for one of the said parties to achieve victory, and thus termination, to the activity.<sup>7</sup> By these criteria, certain activities such as poker and chess are therefore not within the parameters required for

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<sup>4</sup> Donald W. Ball and John W. Loy, Sport and the Social Order: Contributions to the Sociology of Sport (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1975), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ball and Loy, Sport and the Social Order, 12; Ann Hall et. al., Sport in Canadian Society (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), 11.

<sup>6</sup> See for example John Huizinga in Homo Ludens, A Study of the Play Element in Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 196-198; Paul Wiess, Sport: A Philosophic Inquiry (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 132-151; Harry Edwards, Sociology of Sport (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1973), 43-58. For a general overview on the subject, see Morris Mott, "Manly Sports and Manitobans: Settlement Days to World War One," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, 1980), 7-12.

<sup>7</sup> G. Luschen, "The Interdependence of Sport and Culture," International Review of Sport Sociology 2 (1967), 127-141; Weiss, Sport, 142, 143, 144; Edwards, Sociology of Sport, 57-58; Mott, "Manly Sports," 11; Hall et. al., Sport in Canadian Society, 13.

sport because, although they satisfy the latter two conditions, physical ability is not intrinsic in achieving a desired outcome. Similarly, such activities as circus acrobatics, although physically demanding, do not constitute a sport because the performances are non-competitive in character.

With respect to wrestling, another series of terms require specific attention: contest and match. Typically, both are used in reference to wrestling, while ‘game’ is not (the exception in this case being the colloquial phrase “mat game” which was used synonymously with wrestling. The colourful expression is also employed in this study). Sociologist Harry Edward, in examining the distinction between contest/match and game, suggests that “Contests typically pivot around the demonstration of individual excellence in speed, endurance, accuracy, strength, coordination, and/or mental acuity.” Although acknowledging that one or more of these qualities are present in sports that are commonly classified as ‘games,’ he further clarifies that “in the contest it is the outcome for the individual that assumes most immediate priority.”<sup>8</sup> Since wrestling typically involves individuals engaged directly in competition with one another, Edward’s definition, although in itself potentially problematic with respect to common usage, is for this study’s purpose, adequate.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, specific instances where individuals engage in wrestling will be referred to as either contests or matches. To this is added a third term, “bout,” which is used interchangeably with contest and match. One expression omitted from use in this study in reference to wrestling, however, is “fight.” Although writers in recent years have applied it to wrestling matches, such was almost never the case in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where fight was reserved, in a sporting context, for activities such as boxing.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, in keeping with traditional usage, it will not be applied to wrestling here.

Since it is asserted that wrestling is a sport and that episodes of wrestling are deemed contests, matches, and bouts, it remains for the central subject itself to be delimited. Unlike the broader categorization under which it may be grouped, little scholarly attention has been devoted to explicitly

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<sup>8</sup> Edwards, *Sociology of Sport*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> The author of this dissertation acknowledges the difficulty with this definition of contest or match, as some individual sports, namely racquet sports such as tennis, badminton, and squash are referred to as “games.”

<sup>10</sup> See for example Greg Oliver, *The Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame: The Canadians* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2003), 10, 219, 221.

articulating what is meant by ‘wrestling.’ Since wrestling is a near-universal cultural practice, an understanding of the term, similar to ‘sport,’ may seem implicit. Yet, even a cursory survey will reveal massive variation in how wrestling is practiced across the globe. Arnold Umbach and Warren R. Johnson, in confronting wrestling’s simultaneous ubiquity and variety have likened it to language, stating:

[A]ll peoples possess the ability to speak; but the way in which they speak depends upon where they happen to be born... Similarly, wrestling has taken different forms in different parts of the world. Also, as with language, some countries have produced more than one type of wrestling.”<sup>11</sup>

Uniting all wrestling forms, however, are certain commonalities. All involve individuals manipulating parts of their opponent’s anatomy for the purpose of physically manoeuvring them into a position which signifies the contest’s termination. This broad definition makes considerable allowance for rule variations, and therefore includes systems whose express goal is to throw an opponent to the ground, pin them, force them to concede to a submission hold, force them out of an enclosed space, gain positional advantage for which points are awarded, or any combination thereof. Additionally, it permits the utilization of specialized clothing (such as a belt in Icelandic glima or a gi in Japanese jiu-jitsu), if agreed upon within the customary rules, to gain victory. A liberal characterization such as the one provided allows for the type of inclusive analysis befitting a multicultural region such as Manitoba. However, although this is intended to be wide-ranging examination of wrestling, by the 1880s and 1890s, the catch-as-catch-can system, one of several styles with historical ties to the British Isles, was fast becoming the most common in Manitoba and elsewhere in North America.<sup>12</sup> Because most matches in the province were conducted under catch-as-catch-can rules, the term ‘wrestling’ will be synonymous with that style unless specified otherwise.

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold W. Umbach and Warren R. Johnson, Wrestling (Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown Company Publishers, 1966), 1-2. Perhaps in the future, historians and anthropologists, like linguists in their analysis of language, will find it fruitful to apply evolutionary theory in an effort to understand wrestling’s development over time and its diffusion across cultures.

<sup>12</sup> Catch-as-catch-can, or catch wrestling, has its origins in the south Lancashire region of western England. Catch wrestling allowed grips to be taken on either the upper or lower body, in contrast to the French Graeco-Roman style, which only permitted grips from the waist up. Matches consisted of both standing and ground wrestling, a win (often called a fall) being scored when a contestant’s shoulders both touched the mat. In professional matches, victories could also be achieved by forcing an opponent to submit, often due to a painful or debilitating hold. See Walter Armstrong, “Wrestling,” The Badminton Library (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1889), 230-237; Warren S. Boring, Science and Skills of Wrestling (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby Company, 1975), 7-8.

Since the effort here is to present a broad-ranging history for the sport before the 1930s, it is also critical to call attention to the fact that both amateur and professional wrestling are examined. Commonly, if both are mentioned in the same instance, it is merely to differentiate the contest (amateur wrestling) from the scripted exhibition (professional wrestling).<sup>13</sup> If one examines contemporary professional wrestling, it certainly does not meet the criteria established for sport because even though its practitioners frequently display incredible athletic skill, the outcome of matches are, even to the untrained eye, wholly predetermined. However, earlier in the twentieth century, it was not necessarily easy to make such a distinction because the technical character of matches did not always overtly betray whether or not they were completely ‘fixed.’ Debates concerning professional wrestling’s competitive legitimacy as well as its transition to a fully pre-arranged endeavour are nevertheless a regular part of discussions which centre on the period.<sup>14</sup>

Although the matter is not ignored here, the focus is less on whether each of the matches staged in Manitoba were, in fact, ‘on the level,’ and instead on public perceptions surrounding professional wrestling, which invariably included debates relating to its sporting ‘purity.’ The intention is, therefore, not to provide an analysis specifically devoted to professional wrestling’s inner workings, and as such, many terms peculiar to the business are deliberately excluded.<sup>15</sup> Further, far more than any work written to date, there is an attempt to examine both professional and amateur wrestling, their relation to one another, and what this says of Western Canadian society during the period. It is strongly asserted that, by subjecting professional and amateur wrestling to completely separate analyses, historians create a too-simplistic dichotomy that fails to account for the rather more nuanced association between the two that

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<sup>13</sup> See for example, Umbach and Johnson, Wrestling, 3; Harold E. Kenney and Glenn C. Law, Wrestling (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1952), 1; Gordon T. Garvie, Wrestling For Young Wrestlers and Instructors (Don Mills, ON: Collier-Macmillan Canada, 1972), 11; Frank G. Menke, rev. Suzanne Treat, The Encyclopedia of Sports (South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1975), 1088; Pekka Pirskanen, “Wrestling as Seen by A Veteran Amateur,” in Sports Pioneers: A History of the Finnish-Canadian Amateur Sports Federation 1906-1986, ed. Jim Tester (Sudbury: Alerts AC Historical Committee, 1986), 199.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Mike Chapman, Encyclopedia of American Wrestling (Champaign, IL: Leisure Press, 1990), 473; John Rickard, “‘The Spectacle of Excess’: The Emergence of Modern Professional Wrestling in the United States and Australia,” Journal of Popular Culture 33 (1999), 130-133; Jeff Archer, Theatre in the Squared Circle: The Mystique of Professional Wrestling (Lafayette, Co: White Boucke Publishing, 1999), 20.

<sup>15</sup> For an excellent guide to “Carny” or “kayfabe,” the terminology used in professional wrestling, including etymological origins, see B. Brian Blair, Smarten Up! Say it Right! (Tampa: Kayfabe Publishing Company, 2001).

persisted through much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prior to the 1930s, professional and amateur wrestling enjoyed a far closer relationship than in later decades, and as previously noted both by this author and others, skilled professionals often provided the impetus for amateur wrestling's growth.<sup>16</sup> This theme, along with others concerning the interrelationship between amateur and professional wrestling, will be explored in greater detail in the ensuing chapters.

As a sport requiring little, if any, specialized equipment and the presence of no more than two individuals wishing to test one another's skills, it is undoubtedly the case that tens of thousands of impromptu wrestling matches, or perhaps more, occurred in Manitoba's homes, school yards, wheat fields, barns, saloons and factory floors over the years between 1870 and the Great Depression.<sup>17</sup> In some cases, records remain of such encounters, particularly if they resulted in some sort of unfortunate accident.<sup>18</sup> Although conceding historian and sociologist Allen Guttman's assertion that sport does not necessarily require an audience, the chief emphasis here is nevertheless on organized competitive wrestling and training, not on casual, unpremeditated bouts that sprang spontaneously from everyday human interaction.<sup>19</sup> Since residents in Manitoba during the post-Confederation period deliberately chose to allot limited leisure time to participating in or patronizing formally structured wrestling classes and contests, it is through organized encounters that the greatest depth of public interest and the greatest volume of documentation and commentary pertaining to wrestling's significance to the province's residents can be found.

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<sup>16</sup> Martti Jukola, Athletics in Finland (Helsinki: Werner Soderstrom Osakeyhtio, 1932), 107; Chapman, Encyclopedia of American Wrestling, 3, 159, 473; Charles Nathan Hatton, "Finnish-Canadian Wrestlers," in Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation Volume II, ed. Thomas Green and Joseph R. Svinth (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 462.

<sup>17</sup> Even in instances where the style of wrestling typically called for some form of specialized equipment, early Manitobans proved capable of adapting to the limitations imposed by their circumstances, as evidenced by photographic records from 1915 which show two Icelandic settlers, one of them absent the customary belt which had been invented a decade earlier, practicing glima by grasping the pants at the hip. See Archives of Manitoba, New Icelandic Collection 350, Negative N11343.

<sup>18</sup> One notable example in this regard concerned William Penner of Steinbach, who died on 8 February 1902 following a friendly wrestling match at Winnipeg's Tremont Hotel the prior afternoon. Penner, described as "a large muscular man," and quite proud of his strength, gave several impromptu exhibitions of his abilities to the patrons in the Tremont's barroom, including a challenge to pry a \$2 bill out of his clenched fist. Retiring to the sitting parlour, Penner engaged St. Boniface resident Alex Marion in a friendly wrestling match which terminated after Penner said that he did not feel well. He was later taken to St. Boniface Hospital where he died as the result of internal rupture. Penner, a father of five, had two pre-existing hernias for which he wore an abdominal brace. See the Manitoba Free Press, 10 February 1902. Although deaths were extremely rare, injuries were somewhat more common in casual encounters. See the Nor'Wester, 24 April 1895; 23 August 1897; Winnipeg Telegram, 29 June 1899; 16 May 1904.

<sup>19</sup> Allan Guttman, From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 12.



Despite wrestling's ancient pedigree and worldwide practice, there have been a small number of English-language historical studies devoted to the subject. In particular, works examining the period prior to the popularization of television have been largely neglected by professional historians seeking to gain a better understanding of the sport's social importance. However, as early as the 1930s and intermittently thereafter, popular historians, several of whom had longstanding connection to wrestling, began to chronicle its development. The early studies were of varying strength with regard to their factual accuracy, few offered social context to accompany their narratives, and their focus strayed only marginally from professional wrestling as conducted in the United States. Nevertheless, to date they remain among the few surveys concerning the major individuals and events associated with the sport in North America prior to the Great Depression.<sup>20</sup> Particularly significant among early works was Marcus Griffin's Fall Guys: The Barnums of Bounce (1937) which presented a then-novel examination of wrestling. In addition to supplying the seemingly obligatory overview devoted to wrestling's historical roots across the globe, Griffin, a New York sports editor, attempted to 'lift the veil' on the largely-successful efforts of a small cadre of promoters to control the outcome of professional heavyweight wrestling matches throughout the United States in the years following World War I.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to previous works which had directed attention mainly toward professional wrestling's preeminent athletes and better-known matches, Griffin's treatise also presented the public with backgrounds on American promoters, who, operating throughout North America, had remained largely anonymous outside of their own regions up to that time. Fall Guys also shed insight into the rivalries and alliances forged between

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<sup>20</sup> John C. Meyers' Wrestling From Antiquity to Date (St. Louis: By the Author, 1931) was one of the first attempts at creating a survey history devoted specifically to wrestling. A former wrestler himself, Meyers' work offered a very brief global overview of wrestling history combined with his own reminiscences concerning major events and personalities in American catch-as-catch-can. Some effort was made to provide commentary on various contemporary topics such as the role of referees during matches and professional wrestling's appeal as a form of entertainment. Wrestling From Antiquity to Date also offered instruction on how to wrestle. Meyers' work was followed in 1936 by Ring magazine publisher Nathaniel (Nat) Fleischer's From Milo to Londos: The Story of Wrestling Through the Ages (New York: The Ring Inc., 1936). Fleischer's lengthy and compendious work provided a more extensive synopsis of wrestling across time and location than did Meyer's earlier effort, but can primarily be considered a history of the professional heavyweight wrestling championship in the United States since the Civil War. Excepting a short concluding memoir written by lightweight wrestling champion George Bothner, athletes in the lighter weight divisions are largely absent from Fleischer's narrative. Unlike either Meyers or Fleischer, Charles Morrow Wilson's Magnificent Scufflers: Revealing the Great Days When America Wrestled the World (Brattleboro, VT: The Stephen Greene Press, 1959) focused extensively on wrestling in the North Eastern United States, and its lasting value is to be found in its examination of collar-and-elbow style wrestling in the region prior to the 1890s. Also notable among older historical surveys is Graeme Kent's A Pictorial History of Wrestling (London: Spring Books, 1968).

<sup>21</sup> Marcus Griffin's Fall Guys: The Barnums of Bounce (Chicago: The Reilly and Lee Company, 1937).

promoters, the various clandestine arrangements made between them, and the efforts by some wrestlers to resist their machinations. Although Griffin's exposé poses its own unique difficulties for historians looking for a factually accurate account of wrestling's past,<sup>22</sup> its primary value lies in understanding, in broad strokes, how professional heavyweight wrestling began evolving into the business that we now recognize today and therefore serves to inform, in particular, the sixth chapter in this work.

After a modest proliferation of published sources related to wrestling history in the 1930s, followed thereafter in the 1950s and 1960s by a smattering of notable texts, few works were released. Popular historians nevertheless continued to enthusiastically collect and disseminate their research findings, made possible in recent years largely through resources such as J Michael Kenyon's online WAWLI Papers (an acronym for Wrestling As We Liked It), devoted primarily to professional wrestling between 1915 and 1962.<sup>23</sup> The last several years have witnessed, along with an explosion of books related to wrestling's more recent past, a modest resurgence in enthusiasm for works concerning wrestling's history prior to the Great Depression. Foremost among authors is Mark S. Hewitt, whose Catch Wrestling: A Wild and Wooly Look at the Early Days of Professional Wrestling in America (2005), and Catch Wrestling Round Two: More Wild and Wooly Tales from the Early Days of Pro Wrestling (2007) provide biographical background on professional wrestlers in all weight categories in conjunction with episodic accounts of various matches staged in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to earlier treatments accorded to the subject, Hewitt's books evidence scrupulous effort toward ensuring historical accuracy, and supporting documentation is well cited. Tim Hornbaker's National Wrestling Alliance: The Untold Story of the Monopoly That Strangled Pro Wrestling, released shortly before Hewitt's second book, continued the trend toward providing well-written and well-

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<sup>22</sup> Griffin's prose, for example, is written in a casual narrative style which includes considerable dialogue to illustrate the recounted events, and it is therefore difficult at times to precisely ascertain the boundary between artistic licence and a factual accounting of historical occurrences. Additionally, it is heavily biased toward presenting certain individuals in a positive light, in particular Joseph "Toots" Mondt and Ed "Strangler" Lewis. A detailed overview of the historical inaccuracies concerning events which occurred before the mid-1920s would also require considerable effort.

<sup>23</sup> Issues of the WAWLI Papers are available at <http://www.wrestlingclassics.com/wawli/> (accessed 6 January 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Mark S. Hewitt, Catch Wrestling: A Wild and Wooly Look at the Early Days of Professional Wrestling in America (Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 2005); and Catch Wrestling Round Two: More Wild and Wooly Tales from the Early Days of Pro Wrestling (Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 2009).

researched popular histories. In many ways an extension of the institutional history offered in Fall Guys, Hornbaker recounts the formation and growth of the National Wrestling Alliance, a trust made up of promoters from across North America who controlled professional wrestling on the continent after the Second World War. Although focusing primarily on the post-War period, Hornbaker's work, more attentively researched and less fancifully written than Griffin's, likewise delves into the earlier attempts made during the 1920s to monopolize the sport and thus, along with its predecessor, provides critical background for this dissertation's sixth chapter.<sup>25</sup>

Both the Hewitt and Hornbaker efforts, like those that preceded them, focused primarily, although not exclusively, on the United States. Yet, despite the far greater emphasis on American professional wrestling, Western Canadian wrestling history has been illuminated largely due to the efforts of Vern May, (better known as Vance Nevada), whose reference-oriented Central Canadian Professional Wrestling Almanac (1999), and far more intensively-researched and detailed Wrestling in the Canadian West (2009), survey the numerous wrestling promotions that operated in Western Canada throughout its history.<sup>26</sup> As the case with Hornbaker, Nevada's focus is primarily on providing an institutional history for the professional wrestling industry, and although his 1999 work contains greater background on wrestling in Manitoba during the pre-Depression period, Wrestling in the Canadian West is currently without peer as a reference text focused on a single region anywhere in North America.<sup>27</sup> A small handful of reference and biographically-oriented manuscripts likewise testify to the labours undertaken by popular historians to document professional wrestling's more distant past.<sup>28</sup> In a few instances, wrestlers

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<sup>25</sup> Tim Hornbaker, National Wrestling Alliance: The Untold Story of the Monopoly that Strangled Pro Wrestling (Toronto: ECW Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Vern May, The Central Canadian Professional Wrestling Almanac (Winnipeg: Canadian Wrestle-Media, 1999); Vance Nevada, Wrestling in the Canadian West (Gallatin, TN: Crowbar Press, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Other popular histories of note concerning regional professional wrestling promotions in Canada are Heath McCoy's Pain and Passion: The History of Stampede Wrestling (Toronto: ECW Press, 2007); and Gary Howard's The Rassler from Renfrew: Larry Kasaboski and Northland Wrestling Enterprises (Renfrew, ON: General Store Publications, 2007). Both works focus on the post-World War II period, but nevertheless provide mention of wrestling before the 1930s.

<sup>28</sup> Royal Duncan's and Gary Will's voluminous Wrestling Title Histories (Waterloo, ON: Archeus Communications, 2000) documents all known (to date of publication) professional wrestling title reigns, dating back to the 1860s, in dozens of countries around the world. Although considerably in need of revision in light of recent research, Duncan and Will's manual is still essential for those interested in titular achievements in professional wrestling. Published biographies on wrestlers have a lengthy but scattered history. E.W. Halm's edited collection, The Life Work of Farmer Burns (Omaha: A.J. Kuhlman, 1911), was an early attempt to document both the life and training philosophy of a well known professional wrestler. Edward Van Every,

themselves have produced written memoirs in published form. Yet, compared to the recent rash of largely ghost-written autobiographies, athletes of earlier generations were characteristically silent concerning their own exploits.<sup>29</sup> Clarence Eklund, who wrestled on the Canadian Prairies before World War I, fortunately was among the few who did so, and his self-published Forty Years Of Wrestling (1947) and edited collection Wyoming's Wrestling Rancher (1993), published by his daughter Hazel Eklund-Odegard, provide rare insight into professional wrestling in the region during the pre-First World War years.<sup>30</sup>

Any study related to professional wrestling owes a considerable debt to popular historians' work on gathering and disseminating information on the sport's past. Academic investigation on the subject has been far more lacking, and to date, less than a half dozen significant studies have been produced addressing wrestling during the pre-Depression period. Glynn A. Leyshon's Of Mats and Men: The Story of Canadian Amateur and Olympic Wrestling from 1600 to 1984 (1984), one of the earliest works of this

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Muldoon: The Solid Man of Sport (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1929), provided background (some of it apocryphal) on America's first nationally-renowned professional grappler, accounts of his important matches and his efforts in later life as the commissioner for boxing in New York. Similar to Halm's earlier collection on Burns, emphasis was likewise placed on the 'Solid Man's' approach to training. More recently wrestling journalist Mike Chapman's efforts have chronicled the career of world's heavyweight catch-as-catch-can champion and "Farmer" Burns student, Frank Gotch, who appeared in Winnipeg in 1911 before a large audience. Chapman's Frank Gotch: World's Greatest Wrestler (Buffalo, NY: William S. Hein and Co., 1990) was followed seventeen years later by The Life and Legacy of Frank Gotch King of the Catch-as-Catch-Can Wrestlers (Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 2007), both of which seek to affirm Gotch's place as the greatest wrestler who ever lived. Also valuable, particularly for its chapters pertaining early twentieth century French-Canadian wrestler Emil Maupas, is Pierre Berthelet's Yvon Robert, Le Lion du Canada Francais: Le Plus Grand Lutteur du Quebec (Montreal: Editions Trustar, 2000). Greg Oliver's The Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame: The Canadians, and Marsha Erb's Stu Hart: Lord of the Ring (Toronto: ECW Press, 2002), as with the majority of biographical works concerning professional wrestlers, focus primarily on the period after the Depression and, in particular, after World War II. Both nonetheless offer some glimpses into early wrestling in the Canadian West. Also of interest pertaining to professional wrestling during the late 1920s, is Kenneth Boness, Pile Driver: The Life of Charles "Midget" Fischer (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Book Publishing, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Heavyweight wrestler George Hackenschmidt, colloquially known as the "Russian Lion," was an early and notable exception, with his part autobiographical and part training manual The Way to Live (1908; reprint, Farmington, MI: Farmington MI: William F. Hinbern, 1998). Swedish-born wrestler Hjalmar Lundin, whose On the Mat and Off: Memoirs of a Wrestler (New York: Albert Bonnier Publishing House, 1937), was released contemporaneously to Fall Guys (and criticizes the trend toward a more theatrical form of wrestling but does not make a similar effort to lay bare the business' underside), also falls into the category of autobiography, but more in keeping with Meyers' 1931 effort, devotes considerable attention to profiling the prominent wrestlers that he met during his lengthy involvement with the sport.

<sup>30</sup> Clarence Eklund, Forty Years Of Wrestling (Buffalo, WY: By the Author, 1947); Hazel Eklund-Odegard, Wyoming's Wrestling Rancher: Life and History of Clarence Eklund, Champion Wrestler (Buffalo, WY: By the Author, 1993). Similar to Lundin, Eklund provides little hint of efforts (if there were any) to pre-arrange wrestling matches, maintaining a code of silence on the matter that remained characteristic of professional wrestling until the early 1990s. Yet, his insight into the efforts associated with booking appearances, the physical conditions under which matches were contested, and background on other wrestlers operating on the Prairies, provide vital thematic context for this study.

nature, focused on the even more understudied realm of amateur wrestling.<sup>31</sup> Leyshon's seminal work surveyed the institutional and organizational development of Canadian wrestling, including the difficulties faced by the sport's early proponents in conducting and organizing competitions, as well as important competitive achievements by Canadian athletes. Significantly, Of Mats and Men provided an overview of the sport's social and cultural significance among Aboriginal peoples in pre-Confederation Canada. Immigrant cultures' early wrestling practices (particularly those of British lineage) as well as the role of professional wrestling in helping to shape the early amateur wrestling movement also received attention. Leyshon's work did not delve extensively into wrestling's social impact, how the sport reflected larger tensions or trends in Canadian society with respect to masculinity, class, or ethnicity and how these issues changed over time. To date, however, it remains the only published study devoted to early Canadian wrestling and is required reference for those seeking an overview of the sport's growth as a competitive enterprise in the country.

By the late 1980s, American social historians were beginning to direct their attention to the mat game and one of the themes that immediately emerged in their analyses was the importance of nationalism in wrestling. J.J. Mondak's 1989 article on the subject, "The Politics of Professional Wrestling," examined wrestling's cyclical nature within the context of international politics, contending that the sport provided a medium through which complex ideas related to American foreign relations could be simplified into power plays between 'good' and 'evil.'<sup>32</sup> A decade later, Matthew Lindaman further explored this thread in his article, "Wrestling's Hold on the Western World Before the Great War." Through his analysis of heavyweight champion Frank Gotch's career, Lindaman drew a link between wrestling and American nationalism.<sup>33</sup> Ideas surrounding wrestling and masculinity proved to be a second important theme in the emergent academic literature. John Rickard's "'The Spectacle of Excess': The Emergence of Modern Professional Wrestling in the United States and Australia," likewise

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<sup>31</sup> Glynn A. Leyshon, Of Mats and Men: The Story of Canadian Amateur and Olympic Wrestling from 1600 to 1984 (London, ON: Sports Dynamics, 1984).

<sup>32</sup> J.J. Mondak, "The Politics of Professional Wrestling," Journal of Popular Culture 23,2 (Fall 1989), 139-50.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew Lindaman, "Wrestling's Hold on the Western World Before the Great War," Historian 62, 2 (2000), 796.

placed early wrestling exhibitions with the context of a growing physical culture movement which celebrated male muscular development.<sup>34</sup> Masculinity also featured in Lindaman's examination the following year, which placed wrestling matches, and specifically Frank Gotch's exploits on the mat, within the framework of concerns over corroding masculinity in a modern industrial age.<sup>35</sup>

The efforts of a few academic historians, through published articles, to provide some social context for understanding professional wrestling did not precipitate a flowering in the monograph literature. To date, Scott M. Beekman's Ringside: A History of Professional Wrestling in America (2006) remains the only scholarly monograph devoted to the subject. Intended as a survey of American wrestling from its earliest times to the date of publication, Beekman's strongest analysis is fortunately directed toward the pre-Depression period. Although the events illustrated in Beekman's narrative do not stray considerably from those already recalled by such authors as Fleischer, Griffin, and Chapman, he provides social context for understanding the sport's development that was lacking from previous works. He argues that professional wrestling's emergence as a popular spectator pastime in the post-Civil War era was closely linked to the growth of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and advancements in communication and transportation technology.<sup>36</sup> Drawing on Rickard and Lindaman's earlier analyses, Beekman likewise explores wrestling's popularity in conjunction with widespread ideas surrounding the human (and specifically male) body, race, and nationalism.<sup>37</sup> Such themes are similarly central in the present work. Although a significant landmark in studying professional wrestling's growth and social significance, Ringside, as "the first nonpictorial history of wrestling," necessarily attempts to provide only the broadest overview, and in doing so neglects several critical avenues of inquiry.<sup>38</sup>

In staying largely affixed to the narrative on American professional wrestling already established by previous popular historians, Beekman perpetuates the notion that the sport's past can be encapsulated by (and was synonymous with) the activities conducted within the heavyweight division's upper echelon.

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<sup>34</sup> John Rickard, "The Spectacle of Excess," 130.

<sup>35</sup> Lindaman, "Wrestling's Hold," 795.

<sup>36</sup> Scott M. Beekman, Ringside: A History of Professional Wrestling in America (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2006), 13, 16, 25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 21, 22, 28, 29, 36.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

Ringside does not account for the sport's regional peculiarities, nor does it address the point that, despite the fame accorded to heavyweight matmen during the period, wrestling's survival was typically ensured by local talent who, not always drawn from the heavyweight division, catered to, among other things, specific ethnic, nationalist, and civic interests in the regions where they operated. Although acknowledging the importance of such factors as nationalism and ethnicity to wrestling, his treatment of the subject is cursory and fails to address, among other things, how wrestling reflected changing public perceptions surrounding immigration, its role in illustrating inter-ethnic and interregional rivalries, and the sport's importance as a medium for highlighting various immigrant communities own unique cultural perspectives, all of which are themes in the present work.

Although American wrestling had a profound influence on developments in Canada, Ringside, as a distinctly American-based history, likewise does not examine wrestling's relation to events unique to the Canadian experience such as the country's connection to the British Empire, protracted involvement in the Great War, and the heavy influence of Eastern Canadian metropolitan centres on Western Canadian development. Additionally, as his title implies, Beekman examines only professional wrestling, and, as a result, eliminates several potentially fruitful lines of investigation that can be better explored by examining both professional and amateur branches of sport during the pre-Depression period, particularly with regard to the contrasting values that were believed by many to be intrinsic to both movements.

Despite academic historical examinations devoted to wrestling being extremely few in number, a rich body of literature on sport and its relationship to masculinity, class, and ethnicity help to further inform an understanding of wrestling in Manitoba. Morris Mott's doctoral dissertation, "Manly Sports and Manitobans: Settlement Days to World War One," is a necessary starting point for any study on early sporting practices in Manitoba, especially in relation to sport's function in promoting a vision of masculinity that was largely cultivated by members of the province's Anglo-Canadian middle class, most of whom came from Ontario.<sup>39</sup> Subsequent authors have similarly stressed the preeminent role played by

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<sup>39</sup> Morris Mott, "Manly Sports and Manitobans: Settlement Days to World War One," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, 1980). Alan Metcalfe's Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1807-1914 (Toronto:

middle class men, generally of Anglo-Protestant extraction, in shaping the nation's sporting practices and values. In particular, they were aided in this endeavour by their institutions, including religious, recreational, and broad-reaching "amateur" sporting organizations, of which substantially more will be said in the ensuing chapters.<sup>40</sup> Works by such authors as Elliott Gorn, Kevin Wamsley, David Whitson, Robert Kossuth and Colin D. Howell, provide additional insight into sport, male (particularly working class) culture and aggressive masculinity, to which the world of wrestling, particularly before World War I, was frequently linked.<sup>41</sup>

It would be misleading, however, to assert that masculinity can be reduced purely to violence. As demonstrated in literature spanning the last quarter century, masculinity is a socially, as opposed to genetically, derived notion whose meaning can vary according to time, location, and social station.<sup>42</sup>

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McClelland and Stuart, 1987), likewise drawing inspiration from Donald Creighton's Laurentian thesis, stresses the role played by major urban centres in Central Canada, notably Montreal and Toronto, in helping to shape sport's subsequent development throughout the country. Other authors, notably Colin D. Howell in his study on Maritime baseball, Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), have provided an alternative to this model's universal application in Canada, highlighting the connections between the Atlantic Provinces and New England (particularly Maine) in the sport's development. In the present work, the role played by Anglo-Protestants from Central Canada in shaping Manitoba's sporting values is an important theme, particularly during the early settlement period. However, also of vital importance to the analysis, particularly as it concerns professional wrestling, is the connection to the United States, which was strengthened as time progressed.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Alan Metcalfe, Canada Learns to Play, particularly Chapters 1,2 and 4; Jean Barman, "Sport and the Development of Character," in Sports in Canada: Historical Readings, ed. Morris Mott (Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman Limited, 1989), 234; Gerald Redmond, "Some Aspects of Organized Sport and Leisure in Nineteenth-Century Canada," in Sports in Canada, 87; S.F. Wise, "Sport and Class Values in Old Ontario and Quebec," in Sports in Canada, 126; Hall et. al., Sport in Canadian Society (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), 57; Nancy Bouchier, For the Love of the Game: Amateur Sport in Small-Town Ontario, 1838-1895 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill and Queen's University Press, 2003), particularly Chapters 3 and 7; Don Morrow and Kevin Wamsley, Sport in Canada: A History (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4, 70. Concerning the middle-class' role in shaping sport's moral imperatives, see also Tony Collins, "Violence, Gamesmanship, and the Amateur Ideal in Middle Class Rugby," in Disreputable Pleasures: Less Virtuous Victorians at Play, eds. Mike Huggins and J.A. Mangan (New York: Frank Cass, 2004), 172. Frank Cosentino's doctoral dissertation, "A History of the Concept of Professionalism in Canadian Sport," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1973), although an older work, is also of great value in understanding Canadian society's changing understanding of professionalism in sport and, by way of contrast, key ideas guiding the amateur doctrine.

<sup>41</sup> Elliott Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," American Historical Review 90, 1 (1985), 18-43; The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Kevin B. Wamsley and David Whitson, "Celebrating Violent Masculinities: The Boxing Death of Luther McCarty," Journal of Sport History 25, 3 (Fall 1998): 419-431; Kevin B. Wamsley and Robert S. Kossuth, "Fighting it Out in Nineteenth-Century Upper Canada/Canada West: Masculinities and Physical Challenges in the Tavern," Journal of Sport History 27, 3 (Fall 2000): 405-430; Colin D. Howell, Blood, Sweat and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. Although her analysis is not focused on the working class, Varda Burstyn's The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics and the Culture of Sport (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) is also vital in understanding the relationship between sport and male aggression.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example Anthony Rotundo, American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1990), 7; Michael Kimmel, Manhood in America: A Cultural History (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 2; Mike O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1902-1914," Labour/Le Travail 42 (Fall 1998), 116; Philip White and Kevin Young eds., Sport and Gender in Canada (Don Mills, ON: Oxford



Although masculinity as a construct was (and remains) ubiquitous in society, as Canadian historian Mike O'Brien argues, a universally-agreed upon standard has never existed, and its definition has been, "eminently open to contestation even within a single historical context."<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, this dissertation stresses that many people saw value in wrestling quite aside from its merit as a purely aggressive undertaking. Wrestling was, in fact, frequently "contested territory" around which there was considerable debate related to, among other things, appropriate male conduct on and off the mat. Informed by Colin D. Howell's Northern Sandlots (1995) and Bruce Kidd's analysis in The Struggle for Canadian Sport (1997), the notion of "contested territory" is an important element in this study, extending not only to gender, but to how various groups and individuals in society attempted, through wrestling, to further their own unique ethnic, occupational, and class interests in the half century after Confederation.<sup>44</sup> On occasion, however, cooperation could coexist with conflict, and through an analysis of wrestling, we see that various groups which were frequently at odds with one another could also demonstrate the ability to work together to achieve common goals. Wrestling, therefore, highlights that social interactions between groups were frequently less monolithic, and more complex, than a model stressing either antagonism or alliance would imply.

The decision to situate this study within Manitoba was predicated on two main factors. First, as will be shown, extensive settlement in the province occurred contemporaneously with a widespread rise in interest surrounding sport in Canada. As the province grew from a sparsely settled region whose financial base was largely linked to the dwindling fur and hide trade, into a bustling agricultural powerhouse with an increasingly diversified economy, so, too, did sport, in multiple forms, emerge from the social margins to become prescient in many people's lives. Accordingly, it is possible to trace both

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University Press, 1999), xvii; Gertrud Pfister, "Cold War Diplomats in Tracksuits: The Frauleinwunder of East German Sport," in Militarism, Sport, Europe: War Without Weapons, ed. J.A. Mangan (New York: Frank Cass, 2004), 225.

<sup>43</sup> O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth," 116.

<sup>44</sup> For use of the term "contested territory" see Northern Sandlots, 4, 5. To date, scholarly work dedicated specifically to race, ethnicity, and sport in Canada are few in number. Howell's examination of black baseball players in Northern Sandlots, Chapter 9, is particularly insightful for its analysis of race and sport in Canada. Concerning racial prejudice, and in particular exclusion from amateur sport on the basis of race, see also Frank Cosentino's Afros, Aborigines and Amateur Sport in Pre World War One Canada (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Society, 2000). Bruce Kidd's examination of organized sport within Canada's Finnish population in Struggle for Canadian Sport (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), provides important context not only for understanding its role within non-Anglo Canadian communities during the 1920s, but also its place in the country's organized labour movement.

wrestling and Manitoba's growth from their mutual infancy, along parallel courses. Second, Manitoba is an ideal site for examining ideas related to wrestling and ethnicity because, far more than Central and Eastern Canada, it saw the influx of settlers from many nations outside of the English-speaking world.<sup>45</sup> Conversely, in wrestling, owing to its one-on-one nature, ethnicity and race were far more apparent than in team sports, allowing for acute examination on the subject.

Although Manitoba's sporting culture owed much to Central Canada, it was also shaped by the peculiarities of Western life, which included a larger proportion of non-English immigrant peoples than in Ontario. This diversity, coupled with the fact that many immigrant peoples were already familiar with wrestling before arriving in Canada, makes Manitoba, through the lens of wrestling, an ideal location for investigating themes related to ethnic rivalry, nativism, racism and assimilation. A number of survey works, beginning with W.L. Morton's seminal opus, Manitoba: A History (1957), provide context for understanding the critical events and themes shaping Manitoba's development.<sup>46</sup> Since Winnipeg quickly emerged as the dominant metropolitan centre on the Prairies and the unchallenged economic, social, cultural, and transportation centre for Manitoba, its presence looms large in this study. Although effort is also directed toward examining wrestling in the province's smaller communities, as in other matters, Winnipeg was the community where the most events occurred and with the greatest frequency. Accordingly, analysis draws heavily on studies devoted specifically to Manitoba's capital.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Concerning Manitoba's ethnic composition relative to Ontario, see Plate 4 in Donald Kerr and Deryck W. Holdsworth, ed., Historical Atlas of Canada Volume III: Addressing the Twentieth Century, 1891-1961 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> Morton's Manitoba: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957) still remains an excellent source outlining the province's economic and political development since Confederation. John Herd Thompson's Harvests of War (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1978); and Forging the Prairie West (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998) provide further depth on topics related to immigration, assimilation, and Western Canadian nativism than does Morton's earlier work. Since Morton's time, historians have devoted greater effort to providing an inclusive narrative on Prairie settlement and growth that integrates the experiences and achievements of the region's immigrant communities. Of particular value in this regard, as well as for its overall analysis of Prairie life before and after Confederation, is Gerald Friesen's The Canadian Prairies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). Also useful in understanding changing patterns of Western immigration and the forces behind it are D.J. Hall's two part biography on Clifford Sifton, Clifford Sifton Volume One: The Young Napoleon, 1861-1900 (Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 1981); and Clifford Sifton, Volume Two: A Lonely Eminence, 1901-1929 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985). Additional insight into each of these topics is provided by Ken Coates and Fred McGuinness, 'Manitoba: The Province and the People' (Edmonton, AB: Hurtig, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> Background on Winnipeg's economic development and its social impact are provided by Alan Artibise, Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth 1874-1914 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975). Ruban Bellan, Winnipeg First Century: An Economic History (Winnipeg: Queenston House Publishing, 1978) is additionally useful for understanding, on practically a year-to-year basis, the city's cycles of economic growth and decline.

Research specifically into wrestling's history in Manitoba commenced with reading the sports section in the Manitoba Free Press. Owing to the fact that virtually nothing was known about its history, each issue of the Free Press between 1900 and 1930 was examined to provide a foundational understanding for the major individuals, institutions, and events shaping wrestling's past. Previous research on the Thunder Bay district prior to 1900 provided a starting point for investigating wrestling's earlier days in the province before the popularization of dedicated sports pages.<sup>48</sup> Based upon findings in the Free Press, further research was undertaken in the longstanding Winnipeg Tribune and Winnipeg Telegram dailies as well as various shorter lived newspapers that existed since the early Confederation period, to glean further information concerning events deemed significant to the study. Periodicals published in Manitoba's smaller communities such as Brandon, Portage la Prairie, Melita, and Dauphin were likewise examined for their records on local wrestling. All reports were analysed for commentary related to the various themes and questions guiding this work, and catalogued accordingly. Of additional value in this regard were advertisements (typically in the form of playbills), as well as photographs printed in the newspapers, the latter of which were specifically insightful with respect to understanding ideas related to the male physical form. In a number of instances, letters from wrestlers and members of the public who attended wrestling matches also appeared in newspapers, giving insight into their own views concerning the sport.

Although vital for studying wrestling and one of the few extant primary sources providing regular documentation on the subject (particularly professional wrestling), there are intrinsic flaws to relying on newspapers to the exclusion of other records. Intended for commercial consumption as opposed to posterity, the details chronicled in their pages were frequently hastily gathered, with concern for looming deadlines trumping a desire for complete factual accuracy and measured reflection on an incident's importance. Undoubtedly, reports in newspapers also reflected editorial biases concerning what should be included, or excluded, from the limited space available, and this often served to marginalize certain

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<sup>48</sup> See Charles Nathan Hatton, "Headlocks at the Lakehead: Wrestling in Fort William and Port Arthur, 1913-1933, (unpublished Master's thesis, Lakehead University, 2007), 30-31.

segments of the population according to political affiliation, language, occupation, and ethnicity. Yet, as American historian Jerry W. Knudson contends, newspapers, as commercial documents, also had to present information in ways that were culturally intelligible and relevant to their audiences or face economic hardship. Newspaper commentary could, particularly during a period with limited alternative media such as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, strongly inform public opinion.<sup>49</sup> A broad reading of newspaper commentary related to wrestling across time and publication aided in differentiating incidental remarks from themes with wider resonance, and to this end, attempts were also made to draw on non-English language publications such as Le Manitoba, La Presse, and labour-oriented papers such as the Winnipeg Voice and One Big Union Bulletin. Through observations on such matters as attendance numbers, venues for matches, audience composition, behaviour, and public reaction to the events unfolding at wrestling matches, insight could be garnered on where the sport took place, who patronized it, and what value they saw in it. Supplemented extensively by sources including Winnipeg's Henderson's Directories, the Canada Census, Records of the Department of National Defence, Winnipeg City Police Court Records, and Winnipeg Police Commission Books, newspapers were likewise crucial in ascertaining the names, ethnic backgrounds, occupations, and personal activities of those who participated as athletes or boosters in the sport.

Another important body of information related to wrestling in Manitoba came from institutional records produced by various organizations that sponsored wrestling programs, including the Scottish Athletic Association, Young Men's Christian Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association, One Big Union, Department of National Defence (specifically, within the context of the Great War, the Canadian Expeditionary Forces), and Amateur Athletic Union of Canada and its Manitoba affiliate. From them can be ascertained, among other things, the reasons for supporting wrestling programs, membership composition, conditions for participation, the costs associated with staging events, and the relationship with other institutions and individuals in the province. Although a periodical, the One Big Union

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<sup>49</sup> Jerry W. Knudson, "Late to the Feast: Newspapers as Historical Sources," American Historical Association Perspectives (October 1993), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/1993/9310/9310ARC.cfm> (Accessed 20 January 2011).

Bulletin, as the official organ for the organization, also proved a valuable source, particularly in regards to its interaction with other clubs in the city and views surrounding sport's 'appropriate' purpose.

Unfortunately, records from the many commercial clubs that operated, often briefly, in Manitoba throughout its history do not survive to the present day, nor do private records produced by professional wrestling promoters, so much of the information on them must be gleaned from newspapers.

Among other significant sources were City of Winnipeg By-Laws and Municipal Manuals, as well as the Statutes of Manitoba and Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, which provided information on efforts to regulate the sport at, respectively, the local and provincial levels. A number of instructional and technical manuals related to physical fitness and wrestling, published during the period under study and widely available throughout North America, supplied background on ideas related to wrestling, exercise, and the male physical form during the decades bookending the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A small number of photographs, not published in newspapers, also proved useful.

This work adopts a chronological approach to examining wrestling's history in Manitoba, placing significant events in the sport within the context of a society whose values, ethnic composition, and interaction with the larger world were ever in flux. Although such matters as masculinity, class, respectability, nationality, and ethnicity were always important elements to life in Manitoba, as similarly noted by social historian Joy Parr, any one element could, depending on time and place, assume centre stage while others simultaneously dropped to the background.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, each chapter gives varying emphasis to themes whose significance, and character, were subject to changing historical forces.

Chapter One briefly explores the nature and cultural meanings associated with the wrestling and wrestling-related activities undertaken, first, by the Indigenous people who occupied the regions that would later constitute the province of Manitoba and second, by the mixed-blood and European fur trading cultures. Confederation, representing a distinct break from the past, saw the re-grafting of an Anglo-Protestant culture with strong ties to Ontario, onto the Prairies. The new settlers, it will be shown,

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<sup>50</sup> Joy Parr, Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 10, 11.

brought with them their own wrestling practices, but more importantly, competing ideas (which were frequently class-based, but never universal to any one class) surrounding the sport's 'appropriate' purpose in the new province. The chapter also places wrestling's growth within the framework of advances in transportation and communication technology which, in addition to facilitating ties to Ontario and British culture, initiated the development of links to American sporting culture. Building on themes introduced in Chapter One, Chapter Two examines professional wrestling's growth in Manitoba between 1896 and 1914, situating it within a public discourse that both extolled the sport's merits as a worthwhile physical, moral and civic enterprise, and also condemned it for encouraging and showcasing inappropriate (and at times unscrupulous) behaviour. Chapter Three examines wrestling in light of the remarkable demographic changes that occurred in the Prairie provinces after 1896. Far more than in the past, ethnicity took on heightened significance in the sport, as various groups, already acquainted with wrestling in their homeland, attached their own meanings to the activity. Although wrestling, as a commercial enterprise, often capitalized on ethnic divisiveness in the increasingly multicultural province, the chapter also illustrates its role in fostering community cohesion within particular ethnic groups living in the province. Chapter Four shifts the emphasis away from professional wrestling to amateur wrestling, which developed considerably in the seven years prior to 1914. Placed within the context of an expanding nation-wide amateur sporting movement and guided by the philosophical tenets outlined by the Young Men's Christian Association, the chapter investigates amateur wrestling's frequently ambiguous relationship with professionalism as well as its geographic, class, and ethnic composition during its formative years. Chapter Five focuses on wrestling during the Great War. Largely neglected as a period for studying sport, the chapter examines wrestling's function in reinforcing masculine, militarist, and imperialist values, as well as its position as a forum for challenging specific class-based stereotypes surrounding professionalism. Chapter Six looks at professional wrestling during the 1920s and its adaptation to the changing values that were attached to sport during the decade. Particular attention is directed toward professional wrestling as a site for capitalizing on mounting anti-'foreigner' sentiment and its growing connection to the United States heavyweight professional wrestling market. Chapter

Seven explores amateur wrestling's continued growth during the 1920s, its expansion beyond its previously narrow class, ethnic, and geographic confines, and the continuities that persisted from the pre-World War I period due to the ongoing adherence to a rigid amateur code. The dissertation concludes with professional wrestling's final transformation into a form of scripted athletic entertainment within the context of emergent social and technological forces driving that change.

Wrestling has a long, although largely unexplored, history in Manitoba. It was a sport enjoyed by thousands of people from a variety of ethnic and occupational backgrounds who attached meaning to participating in matches, organizing clubs and tournaments, attending events, or otherwise keeping abreast of the latest developments occurring in the "mat game" both in the province and the world-at-large. What follows is a first attempt to elaborate some of the sport's many hues and contours in Western Canada's oldest province.

## **Chapter I**

### **Wrestling in Manitoba Before 1896**

Wrestling's origins in the regions that would later comprise the province of Manitoba predate the widespread European settlement that occurred during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. First Nations, mixed-blood peoples, and European traders participated in various forms of the sport in the decades and centuries before Confederation, each group imbuing it with a distinct social purpose. After 1870, Manitoba society underwent a radical transformation, as large numbers of settlers, the vast majority of whom were of British-Canadian extraction, came to the province. These settlers, who by the decade's end formed the ethnic majority, did not create a wholly new society on the Canadian Prairies, but instead sought to shape the province according to their pre-existing customs and beliefs. British-Canadians brought with them to Manitoba a rich sporting tradition that included wrestling. In the ensuing years, wrestling increased in popularity, as improvements in the province's communication and transportation infrastructure assisted in integrating Manitoba into a larger culture of sport that, by the 1880s, spanned the English-speaking world. During the late nineteenth century, wrestling experienced its most remarkable growth in Winnipeg, which emerged as the region's dominant metropolitan centre following Confederation. Although popular, wrestling was also highly controversial, as the activity was predominantly associated with Winnipeg's male bachelor sporting culture, a group whose interests and activities often ran contrary to reform-minded members of the middle class who sought to shape wrestling according to their own values of 'manly' respectability. Tension between these two sets of values were often evidenced both by the press, who simultaneously criticized the sport on moral grounds while capitalizing on its commercial appeal, and the wrestlers themselves, who both cultivated and defied an image of respectability.

#### **Wrestling Prior to 1870**

Prior to Confederation, First Nations, mixed-blood and European-Canadians, both in the Red River settlement and the regions of the Canadian Northwest that later fell within Manitoba's borders,



participated in displays of ritualized combat that affirmed important values associated with masculine identity. Written records of wrestling among First Nations peoples are rare, owing in part to the fact that those with sufficient literacy levels in the Northwest, among them priests and explorers, were more concerned with documenting activities directly related to their work in the region than detailing the day-to-day activities of the people they encountered.<sup>1</sup> A notable exception in this regard can be found in Samuel Hearne's writings.

Hearne, an explorer employed with the Hudson's Bay Company, travelled extensively throughout the Northwest between 1768 and 1772 primarily in search of copper deposits.<sup>2</sup> In 1771, he commented that, among members of the Chipewyan, the male youth regularly engaged in wrestling contests in which both combatants usually grasped the other by the hair until one had been dragged to the ground, signalling the contest's termination.<sup>3</sup> However, wrestling served other purposes besides being a simple recreational diversion. As a strenuous physical endeavour, it both tested and displayed many of the physical qualities associated with hunting.<sup>4</sup> Wrestling matches among the Chipewyan also served as a form of arbitration, since, for example, disputes over who could claim a woman as their wife could be settled by a wrestling contest.<sup>5</sup> Hearne observed that, "It has ever been the custom among those people for the men to wrestle for any woman to whom they are attached, and of course, the strongest party always carried off the prize."<sup>6</sup> At least one Chipewyan male echoed his commentary, declaring decades later to David Thompson that, "The strong men take the Women when they want them; certainly the strong men have the right to the Women."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leyshon, *Of Mats and Men*, 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> For a general overview of Samuel Hearne's exploration activities in the northwest interior, see C.S. Mackinnon's entry in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, [http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=1943&interval=25&&PHPSESSID=nc3qsetgi77rn9f6941tmgnj05](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=1943&interval=25&&PHPSESSID=nc3qsetgi77rn9f6941tmgnj05) (accessed 3 September 2009); and E.E. Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 146-151.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Hearne, *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort, in Hudson's Bay, to the Northern Ocean in the years 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1911), 141, 142.

<sup>4</sup> Mott, "Manly Sports," 26, 28. See also Morris Mott, "Games and Contests of the First 'Manitobans,'" *Sports in Canada*, 19, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Leyshon, *Of Mats and Men*, 5; Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, c.1980), 24.

<sup>6</sup> Hearne, *A Journey*, 141.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 25.

Within Chipewyan culture, the ability to take more than one wife was symbolic of a man's strength and his social status.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the decision to do so was not entirely a matter of cementing one's personal standing within the community. Stronger men would often claim a weaker man's wife if he felt that his own wife or wives were already overburdened with furs or provisions.<sup>9</sup> Hearne, who admired the Chipewyan people for their incredible ingenuity, commenting in one instance that their craftwork was, "not to be excelled by the most expert mechanic, assisted with every tool he could wish," nevertheless brought his own European cultural biases to his observations concerning their wrestling practices. He found such bouts "very unpleasant" and felt "pity" for the "wretched victims" of the disputes.<sup>10</sup> Subsequent scholarship, however, suggests that the practice should not be mistaken as a form of simple chattelhood wherein females possessed no social capital. In Chipewyan culture, the youngest wife was required to do most of the heavy work, and as a result, senior wives were able to exercise their own agency by urging their husbands to take on another marital partner, thus reducing the severity of their own labours.<sup>11</sup>

Wrestling's effectiveness as a form of social arbitration among the Chipewyan is underscored by the fact that, despite his abhorrence for the custom, Hearne never observed any act of violent revenge within the community, save for the matches themselves, none of which ever resulted in injury. Indeed, he noted that murder was virtually unknown, being "shunned and detested by all the tribes."<sup>12</sup> Likewise, wrestling contests, from his experience, never escalated to the point where other individuals, including close family members, interfered in the proceedings except to warn a weaker, but game, combatant, that protracted conflict might result in physical harm.<sup>13</sup> This point, however, did not prevent European traders from intervening in such contests, which were viewed as an affront both to their own notions of male

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<sup>8</sup> Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 24; Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), 63.

<sup>9</sup> Hearne, *A Journey*, 142.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, 63. Hearne's own observations concerning wrestling customs among the Chipewyan people indirectly suggest the point raised by Brown. He noted in *A Journey*, 143, for example, that most wrestling matches were contested over young women.

<sup>12</sup> Hearne, *A Journey*, 144.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 142, 143.

chivalry and their monogamous world view. In one instance, David Thompson chased away the winner of a wrestling match, and in another, defended a man who, more in keeping with encroaching European practices, shot his conqueror after losing a bout.<sup>14</sup> Thompson was heavily criticized for his decision to shield the perpetrator in the latter case, and was told by a member of the Chipewyan community that, “on no account whatever ought the ground to be made red with man’s blood” over such marital disputes.<sup>15</sup>

Further north, among the Inuit, wrestling was also common, and travel journals from the region note its prevalence.<sup>16</sup> Here, too, wrestling matches were often useful in resolving disagreements between two individuals. In other instances, specifically among the Netsilik, ritualized unarmed combat in which both men would strike one another in the forehead or shoulder until one capitulated, served a similar function. Thereafter, the grievance would be considered settled. Formal wrestling or striking matches prevented aggression from escalating and potentially ruining favourable relationships within the community.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, wrestling partnerships were formed among pairs of Netsilik Inuit men from different bands as part of a complex dyadic social ritual that also involved wife and food sharing.<sup>18</sup> Although written over thirty years after Manitoba’s entry into Confederation, reports in the Winnipeg Voice give further insight into wrestling’s practice amongst the Inuit people. In 1901 the paper noted that:

Next to gambling, the Esquimo men like to wrestle. The usual way of doing this is a test rather of strength than skill. The wrestlers sit down on the floor or in any convenient place, side by side, and facing in opposite directions, say with right elbows touching. Then they lock arms, and each strives to straighten out the other’s arm.<sup>19</sup>

Difficulties arise in determining how widespread this specific type of wrestling was among the Inuit, as writings on Indigenous peoples who lived outside European settlement areas frequently generalized

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<sup>14</sup> Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> David T. Hanbury, who spent twenty months traversing Canada’s north, observed in Sport and Travel in the Northland of Canada (London: Edward Arnold, 1904), 2, that the Inuit who worked at Churchill were particularly fond of wrestling. By the end of the nineteenth century, American sporting amusements were also being integrated into Inuit society, as Hanbury witnessed the children’s affinity for baseball, which they had learned from American whalers. See page 130.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony D. Pellegrini and Peter K. Smith, The Nature of Play: Great Apes and Humans (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 76; Michael Heine, Inuit Style Wrestling: A Training and Resource Manual (Yellowknife: Sport North Federation, 2002), I-12, I-60.

<sup>18</sup> Leyshon, Of Mats and Men, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Winnipeg Voice, 27 December 1901.

specific occurrences to be indicative of wider cultural practices.<sup>20</sup> The report is nevertheless instructive, as it describes not only the sport's apparent prevalence, but also its unique attributes. Here, Inuit wrestling often took place indoors, a point also noted by ethnologist Diamond Jenness, who observed that wrestling occurred primarily in the winter months, once the summer migrations and hunting expeditions were at an end and more free time became available for recreational pursuits.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the emphasis on strength, rather than skill, in wrestling, had direct relevance to the hunt, where the ability to drag, carry and haul animals was of paramount importance. Strong wrestlers were accordingly granted high social standing within Inuit communities.<sup>22</sup>

Among the voyageurs who traversed Canada's Northwest interior long before extensive European settlement in the late nineteenth century, physical strength, endurance and courage were central elements in their identity. Carolyn Podrychny argues that, in their inherently transient, physically arduous and exclusively male work environment, such activities as consuming alcohol, explicit acts of bravery, and fighting earned voyageurs "masculine capital" amongst their peers.<sup>23</sup> So important were such themes to voyageur existence that Daniel Harmon, a trader with the North West Company, remarked that he had little interest in conversing with the "illiterate ignorant Canadian[s]," because, "All of their chat [was] about Horses, Dogs, Canoes and Women, and strong Men who [could] fight a good battle."<sup>24</sup> Harmon's attitude, much like observations made by Europeans concerning First Nations peoples, betray the extent to which an accurate understanding of a peoples' cultural practices can be distorted when commentators from outside that culture apply their own values and social expectations to assessing that group's behaviour. Nevertheless, the importance of physicality, including fighting prowess, to voyageur culture is

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<sup>20</sup> George Eisen, "Early European Attitudes toward Native American Sports and Pastimes," in Ethnicity and Sport in North American History and Culture, eds. George Eisen and David K. Wiggins (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>21</sup> Diamond Jenness, "The Life of the Copper Eskimo," A Report of the Canadian Arctic Expedition 1913-18 (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970), 221.

<sup>22</sup> Heine, Inuit Style Wrestling, I-36, I-42.

<sup>23</sup> Carolyn Podrychny, Making the Voyageur World: Travellers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 13, 186.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Williams Harmon, Harmon's Journal 1800-1819 (Surrey, BC: TouchWood Editions, 2006), 43.

widely documented, regardless of the distain with which many bourgeois fur trade officials viewed such behaviour.<sup>25</sup>

Detailed descriptions of voyageur fighting practices, although rare, indicate that contests took on a more violent and unstructured form than those engaged in by either the Chipewyan or Inuit peoples. An account in the Montreal Gazette vividly describes one such incident, occurring at Fort William during the annual *Rendevous*, in which combatants engaged one another, not only wrestling but, “with the ferociousness of bull-dogs,” attempting to disfigure one another’s face and gouge eyes from their sockets.<sup>26</sup> After a series of such bouts, the ultimate winner would be crowned “boule,” or champion, of the fort; a title that certainly carried with it a very high degree of “masculine capital” in a culture that put preeminent stock in fighting prowess.<sup>27</sup> The contests’ chaotic nature, part boxing, part wrestling and part fighting, may be in part attributable to the liminal nature of voyageur existence. A perpetual series of transitions characterized voyageur life, as men continually moved from one geographic area to another, and back and forth between European and First Nations cultures. Such a transient reality allowed for a greater degree of freedom and experimentation in their cultural practices than would be permitted in a social setting with long-established customs and social mores.<sup>28</sup> Decades earlier in Virginia, a remarkably similar form of combat was practiced by members of mid-eighteenth century planter society. Although more settled than the voyageur world, with an established gentry who formed a social elite, Virginian society during the period was nevertheless characterized by what historian Rhys Issac termed, “A perpetual struggle for advantage... constantly wrenching against the confines of settled community

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<sup>25</sup> Both popular and academic historical accounts regularly mention the voyageurs’ love of physically demonstrative revelry and fighting. See, for example, Greg Shilliday, ed., Manitoba 125- A History Volume 1: Rupert’s Land to Riel (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 1993), 89; Peter C. Newman, Company of Adventurers (Markham, ON: Penguin Books, 1985), 284; Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 159, 166, 175, 186; and Morrow and Wamsley, Sport in Canada, 20, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Montreal Gazette, 29 September 1870.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Victor Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual,” Rice University Studies: The Anthropological Study of Human Play, 60, 3 (Summer 1974), 83; Victor Turner, Blazing the Trail (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 52; Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 166. Michael Payne’s contention in The Most Respectable Place in the Territory: Everyday Life in Hudson’s Bay Company Service York Factory, 1788 to 1870 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1989), 69, that boxing (a sport that, prior to the adoption of the Marquis of Queensbury rules, contained a substantial amount of wrestling) held greater appeal among voyageurs, trip men, and sailors than permanent York Factory residents, supports this view.

and the fixities of hereditary land tenure.”<sup>29</sup> Since social status in mid-eighteenth century Virginian society was in a constant state of negotiation, men were acutely concerned with maintaining, or seeking to improve, their place among their peers through exorbitant betting, audacious boasts and brutal fighting. Perceived insults to one’s status commonly served to instigate fights.<sup>30</sup> However, as historian Elliott Gorn has observed, such contests became far more rare in Virginian society by the end of the century, as landed gentry, who had previously partaken in these intensely violent spectacles, instead sought to emulate British aristocratic customs (including pistol duelling) as a means of distinguishing themselves from those perceived to be their social inferiors.<sup>31</sup> The violent and unstructured fighting practices seen in the eastern state had, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, migrated to the less-settled American backcountry, where, practiced by what Gorn terms “gamblers, hunters, herders, roustabouts, rivermen, and yeomen farmers,” it became known as rough-and-tumble fighting. There too, as widespread settlement encroached, its practice fell into disfavour.<sup>32</sup> Linking mid-eighteenth century Virginia, the backcountry of the American territories, and the fur trading world of the voyageurs was the precarious nature of life and work, which carried with it the ever-present danger of horrific injury or death. Such a tenuous existence conditioned the men living in these regions to accept violence more readily than people in more stable environments, and so chaotic and frequently disfiguring brawls found a receptive audience.<sup>33</sup>

Similar to the voyageurs, among the Hudson’s Bay Company York (HBC) boat tripmen who transported furs and supplies between the Red River colony, Norway House, and York Factory during the early to mid-nineteenth century, courage, physical strength and fighting prowess were held in high regard. Like the voyageurs who preceded them, the tripmen’s work was transient and dangerous in nature, passing from the Red River colony on the plains south of Lake Winnipeg, through frequently treacherous

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<sup>29</sup> Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Williamsburg, VA: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 120.

<sup>30</sup> Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 95, 99.

<sup>31</sup> Elliott Gorn, “Gouge and Bite,” 22.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 23, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Williamsburg, VA: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 98; Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 27.

waterways, to the boreal forests and marshland that marked the territory around the Company's northern posts. When various brigades converged at Norway House and York Factory, bare knuckle fights were customarily staged between their respective champions to determine overall supremacy.<sup>34</sup> History still records the names of several brigade champions, including Jimmy Short, Michael Lambert and, most notably, Poulet (Paulet) Paul, a figure who earned folk-hero status within Manitoba's Métis community.<sup>35</sup> However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, J.J. Gunn commented that "Some few [triplers] still remain to tell of the glories of a calling that dwindled away before steamboats and railways, and is now completely unknown as though it had never been."<sup>36</sup> His remarks, applied to only one class of men working in the Northwest, capture the essence of the transformation that was underway in and around the former Red River colony during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Following Manitoba's entry into Confederation with the passage of the Manitoba Act in July 1870, the largely French-speaking and mixed-blood society was replaced, both in number and influence, by Anglo-Canadian settlers who brought with them their social norms and customs. Combative sports, and more specifically wrestling, which already had a long history in the region, took on new forms and meaning in the burgeoning Manitoba society.

### **Anglo-Canadian Culture on the Prairies**

During the first half of the nineteenth century, popular perception among residents and officials in the United Provinces of Canada held that the prairie region, then controlled by the HBC, was generally unsuitable for farming and large-scale settlement. By the late 1850s, however, views began to change as prominent Canadian scientists, politicians and businessmen re-evaluated the West both in terms of its agricultural merit and its prescient role in fostering a "new Britannic empire on [the] American shores."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> J.J. Gunn, Echoes of the Red (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1930), 43, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 56-57; John E. Foster, "Paulet Paul: Metis or 'House Indian' Folk-Hero?" Manitoba History 9 (Spring 1985), 2, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Gunn, Echoes, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Owsam, Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 4, 39-40, 57. See also Suzanne Zeller, Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 162, 170-171. Growing interest in the Western

After prolonged negotiations with the HBC, the Dominion of Canada secured title to the area, called Rupert's Land, in 1870. Between 1870 and 1877, and again in 1884-85, the federal government quelled Métis resistance to Canadian expansion in respectively, the Red River settlement and North West Territories. It also negotiated a series of treaties with the region's First Nations peoples in order to extinguish their title to Manitoba's lands and make way for widespread European settlement.<sup>38</sup> Following the ratification of the Dominion Lands Act in 1872, English-Canadian settlers slowly began to arrive with the goal of transplanting British-Canadian (specifically Ontario) Protestant culture to the Manitoba grasslands and supplanting the fur-trade based economy of the Métis and First Nations with grain farming. Within the decade, they succeeded in achieving numerical, economic, and cultural dominance.<sup>39</sup> Social transformation did not only occur with the tacit consent of Central Canadian authorities, but with their explicit forceful support. The Mounted Constabulary Force (later, the Manitoba Provincial Police Force), which was established under Federal jurisdiction after Confederation, emerged as a visual symbol of the changes underway in Manitoba during the decade after Confederation.<sup>40</sup> Since, at its inception, the force was established under Federal authority, like the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) who later served the North West Territories, it was not only aimed at preventing the notorious (and often exaggerated) lawlessness of the American frontier, but also at extending Central Canadian authority into the region.<sup>41</sup>

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Prairies during the late 1850s and 1860s was not exclusively the product of Anglo-Canadian cultural imperialism. By this period, much of the viable farmland in Canada West was already under cultivation, leading to inflated land prices, concerns over future resource scarcity, and reduced interest in settlement among prospective immigrants. Additionally, apprehension over American annexation also provided incentive for rapid Western settlement. See Owrham, Promise of Eden, 43, 57.

<sup>38</sup> The Red River resistance of 1870, culminating in Manitoba's entry into Confederation has been widely examined. For treatments of the subject, see Morton, Manitoba, 121-150; Fritz Pannekoek, A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1991); and J.M. Bumstead, The Red River Rebellion (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1996). For an overview of each of the seven prairie treaties negotiated during this period, see Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies, 136-148.

<sup>39</sup> Morton, Manitoba, 241; Artibise, Winnipeg, 194.

<sup>40</sup> Jack Templeman, From Force to Service: A Pictorial History of the Winnipeg Police Department (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Police Museum, 1998), 9-10.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 10; David H. Breen, "The Turner Thesis and the Canadian West: A Closer Look at the Ranching Frontier," in Essays on Western History, ed. Lewis H. Thomas (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1976), 150. Outside of Manitoba, in the regions later known as Saskatchewan and Alberta, David H. Breen argues that the NWMP represented, "the determination of the central authority to reach out and integrate the new territory into the established institutional framework." For additional information on the NWMP's connection to British-Canadian society and Central Canada, see Breen's The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier 1874-1924 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 30; and Friesen, The Canadian Prairies, 170-171.



The police presence, however, was not the only visual indication of Manitoba's growing connection to Central Canada. During the period a large number of sporting pastimes, including team sports such as cricket, lacrosse, soccer, rugby, curling, rowing, and individual sports such as pedestrianism and snowshoeing, already practiced in Ontario, appeared in the province.<sup>42</sup> Sport's widespread popularity in Manitoba reflected larger trends seen throughout the English-speaking world during and after the 1870s, in which many members of society increasingly came to view them not only as an enjoyable endeavour, but as a vehicle for positive social change. Specifically, sports were looked at as a medium to teach desirable 'manly' values to young men. Much of this had to do with prevailing definitions of masculinity among the increasingly-influential Protestant middle class and the rapid shift away from an agrarian-based rural economy to urban industrialism.

### **Sport and Masculinities**

During the decades surrounding Confederation, ideas of appropriate manhood underwent a fundamental shift within Protestant English-speaking society due in large part to the growing influence of the middle class in virtually all realms of human interaction. Early in the nineteenth century, Protestantism generally placed preeminent value on moral qualities such as piety, gentleness, community service and domesticity.<sup>43</sup> Physical prowess had little to do with a man's worth as a Christian. Methodism's powerful influence on Upper Canada's residents during the Second Great Revival bolstered this view by promoting an anti-materialist conception of Christianity, stressing one's direct spiritual relationship with God and rejecting the material world, seen as an expression of humanity's fall from divine grace. However, by the middle of the 1800s, Christian reformers began, in increasing numbers, to reject the internally-oriented conception of Christianity in favour of one that stressed physicality.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mott, "Manly Sports," 55, 67, 73-77.

<sup>42</sup> Mott, "Manly Sports," 55, 67, 73-77.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 223.

<sup>44</sup> Colin D. Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 98; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 11; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 223.

Impetus for this change is attributed to a number of prominent theologians and writers, including Charles Kingsley and Thomas Brown.

Kingsley, who drew inspiration for his ideas from a variety of earlier sources, including the classical Greek works of Plato, saw a direct connection between the previously-separate physical and spiritual realms, arguing that proper Christianity entailed serving God with your entire being. Direct physical action, not just personal reflection and prayer, could bring an individual closer to God and assist in inculcating proper Christian values.<sup>45</sup> His doctrine, popularly termed Muscular Christianity, quickly gained wide acceptance, spurred on in large part by the commercial success of author Thomas Hughes' novel Tom Brown's School Days.<sup>46</sup> Through participation in sports, Tom Brown, the story's protagonist, not only gained greater physical prowess, but learned a variety of moral lessons that shaped his character and made him a proper model of Christian manhood. Many middle-class Protestants had previously viewed participation in sport as largely a waste of time that distracted them from more important business and spiritual matters. However, the doctrine of Muscular Christianity gave new meaning to these previously frivolous activities.<sup>47</sup> In fact, far from being an unnecessary indulgence, sport now became an important vehicle in preparing young men for success in public life, including business, as it taught such critical traits as team work, determination, healthy competitiveness, and playing by the rules: all of which were seen as critical in a burgeoning capitalist economy.<sup>48</sup> Sport served as an efficient means to achieving higher ends. Hughes' work gained such widespread acclaim that by the 1880s, it was included on both the Ontario and Manitoba supplementary reading lists for Protestant school teachers.<sup>49</sup> Muscular

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<sup>45</sup> Anne Bloomfield, "Muscular Christian or Mystic? Charles Kingsley Reappraised," International Journal of the History of Sport 71, 1 (1994), 173, 174; Benjamin Rader, American Sports From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 24.

<sup>46</sup> Seven A. Riess, "Sport and the Redefinition of Middle Class Masculinity," International Journal of the History of Sport 8 (1991), 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Rader, American Sports, 124.

<sup>49</sup> Mott, "Manly Sports," 60. For an excellent overview of the manly qualities that Tom Brown learns through sport, see pages 61-62.

Christianity's precepts became so pervasive that even the image of Jesus Christ himself was recast as a physically robust model of ideal manliness.<sup>50</sup>

Despite manhood's growing association with physicality, such ideas never achieved universal acceptance. As historian Janet Guildford contends, conceptions of masculinity were not exclusively shaped by men. Instead, women, through their own ideas regarding what constituted appropriate manhood, were able to help shape male self-identity and behaviour.<sup>51</sup> As her analysis of mid-Victorian literature suggests, many middle class women were, at best, ambivalent toward such 'vaunted' attributes as male physical strength, instead advocating qualities including generosity, a capacity for passion tempered by self control, and a genuine interest in cultural pursuits, as key virtues.<sup>52</sup> Some segments of the male population, including prominent Christian leaders such as Samuel J. May and the more secularly-minded transcendentalist Walt Whitman, believed that men could best be served by removing the social and political barriers that separated them from women (and in the process adopting many so-called feminine traits), not by emphasizing physical strength as a pathway to self-actualization.<sup>53</sup>

### **Taverns and Commercial Sport**

Although it never gained complete hegemony, Muscular Christianity gave tremendous impetus to legitimating sport. Yet, even as interest in sport grew, the idea that it should be conducted solely for the purpose of cultivating Christian morality did not garner universal acceptance. By the mid-nineteenth century, many sporting pastimes, including wrestling, already had a longstanding association in Canada with taverns. In Upper Canada, taverns were found in communities of all sizes throughout the colony.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Colin D. Howell, *Blood, Sweat and Cheers*, 32-34.

<sup>51</sup> Janet Guildford, "Creating the Ideal Man: Middle-Class Women's Constructions of Masculinity in Nova Scotia, 1840-1880," *Acadiensis* 24, 2 (Spring 1995), 23.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-12.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Kimmel, *History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 82, 83, 108. See also Robert K. Nelson and Kenneth M. Price, "Debating Manliness: Thomas Wentworth Higginson, William Sloane Kennedy, and the Question of Walt Whitman," *American Literature* 73, 3 (September 2001): 497-524.

<sup>54</sup> As Julia Roberts notes in "The Games People Played: Tavern Amusements and Colonial Relations," *Ontario History* 52, 2 (Fall 2010), 157-158, taverns themselves could take on a plethora of physical forms depending on time and location, ranging from simple rural log cabins with only the barest of amenities, to more palatial, multi-room and multi-storey hotels.

In addition to providing alcohol, meals, and lodging, a huge array of amusements were engaged in by tavern clientele.<sup>55</sup> In some instances, wrestling matches occurred without apparent prearrangement, as part of a larger pattern of social interaction that generally condoned convivial roughhousing in tavern space. Such activities, conducted within the tavern setting, provided men with a public forum to enhance their social standing through showcasing valued physical attributes including speed and strength.<sup>56</sup> Wrestling matches also proved to be exciting spectacles for those who witnessed them. However, both the keepers and patrons valued taverns as public spaces that facilitated orderly interaction, and a host of informal- but well understood- social customs ensured that wrestling bouts did not escalate to the point that either the individuals involved, or the tavern itself, were harmed.<sup>57</sup> Although Upper Canadian tavern-goers were familiar with wrestling, it is not clear if many such contests were deliberately arranged ahead of time for patrons' amusement. The subject, beyond the scope of this investigation, nevertheless warrants detailed research.

The gradual shift from an agricultural to an industrially-based economy which began to occur during the mid-nineteenth century aided wrestling's development as a commercial undertaking. Industrialization facilitated the growth of urban centres, and, in turn, urban taverns grew to service the rapidly expanding towns and cities. Eventually, tavern proprietors, who had long permitted friendly wrestling bouts in their establishments during the pre-industrial period, also recognized that formally staged contests could prove to be potentially lucrative undertakings, either through charging patrons admission to witness them, or simply as a means to attracting people into the establishment.<sup>58</sup> In Britain,

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<sup>55</sup> Roberts, "The Games People Played," 159, 164; Julia Roberts, In Mixed Company: Taverns and Public Life in Upper Canada (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 84. For similar observations concerning the nearly unlimited variety of activities offered in public drinking establishments, albeit during a slightly later period, see Madelon Powers, Faces Along the Road: Lore and Order in the Workingman's Saloon, 1870-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 138.

<sup>56</sup> Roberts, "The Game People Played," 163,

<sup>57</sup> Roberts, Mixed Company, 94, 96, 97, 98. Although far removed spatially and temporally from Upper Canada, Roberts' observations in this regard apply equally to impromptu wrestling bouts staged decades later in Manitoba's drinking establishments. Despite its ultimately tragic conclusion, the case of Steinbach's William Penner, noted in the Introduction, footnote 18, likewise demonstrates a concerted effort to ensure that the Tremont Hotel remained an orderly social space. Penner and Marion's decision to relocate from the barroom to the sitting parlour to conduct their friendly wrestling match indicates a respect for their surroundings and an acute understanding that some activities, whether to prevent injury or property damage, were best confined to certain clearly-defined areas within a public setting.

<sup>58</sup> Kevin Wamsley, Sport in Canada, 155; Tony Joyce, "Sport and the Cash Nexus in Nineteenth Century Toronto," Sport History Review 30, 2 (1999), 142-144.

where industrial development long predated Canada, wrestling matches were organized by tavern owners in London as early as the 1820s.<sup>59</sup> As urban centres grew in size, tavern owners and other entrepreneurs, recognizing the widespread interest generated from commercial sport, expanded their activities into larger venues.<sup>60</sup> By the early 1870s, an enthusiastic sporting community with a keen interest in wrestling was already in evidence in Canada. In July 1873, for instance, a match in Troy, New York, between American John McMahon (a well known wrestler with close ties to New York City tavern owner Harry Hill) and Thomas A. Copeland, described as “champion of Canada” and “representative champion of the British provinces,” took place at the city’s Harmony Hall. Reports described the hall as “crowded with sporting men from all over the United States and Canada.”<sup>61</sup> One notable feature of this contest, ubiquitous in all similar affairs, was the presence of gambling on the outcome.

By the 1870s, gambling already had a well-established connection to tavern life, and this carried over into commercial sport. Although not all tavern-goers gambled, the practice of placing bets on the outcome of games and amusements (whether in the form of money or by ‘treating’ someone to a drink) was longstanding.<sup>62</sup> Individuals could gain esteem amongst their peers and, with a sufficient level of skill, generate income through participating in sporting endeavours where money rested on the results.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, individuals who lacked the requisite skill to excel in sports could nevertheless profit from them by placing bets.<sup>64</sup> The emphasis on sport as a money-making enterprise stood in stark contrast to middle-class Muscular Christian doctrines that prescribed sport primarily as a character-builder. Many bourgeois sports enthusiasts frowned upon mixing sport with money, in part, because of a world-view that equated financial success with hard work. Mainstream Protestant church denominations in Canada (whose members likewise were among the country’s leading ‘Muscular Christians’) generally condemned

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<sup>59</sup> Dennis Brailsford, *Sport, Time and Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 77.

<sup>60</sup> Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 134, 159, 162; Joyce, “Sport and the Cash Nexus,” 143.

<sup>61</sup> Boston *Daily Globe*, 23 July 1873. Concerning McMahon’s career, including commentary on this match, see Mark Hewitt, “John McMahon.” *Journal of Manly Arts and Sciences* 2 (2002), <http://ejmas.com/jmanly/jmanlyframe.htm> (accessed 5 May 2011).

<sup>62</sup> Roberts, *In Mixed Company*, 81-82.

<sup>63</sup> Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 137; Beekman, *Ringside*, 14; Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 86.

<sup>64</sup> Henry Roxborough, *One Hundred- Not Out: The Story of Nineteenth Century Canadian Sport* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1966), 222-224; Morrow and Wamsley, *Sport in Canada*, 28-29;

gambling as selfish and wasteful, and the quick money that could be made from competing for prize money or betting on an event's outcome contravened their values.<sup>65</sup> Money's presence in sport, many argued, could also lead to behaviour that completely contradicted ideas of middle-class respectability, including rule breaking or outright fixing in sporting events. As Manitoba entered Confederation in mid-1870, both the middle-class Protestant-based ideas of Muscular Christian sport and the commercial, profit-oriented model were familiar to the Anglo-Protestants who were to settle there. It was the latter vision of sport, far more than the former, which provided the framework for wrestling's advancement in Manitoba until the early twentieth century. Wrestling, however, also depended on a number of other interrelated factors for its growth.

### **Communication, Transportation, Urbanization, and Wrestling**

Improvements in communication and transportation technology, as well as rapid urban expansion, proved vital factors in wrestling's development. Although it would be erroneous to describe either the Red River settlement or other regions of the Northwest as 'cut off' from Canadian and British civilization, the existing communication infrastructure made regular contact with the outside world problematic.<sup>66</sup> In 1870, mail from Canada was directed through Minnesota and into Manitoba. Arriving at Pembina, on the international border, it was shipped by boat up the Red River to Winnipeg, and then further by river to the other scattered settlements in the province. At the time, there were only six postal outlets across the prairies.<sup>67</sup> In the summer of 1871, the Dominion government gave approval to the North-Western Telegraph Company to construct a telegraph line between Lower Fort Garry and the Minnesota border, which was completed later that year.<sup>68</sup> Although early services were not always

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<sup>65</sup> Suzanne Morton, *At Odds: Gambling and Canadians 1919-1969* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 8, 16; Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 140; Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation and Community, 1865-1915* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982), 48.

<sup>66</sup> The Hudson's Bay Company's presence throughout the northwest ensured ongoing communication with the English-speaking world during the fur trading era. Newspapers and popular journals arrived on supply ships during the ice-free season at York Factory, and were distributed to subscribers located at the numerous inland trading posts. Letter writing allowed for current events to be further disseminated throughout the region. Payne, *The Most Respectable Place*, 73-74, 78.

<sup>67</sup> John A. Eagle, "The Development of Transportation and Communications, 1870-1905," in *The Prairie West to 1905: A Canadian Sourcebook*, ed. Lewis G. Thomas (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), 315.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

reliable, the arrival of telegraphic communication symbolized an epochal shift for Manitoba, as it precipitated the transition from what Gerald Friesen termed the “textual-settler,” era to the “print-capitalism” stage in Western Canadian development.<sup>69</sup> Just as the arrival of thousands of new settlers in the ensuing decades changed Manitoba’s demographic and ethnic composition, the telegraph changed the means by which those in the province interacted with others and understood the world around them, vastly accelerating the interchange of information, and diminishing the degree to which time and space that had previously been impediments to the region’s integration into Canadian and North American society.<sup>70</sup> Between 1874 and 1887, telegraph lines were constructed that linked Central Canada to Manitoba and other areas of the Northwest.<sup>71</sup> The province’s burgeoning newspaper industry benefitted more than any other commercial enterprise from telegraphic services, as it was now able to provide increasingly detailed and topical reports on events of regional, national and international significance.<sup>72</sup> As Manitoba’s population increased five-fold in the decade and a half after Confederation, consumer demand for newspapers expanded accordingly. In 1874, two newspapers, the Manitoba Free Press and Nor’Wester, began daily publication.<sup>73</sup> Over the next decade, various other newspapers appeared that went to print on a daily or weekly basis.<sup>74</sup>

Manitoba’s entry into the “print-capitalism” era corresponded with sport’s rapid growth in urban centres across the continent.<sup>75</sup> Wrestling benefitted from both developments, albeit not immediately. Evidence suggests that if organized wrestling matches were staged at all in the province during the 1870s, they did not garner any significant media attention.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, bouts held in the United States and

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<sup>69</sup> David R. Richeson, “Telegraph Construction and Community Formation in the North-West Territories,” in The Developing West, ed. John E. Foster (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983), 141; Gerald Friesen, Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>70</sup> Friesen, Citizens and Nation, 222; Richeson, “Telegraph Construction,” 139.

<sup>71</sup> Eagle, “The Development,” 315; Richeson, “Telegraphic Construction,” 140, 147.

<sup>72</sup> Stacy L. Lorenz, “‘A Lively Interest on the Prairies’: Western Canada, the Mass Media, and the ‘World of Sport,’ 1870-1939,” Journal of Sport History 27, 2 (Summer 2000), 199.

<sup>73</sup> Friesen, The Canadian Prairies, 201.

<sup>74</sup> Other newspapers appearing in Manitoba during this period included the Manitoba Herald (January 1877); Manitoba Gazette (October 1878); Portage la Prairie Weekly Tribune (September 1881); and Winnipeg Sun (August 1881).

<sup>75</sup> Lorenz, “A Lively Interest,” 196.

<sup>76</sup> The only reference to local wrestling contained in the Manitoba Free Press during the decade is a report, dated 28 March 1876, in which a local resident named “Big Dan” fell and broke his arm while wrestling. No further details of the incident are given.

Central Canada rarely occasioned mention in the daily press.<sup>77</sup> However, during the 1880s, indicative of wrestling's growing popularity, newspaper coverage of wrestling matches expanded dramatically. Advances in communications technology allowed Manitobans the opportunity to acquaint themselves with prominent wrestlers, keep abreast of upcoming matches and the financial stakes associated with them, and become familiarized with the various wrestling styles and the methods they employed, all from hundreds and even thousands of kilometres away. Readers were given regular accounts of contests from such varied centres as New York City, Buffalo, Boston, Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, St. Louis, Chicago and San Francisco within days of their occurrence.<sup>78</sup> This coverage ultimately helped to create a popular audience for wrestling in Manitoba, which, even with the absence of locally staged matches, could feel connected to the goings-on elsewhere.

Improvements in transportation infrastructure supplied the next important component in the sport's development. In December 1878, the province's first railway commenced operation, linking St. Boniface, on the east shore of the Red River across from Winnipeg, to Emerson on the Manitoba-Minnesota border, making existing steamboat operations along the north-south Red River corridor obsolete. The railway link gave settlers a direct connection with St. Paul, Minnesota, facilitating both the flow of people and commercial goods.<sup>79</sup> The establishment of continuous railway service reduced the time and inconvenience of travel and provided athletes with a level of physical access between Manitoba and other population centres in the United States that had not existed previously.

Communication and transportation technology allowed unprecedented levels of contact with the larger world. Rapid urban population growth simultaneously aided, and was aided by, these developments. Within Manitoba, and indeed the entire prairie region, Winnipeg emerged as the dominant

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<sup>77</sup> For two such reports, see the Manitoba Free Press, 11 January 1876; and 20 October 1879.

<sup>78</sup> For examples of wrestling matches from each of these cities, see respectively the Manitoba Free Press, 30 November 1882; 2 February 1883; 5 January 1884; 25 March 1884; 25 October 1884; 14 April 1883; 24 July 1884; 31 July 1884; 16 October 1884; 9 April 1884; 4 April 1884; 6 September 1884; 9 June 1883; and 31 December 1883.

<sup>79</sup> Douglas Hill, The Opening of the Canadian West: Where Strong Men Gathered (New York: The John Day Company, 1967), 146-147; P.B. Waite, Canada 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1971), 60-61; Eagle, "The Development," 310; A.A. den Otter, "The Hudson Bay Company's Prairie Transportation Problem," in The Developing West, 36-37; Holly S. Seaman, Manitoba Landmarks and Red Letter Days, 1610 to 1920 (Winnipeg: By the Author, 1920), 70.



metropolitan centre. In the fifteen years after Confederation, it mushroomed from a tiny settlement at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers with two dozen buildings and between 100 and 200 residents, to a city of 20,000.<sup>80</sup> Winnipeg's rapid growth produced an overwhelming sense of optimism among its residents. In December 1879, Mayor Alex Logan encapsulated the general mood prevailing throughout the city:

Winnipeg has grown from a little village into a city which is making progress by leaps and bounds. Today nearly one thousand dwelling houses stud the plain, where ten years ago they could be counted on the fingers of two hands. That Winnipeg is destined to be a great distributing centre of the Northwest is now no empty figure of speech for it admits of no denial. It is now all but an accomplished fact.<sup>81</sup>

During the early 1880s, the city experienced even more rapid growth due to the decision to build the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) through it. The details of Winnipeg's successful bid to become the Western hub of the trans-continental railway and the subsequent property and construction boom it initiated, have been well documented by Canadian historians.<sup>82</sup> What is significant to the sport of wrestling is not just the raw numbers associated with Winnipeg's population explosion during the city's early years, but its demographic characteristics. A disproportionately large segment of the community's population during this period consisted of young, unattached male labourers, many of whom, as described by W.L. Morton, were "of the roughest kind." Although a police presence helped curtail violent crimes, particularly those involving guns, a large number of hotels, taverns, gambling dens, and prostitution houses emerged to provide services to the predominantly male population. Fighting was common and police courts levied frequent fines for prostitution and public intoxication.<sup>83</sup> Winnipeg's national

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<sup>80</sup> Artibise, Winnipeg, 10, 130; Friesen, The Canadian Prairies, 202; Coates and McGuinness, Manitoba, 17.

<sup>81</sup> Alex Logan quoted in W.J. Healy, Winnipeg's Early Days (Winnipeg: Stovel Company Limited, 1927), 27-28.

<sup>82</sup> See Morton, Manitoba, 194; Artibise, Winnipeg, 69-74; Alan F.J. Artibise, ed., Gateway City: Documents on the City of Winnipeg 1873-1913 (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1979), 57-69; Bellan, Winnipeg First Century, 26-38; Randy Rostecki, "The Growth of Winnipeg, 1870-1886," (unpublished MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980), 29-48; and Friesen, The Canadian Prairies, 205-207.

<sup>83</sup> Morton, Manitoba, 171; James H. Gray, Red Lights on the Prairies (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1971), xi, 5, 7; Mott, "Manly Sports," 67. The 1881 Census of Canada, for example, indicates that, between the ages of 21 and 31, the number of men living in Winnipeg (Selkirk District) far outnumbered that of women. Concurrently, the number of married men in the same age range was smaller than the number of married women. Yet, as Alan Artibise notes, the census failed to adequately account for the large 'floating' population in the city, which, overwhelmingly male, may have been double that recorded in official reports. See Department of Agriculture, Census of Canada 1880-81 Volume II (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1884), 119-121, 162; Artibise, Winnipeg, 130.

reputation as a vice-ridden community was so wide-spread that, as early as 1876, the Toronto Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) deemed that in the entire Dominion, only Barrie, Ontario could match the Manitoba capital in depravity. At their annual convention, prayers were offered for both cities.<sup>84</sup> Despite appeals to the Almighty, Winnipeg retained its reputation as a 'vice city' for many years.<sup>85</sup>

### **Professional Wrestling's Early Years in Manitoba**

Among the large male population, interest in competitive individual tests of physical strength and skill ran high, and it is little surprise that wrestling, which the press was already covering in detail by the early 1880s, became popular among Winnipeg's young male residents. As Morris Mott notes, virtually all organized sport in Manitoba can trace its origins to Winnipeg.<sup>86</sup> Wrestling is no exception. Although impromptu wrestling matches undoubtedly took place throughout the city, by the early 1880s, local commercial entrepreneurs began to capitalize on the sport's popularity. During this period, a relationship was established that would remain important well into the twentieth century: organized wrestling maintained close ties to Winnipeg's hotels and liquor establishments. As evidenced, this connection had already existed for years in the taverns of Ontario as well as Eastern American cities, and like many customs, it was recreated by settlers in the West. In the spring of 1882, the city's first known wrestling gymnasium, one of many that would spring briefly into existence over the next four decades, opened at the Winnipeg Hotel when two individuals named Barnes and Tilley began offering instruction in the sport to the public along with sparring and club swinging.<sup>87</sup> Thomas Montgomery, the Winnipeg Hotel's proprietor, evidently took an active interest in the sport himself and was not reticent to demonstrate his skills in his own establishment. In 1884, while engaged in a "friendly" bout in the hotel's bar, he accidentally injured Mr. Nott, co-proprietor of a local plumbing, steam and gas fitting firm, Nott

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<sup>84</sup> Morton, *Manitoba*, *Ibid.*; Robert Hutchison, *A Century of Service: A History of the Winnipeg Police Force 1874-1974* (Winnipeg: City of Winnipeg Police Force, 1974), 19.

<sup>85</sup> Mott, "Manly Sports," 66.

<sup>86</sup> Mott, "Manly Sports," 73.

<sup>87</sup> For a sample of their advertisement, see the Manitoba *Free Press*, 15 April 1882.

&Robinson. Nott fractured his leg when he was thrown awkwardly to the ground, requiring a surgeon's attention to set the bone.<sup>88</sup>

Although wrestling invited potential injury, inherent risk of physical harm did not, in itself, generate controversy for the sport. Indeed, among middle-class reformers, wrestling had the potential to inculcate many desirable traits, and contemporary accounts frequently spoke of its benefits. Among young boys, wrestling was encouraged as a positive, "natural" activity that exercised all of the body's muscles.<sup>89</sup> Some commentators even advocated it for men in advanced years, stating that "Two old men living in a city can get excellent exercise by wrestling in a large, light room," but of course, owing to their age, "there must be more gentleness displayed in the struggle than two 12 year old boys would observe."<sup>90</sup> Even more important was its efficacy as a character builder for young men. Part of wrestling's perceived value was to be found in its effectiveness in combating effeminacy. Wrestling, along with other combative sports, could help boys avoid reputations as a "milksoy" or "sissy" among their peers by teaching them to stand up for themselves in an honourable and respectful fashion: a habit that would be of benefit to future businessmen.<sup>91</sup> As Judge Henry A. Shute opined, "Let your boys learn to box, to wrestle, to fence, and so develop every muscle. I never yet saw a boy who knew how to box strike with a club, a stone or a dangerous weapon."<sup>92</sup> Although wrestling injuries could, and did, occur, similar observations could be made of many sports. Playing rugby, for example, which assisted in developing so many of Tom Brown's "manly attributes" and was the conscious creation of middle-class British educators, commonly resulted in injuries and even death.<sup>93</sup> With regard to wrestling, what was of greatest concern to middle-class reformers was not danger, but that matches were generally associated with less reputable activities such as gambling, rowdy behaviour, and alcohol consumption, and that many individuals

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<sup>88</sup> Winnipeg Daily Sun, 26 March, 1884; Manitoba Free Press, 27 March 1884. Nott & Robinson were frequent advertisers in the Manitoba Free Press during Winnipeg's construction boom of the early 1880s. See for example their ad printed on the papers first page on 2 May 1883.

<sup>89</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 4 December 1879; Minnedosa Tribune, 29 January 1891.

<sup>90</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 May 1907.

<sup>91</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 8 August 1903.

<sup>92</sup> Judge Henry A. Shute, quoted in Manitoba Free Press, 8 August 1903.

<sup>93</sup> Rugby's casualty rate, far more than was the case with wrestling, did generate public concern, but the sport continued to grow in popularity. Over time, rule reform assisted in reducing injuries and fatalities. See William J. Baker, Sports in the Western World (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), 120, 191; and Winnipeg Tribune, 2 November 1907.

involved directly in the sport constituted less “respectable” members of society whose behaviour was not in keeping with the tenets of Muscular Christianity. Additionally, many of the wrestling matches held in the city were not seen to serve ‘higher’ purposes.

Newspaper reports sporadically told stories of the problems associated with professional wrestling. On 22 March 1882, for instance, the Manitoba Free Press carried a report from Pueblo, Colorado, of a match at a local theatre in which a defeated wrestler’s supporters threatened the referee with pistols. A general fight erupted among the spectators, resulting in one man being rendered unconscious and another being injured severely.<sup>94</sup> Such reports contributed to wrestling’s growing reputation as a dubious commercial undertaking, and local newspapers occasionally took on the role of moral guardian for the community. The Winnipeg Sun, in commenting on British-born wrestlers Duncan C. Ross and Edwin Bibby, warned, “If Winnipeg is ever threatened with an eruption of this fraternity the Sun will light up some of the dark corners of these contests. The Sun man has been there.”<sup>95</sup> With its growing population of young men and the subsequent proliferation of other “less respectable” entertainments, however, wrestling nevertheless became one of the many commercial amusements offered in the city. By early 1884, the sport, along with boxing, was evidently popular among Winnipeg’s residents, and matches were being staged in the various variety theatres that had been quickly erected to meet growing demands for entertainment. In April 1884, the Winnipeg Sun, reporting on a recent boxing match at the Theatre Comique noted, “Pugilistic encounters and wrestling matches are the latest dodges resorted to by the proprietors of these places, and prove ‘drawing cards.’”<sup>96</sup> The report’s derisory tone reflected the widespread sentiment that had grown among many members of the press, in addition to large segment of Winnipeg’s population, that the city’s variety theatres constituted an offense to public decency. Liquor sales accounted for most of the theatre’s revenues, and alcohol-fuelled rowdiness among

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<sup>94</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 22 March 1882.

<sup>95</sup> Winnipeg Sun, 27 March 1882.

<sup>96</sup> Winnipeg Sun, 17 April 1884. The Theatre Comique was one of eight theatres operating in Winnipeg between 1882 and 1884. It was opened in September 1883 by Richard Farrell, a local restaurant owner who had previously been a member of the city police force. Financial difficulties forced the theatre’s closure just eight months later. See Carol Budnick, “Theatre on the Frontier: Winnipeg in the 1880s,” Theatre Research in Canada 4, 1 (Spring 1983), <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/7475/8534> (accessed 15 September 2009).

the all-male spectators, in addition to the lewd nature of many of the acts, drew the scorn of reform organizations including the Women's Christian Temperance Union and Blue Ribbon Society, as well as several members of city council.<sup>97</sup> Wrestling's close association with the city's generally-disreputable variety theatre business certainly contributed adversely to its standing. Nevertheless, such entertainments had wide appeal amongst men that transcended class boundaries, and even well-to-do citizens often attended the shows, while other people of the same social station decried them.<sup>98</sup>

Also shaping wrestling's reputation during the 1880s were the athletes most directly associated with the sport at a local level. A closer examination of their lives provides further insight not only into wrestling's reputation among middle-class reformers, but also into the nature of Winnipeg's male sporting culture during this period. During the 1880s the most prominent individuals in this regard were the McKeown brothers. As noted by long-time resident Joe Fahey, who later founded Winnipeg's North End Athletic Club, "The McKeown boys, Edward [Ed], John [Jack], and Peter, were always at the fore with anything that was going on [in sport]."<sup>99</sup>

The McKeowns emigrated to Winnipeg from Simcoe County, Ontario, during the city's growth period in the late 1870s and early 1880s.<sup>100</sup> Although it is difficult to ascertain when each of them arrived, by the early 1880s, all three were living in the city and heavily immersed in local sports. While Peter, a railway policeman, was a gifted athlete, it was Jack (the eldest), and Ed (the youngest), who were most associated with wrestling.<sup>101</sup> Jack and Ed were all-around athletes, competing in a variety of events and often doing so for money.<sup>102</sup> In addition to wrestling, Jack, an expressman by trade, participated for

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<sup>97</sup> Budnick, "Theatre on the Frontier."

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Joe Fahey, quoted in *Manitoba Free Press*, 16 June 1920.

<sup>100</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 20 October 1887.

<sup>101</sup> Peter McKeown frequently competed in field athletics, and excelled at hammer throwing and caber tossing. At the Dominion Day celebrations in 1883, for instance, he received third and first prizes, respectively, in both sports. Peter appears to have been particularly skilled with the caber, as reports from the Catholic Picnic sporting programme held on 29 July 1885 note that he easily won the event. For information regarding his athletic exploits, see, for example, the *Manitoba Free Press*, 3 July 1883; 30 July 1885; and 16 August 1892. See also *Canada Census 1891*, RG31, Manitoba, Winnipeg District 10, Ward 5, page 62.

<sup>102</sup> The McKeown brothers reflected wider trends in their multidisciplinary approach to sport. A number of internationally prominent wrestlers participated in various sports in addition to wrestling to earn a living. Most notable in this regard were Donald Dinnie and Duncan C. Ross. Dinnie wrestled, competed in field athletics, and engaged in strength contests. Duncan C. Ross, styled the world's champion "all around athlete" likewise competed in field athletics and sword fighting in addition to

gate receipts and side bets in pedestrian racing, a sport that enjoyed great popularity in the late 1870s and early 1880s both in Winnipeg and other Canadian urban centres.<sup>103</sup> Ed was best known as a pugilist, and fought several well publicized fistic demonstrations and bouts in Winnipeg.<sup>104</sup> For several years he was proprietor of the Nickel Plate Hotel at 589 Main Street where he also taught Indian club and dumbbell exercises, in addition to boxing lessons, in an adjoining gymnasium.<sup>105</sup> Although not a wrestler himself, both boxing and wrestling were frequently staged together, and Ed served as a referee or master of ceremonies for matches.<sup>106</sup> Evidently, he was held in high enough regard within the local sporting community to be called on to serve in official capacities for other events in which prize money played a role.<sup>107</sup>

The McKeowns demonstrate professional wrestling's frequent connection to a larger culture of criminality and violence in nineteenth century Winnipeg. During the 1880s and 1890s the three brothers appeared in local police court dozens of times. Often the charges were minor ones including arrests and fines for being drunk or disorderly in the street.<sup>108</sup> However, many of their offenses were of a more serious nature. In mid-September 1884, Peter was arrested and pled guilty to assault and beating.<sup>109</sup> John

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wrestling. For an overview of Dinnie's career, see David Webster, *Donald Dinnie: The First Sporting Superstar* (Aberdeenshire, UK: Ardo Publishing, 1999). Newspaper accounts on Duncan C. Ross' exploits in various sports besides wrestling were numerous and widespread during the 1880s and 1890s. See for example the *Manitoba Free Press*, 19 July 1882; *New York Times*, 5 August 1888; *Lowell Sun*, 7 November 1885; *Logansport Journal*, 24 April 1888; *Logansport Pharos*, 20 September 1889; and *Chillicothe Constitution*, 17 January 1890.

<sup>103</sup> In February 1879, for instance, John McKeown staged an event at Winnipeg's Fort Osborne Barracks in which he attempted to walk 500 miles in 144 hours. Spectators were invited at a cost of 15 cents and the city band was on hand to provide entertainment. Due to the cold weather, which led to badly swollen ankles, he had to abandon his quest on the second day, having covered only 60 miles. Six months later, he posted an open challenge with the *Manitoba Free Press* to race anyone in Manitoba 25 miles to the Winnipeg City Hall for a side-bet of \$50, to be posted with John McGovern, proprietor of the Brouse Hotel. McKeown featured in a two day pedestrian contest organized by McGovern later that fall in which he defeated four other men. For general commentary on pedestrianism, see Mott, "Manly Sports," 67 and Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 160-161. For further information on John McKeown's exploits in this field, see respectively the *Winnipeg Free Press*, 26 February 1999; and *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 August 1879; 22 October 1879; 23 October 1879.

<sup>104</sup> For reports of McKeown's ring appearances against boxers Holmes, Ike Fullerton, and William Barry, see respectively, the *Winnipeg Sun*, 17 April 1884; *Manitoba Free Press*, 26 January 1885; and 28 October 1885.

<sup>105</sup> *Winnipeg Henderson's Directory* 1887, and 1889; *Winnipeg Siftings*, 16 February 1889.

<sup>106</sup> For accounts of Edward McKeown's involvement as a wrestling official see, for example, the *Manitoba Free Press*, 5 November 1890; and 22 February 1894.

<sup>107</sup> McKeown, for example, refereed in a shooting match in which J.C. Cockburn was to break 30 glass balls in one minute and ten seconds for a side bet, and acted as a stakeholder for Caledonian Games athlete and wrestling aspirant John McPherson. See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 12 March 1885; and 10 May 1887.

<sup>108</sup> See Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1213, Roll 4, no. 2254, 19 March 1885; M1214, Roll 5, no. 4796, 8 October 1886; no. 5711, 22 August 1887; and M1215, Roll 6, no. 16142, 15 June 1896.

<sup>109</sup> Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1213, Roll 4, no. 1350, 19 September 1884.

faced similar charges on at least one occasion during August 1887, in addition to resisting arrest.<sup>110</sup> Ed appears to have been the most prone to violent physical action. Since prizefighting was illegal under the Criminal Code of Canada, his charges sometimes stemmed from activities associated with boxing, but such was not always the case.<sup>111</sup> Between 1884 and 1907 he appeared in Winnipeg courts on at least twelve occasions for such related offenses as assault/assault and beating (eight times), felonious assault (once), aggravated assault (once), malicious wounding (once) and intimidating a witness by threats (once).<sup>112</sup> McKeown did not always get away from confrontations unscathed. During a visit to St. Paul's Olympic Hotel in 1886, for example, an argument led to him being pistol whipped, knocked to the ground, kicked repeatedly and then later robbed of \$325 and a watch.<sup>113</sup> Edward also took an active part in animal blood sports such as cock and dog fighting during his sporting career, activities which invited moral censure in addition to arrest from local authorities.<sup>114</sup> It is incorrect, however, to assume that even the bloodiest and most brutal of these events were frequented only by individuals of poor social standing. As in the case of variety theatre, men of many different stations took great interest in 'disreputable'

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<sup>110</sup> Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1214, Roll 5, no. 5710, 22 August 1887; no. 5717, 23 August 1887.

<sup>111</sup> Following McKeown's fight with Ike Fullerton on 25 January 1885, both contestants were placed under arrest for engaging in a prizefight. However, neither appears to have been convicted. Less than three weeks later, on 18 February 1885, Ed was once again arrested, this time for going into training preparatory to a prize fight. Eleven witnesses were sworn in and examined, including his brothers John (Jack) and Peter. Ed was convicted and released on his own recognizance for \$500. The hefty bond does not appear to have been much of a deterrent, because on 31 March 1885, Ed was taken into court by the police for engaging in a prize fight a week earlier. However, the charges were withdrawn. See the Manitoba Free Press, 26 January 1885; and Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1213, Roll 4, no. 2135, 18 February 1885; no. 2296, 31 March 1885.

<sup>112</sup> For Ed McKeown's court appearances related to assault/assault and beating, see Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1213, Roll 4, no. 2562, 19 May 1885; no. 2910, 31 July 1885; M1214, Roll 5, no. 4900, 6 November 1886; no. 5741, 1 September 1887; no. 5798, 21 September 1887; M1215, Roll 6, no. 11781, 8 December 1892; no. 16067, 15 June 1896; and M1218, Roll 9, no. 12866, 31 July 1907. For each of the other individual charges, see respectively M1213, Roll 4, no. 2905, 31 July 1885; M1214, Roll 5, no. 7363, 23 March 1889; no. 9795, 22 May 1891; and M1215, Roll 6, no. 11865, 10 January 1893.

<sup>113</sup> Winnipeg Sun, 15 September 1886.

<sup>114</sup> Greg Shilliday, ed. Manitoba 125- A History Volume 3: Gateway to the West (Winnipeg, MB: Great Plains Publications Ltd., 1994), 78-79. McKeown owned a large number of dogs and railway links to the United States facilitated his ability to take them to Minnesota for fights. His best dog was allegedly a bull terrier named Spring which he claimed to be "the best in the Northwest." See the Manitoba Free Press, 23 January 1888. Although records do not indicate that any of the McKeowns ever faced legal action for being involved in animal blood fights, arrests did occur. On 9 July 1881, H. McAlpine and James Close were brought to city police court on dog fighting charges, but released with a reprimand. Ed Burluig and Henry Minto faced more serious censure in October 1884 when both men were arrested for encouraging two dogs to fight. The matter was sent to Provincial Police Court for trial. See the Manitoba Free Press, 11 July 1881; and Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1213, Roll 4, no. 1484, 13 October 1884.

activities such as animal blood sports.<sup>115</sup> Likewise, prominent sportsmen with connections to professional wrestling in Manitoba did not travel exclusively in social circles that left them divorced from mainstream ‘respectable’ activities, including involvement in local and national electoral politics. Ed McKeown was an ardent Liberal party supporter who took an active role in the political campaigns of parliamentarians such as Winnipeg’s “Fighting Joe” Martin, a staunch defender of Ontario-style culture on the Prairies.<sup>116</sup> Additionally, McKeown’s frequent forays into court in no way negated his propensity for selfless courage, demonstrated most notably when, during a fire at the Nickel Plate Hotel, he wrapped himself in a blanket and ran through the flames to rescue a missing child, suffering burns to his face in the process.<sup>117</sup> As McKeown’s case demonstrates, society was often far more dynamic and fluid, and individuals more ethically complex, than a simple dichotomy allowing for them, at all times, to be categorized as wholly respectable or wholly disreputable. Naturally, however, not all members of Manitoba society took an interest in professional wrestling, nor did they advocate the practices and behaviour that often surrounded it.

Newspaper reports frequently looked with disapproving eyes upon wrestling and the larger sporting culture in which it was situated, yet, despite their admonitions and criticisms, coverage steadily grew during in the 1880s and 1890s. Publishers’ apparently duplicitous decision to give increasing column space to sporting activities that they, and many reform-minded citizens, found distasteful, stemmed largely from economic imperatives. By the early 1880s, it was becoming increasingly evident that detailed sports coverage could considerably boost a paper’s circulation. In the United States, a number of weekly journals had vastly expanded their readership and circulation by shifting their emphasis

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<sup>115</sup> In January 1889, members of Winnipeg’s sporting fraternity staged “the biggest cock fight ever held in this country” involving over forty birds, wearing two and a half inch steel spurs. Hundreds of dollars were wagered on the matches, but the participants escaped detection by the city police. Many of Winnipeg’s most prominent citizens were at ringside. The event was said to be just one of several that were planned for that winter. See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 12 January 1889. Members of St. George Snowshoe Club, one of the city’s most popular sporting clubs, with “a membership that include[d] nearly every able-bodied Winnipegger of active and alert disposition,” also held cock fighting bouts, along with wrestling and a variety of other entertainments, following their ‘tramps.’ Concerning the St. George Snowshoe club, see the *Manitoba Free Press*, 14 February 1889, 5 March 1896; and the *Nor’Wester*, 14 December 1896.

<sup>116</sup> Henry Trachtenberg, “Ethnic Politics on the Urban Frontier: ‘Fighting Joe’ Martin and the Jews of Winnipeg, 1893-1896,” *Manitoba History* 35 (Spring/Summer 1998), 2, 11; *Ottawa Journal*, 28 March 1922.

<sup>117</sup> Vincent Leah, *Alarm of Fire: 100 Years of Firefighting in Winnipeg 1882-1982* (Winnipeg: Fire Fighters Burn Fund, 1982), 71.



toward sports reporting. The most notable in this regard were the New York Clipper and the National Police Gazette. The Police Gazette, in particular, proved that interest in commercial sports such as boxing and wrestling extended far beyond the individuals and spectators immediately involved in the contests. Prior to 1880, the Police Gazette focused most of its coverage on lurid tales of crime and sex. However, when its owner, Richard Kyle Fox, noticed that the paper's coverage of important prize fights significantly boosted sales, he began to shift his focus toward sports reporting. Circulation, which averaged 150,000 in 1880, later rose to over 1 million.<sup>118</sup> In Canada, newspaper publishers expanded their sports coverage to both attract readers and to lure advertisers. During the late nineteenth century, newspapers became increasingly dependent on advertising revenue, and greater circulation allowed newspapers to attract more advertisers and to charge higher prices for advertising space.<sup>119</sup>

In Manitoba, as in the rest of Canada, newspaper publishers recognized that public demand for sports reporting included local coverage in addition to reports of national and international events.<sup>120</sup> What proved to be particularly interesting to the public, however, was that the confluence of communications and transportation technology allowed athletes with national or international fame to visit the region. As the largest population centre on the Canadian prairies and the region's major railway hub, Winnipeg was the first centre to entertain famous wrestlers. The earliest and most significant wrestler of international reputation to visit the city was Matsuda Sorakichi, who engaged in two local matches in August, 1886. Sorakichi was the first Japanese wrestler to gain prominence in North America. He arrived on the continent in 1883 and had his first match in New York City on 14 January 1884 against British-born Edwin Bibby. Over the course of the next several years, he engaged in numerous tours throughout the United States, facing virtually all of the country's top wrestlers.<sup>121</sup> In Manitoba, Sorakichi, who was often referred to simply as "The Jap," received considerable attention in the press,

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<sup>118</sup> Beekman, Ringside, 16, 17; Michael T. Isenberg, John L. Sullivan and His America (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 92-96.

<sup>119</sup> Stacy L. Lorenz, "A Lively Interest," 196-97.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>121</sup> For a general overview of Sorakichi's wrestling career, including major matches, see Joseph R. Svinth, "Japanese Professional Wrestling Pioneer: Sorakichi Matsuda," InYo: Journal of Alternative Perspectives on the Martial Arts and Sciences 1 (November 2000), <http://ejmas.com/jalt/jaltframe.htm> (accessed 21 September 2009).

and was very well known by Winnipeg's residents prior to his arrival.<sup>122</sup> His two matches in the city illustrate many of the features endemic to wrestling matches not only in the 1880s, but in the decades thereafter.

Sorakichi's first match was against local grappler John Blackey. Given the Japanese native's international reputation as a superb wrestler, it was agreed that he would wrestle according to a handicap, consenting to pin Blackie three times in an hour. Handicap matches were commonplace when one opponent possessed either greater skill or greater size than the other, and ensured public interest in what might have otherwise been a mismatch. Additionally, it created favourable conditions for betting, as it allowed money to be wagered on more even terms. Considerable wagering preceded the match between Sorakichi and Blackey, and the Winnipeg man's supporters expressed the willingness to back him into the hundreds of dollars.<sup>123</sup> As evidence of a growing interest in quantification among the sports-minded public, the night prior to their contest, both men were carefully weighed, Sorakichi being 160 pounds, and Blackey, 148. Additionally, unlike during the era when the voyageur and tripmen plied their physical skills in the Northwest, wrestling matches were now being contested according to specific rules.<sup>124</sup> By the 1880s, Winnipeg was already becoming integrated into what historians Richard Gruneau and David Whitson term "the world of sports": a far-reaching culture of common practices and standardized sporting forms that were well known among the general public throughout North America.<sup>125</sup> In the case of the Sorakichi-Blackey match, the contest adhered to the established conventions of catch-as-catch-can wrestling.

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<sup>122</sup> Reports on Matsuda Sorakichi's wrestling matches were numerous. See the Manitoba Free Press, 9 April 1884; 5 July 1884; 22 May 1885; 29 January 1886; and 16 February 1886 as well as the Winnipeg Daily Sun, 9 April 1884; 20 May 1884; and 5 July 1884.

<sup>123</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 August 1886.

<sup>124</sup> For more on the propensity toward statistics and quantification that developed in sports during the nineteenth century, see Allan Guttman, From Ritual to Record, 47-51, 54.

<sup>125</sup> Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities, and Cultural Politics (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993), 61-62.

Catch-as-catch-can wrestling, which originated in Lancashire, England, was already practiced in Ontario by the 1870s.<sup>126</sup> However, the art gained further prominence throughout North America following the arrival of several outstanding wrestlers from England between 1880 and 1883.<sup>127</sup> Catch-as-catch-can allowed grips to be taken on both the upper and lower body and matches continued until one contestant had his shoulders pinned to the mat or he conceded defeat. Custom permitted virtually any hold, but typically prohibited tactics such as suffocation, scratching, and ear twisting, all of which were deemed to be unfair.<sup>128</sup> The Sorakichi-Blackey bout was Manitoba's first significant catch-as-catch-can contest, and to ensure the rules were followed and to decide a winner, both a referee and a timekeeper were appointed.<sup>129</sup>

Rules did little to sway press opinion regarding the event's merit as a worthwhile enterprise, because such conventions were not of central concern to wrestling's critics. Respectability remained their primary interest. Commenting on the show, which was late in commencing, the Free Press opined, "There were several attempts made by the various persons to make the time pass rapidly. Boys who should have been in bed put on gloves and slugged one another around the room for the amusement of men. Had the police stopped the disgusting sight, their actions would have been approved of."<sup>130</sup> Senseless violence was not the only problem. Evidently, there was also a strong suspicion that the larger and more experienced Japanese grappler was carrying his local opponent. The reporter noted, "When the

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<sup>126</sup> Maxwell L. Howell and Nancy Howell, Sports and Games in Canadian Life, 1700 to the Present (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1969), 127.

<sup>127</sup> Ashton's Edwin Bibby, who had begun his wrestling career by 1868, was the first of the great catch-as-catch-can exponents to sail to North America. Bibby's arrival in 1880 was followed in the spring of 1882 by Wigan's Joe Acton. Both Bibby and Acton had wrestled one another on eight occasions in England, the first match occurring on 27 December 1873, and the last on 3 May 1879. Following the latter's arrival, they renewed their old world rivalry, wrestling a ninth match at New York's Madison Square Garden on 7 August 1882. Another prominent catch-as-catch-can stylist, Tom Cannon, a former miner who worked in the coal pits at Tyldesley, also arrived in 1882, followed by Manchester's Tom Connors in February 1883. All men toured extensively, wrestling in their native Lancashire style. Subsequent generations of North American wrestlers would continue to refine the catch-as-catch-can method, building upon the technical base provided by its Lancastrian progenitors. See Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle, 2 May 1868; 20 November 1875; Salt Lake Daily Tribune, 1 February 1880; New York Herald, 7 May 1882; New York Times, 8 August 1882; Tom Connors, The Modern Athlete (Milwaukee, WI: Ed Bulfin, 1890), xv; J.W. McWhinnie, Modern Wrestling: Graeco-Roman and Catch-as-Catch-Can Styles (London: The Health and Strength Magazine Company, 1901?), 46.

<sup>128</sup> For an early published compendium of catch-as-catch-can rules, see Connors, Modern Athlete, 33-36.

<sup>129</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 19 August 1886.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

Jap got tired of playing tricks for the amusement of the crowd he threw his opponent, thus terminating the match.”<sup>131</sup>

Sorakichi’s second match pitted him against Winnipeg’s most prominent wrestler, Jack McKeown, for a side bet of \$50. The Free Press reports did not contain the same degree of moral commentary that followed Sorakichi’s previous engagement, owing perhaps in part to the match’s more evenly contested nature. The Japanese wrestler “looked a veritable dwarf beside the man he was to throw being nine or ten inches shorter and sixty or seventy pounds lighter,” and as a result, “McKeown’s great size and strength prevented the Jap from using any of his customary tricks.”<sup>132</sup> What is of particular interest, however, is that public enthusiasm for the match remained high, despite moral criticisms of the previous one. In fact, much of the tremendous enthusiasm that spectators brought to the Sorakichi-McKeown bout stemmed precisely from the fact that they anticipated a rough spectacle. As Joe Fahey later recalled, “How the good people did fight that night... to get seats to see the killing take place... and the noise and excitement fairly shook the building as the contest progressed.”<sup>133</sup> The enthusiastic reception accorded to the match by the public, in addition to the motives that many people held in attending it, indicate that middle-class values concerning sport’s appropriate purpose had not yet achieved hegemony among Winnipeg’s predominantly male sport-loving citizenry. On the strength of his appearance against Sorakichi in Winnipeg, Jack McKeown began to engage in wrestling matches outside of Winnipeg. Completion of the CPR meant that athletes now had rapid access not only to American centres, but Canadian cities as well, and in the fall of 1887 he travelled to Vancouver and Victoria to engage in a series of matches against Charles Barr, all of which received detailed coverage in the Winnipeg press.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> McKeown ultimately emerged victorious in the match, as Sorakichi, who had undertaken to pin the local man three times in one hour, was only able gain one fall in thirty nine minutes. Manitoba Free Press, 21 August 1886.

<sup>133</sup> Joe Fahey, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 16 June 1920.

<sup>134</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 7 October 1887; 13 October 1887; and 20 October 1887; 14 November 1887; and 21 November 1887. Evidently, as noted on 20 October, the spectators attending the matches in Vancouver were of similar disposition to those commonly seen in Winnipeg, amusing themselves with “cat-calls and chaff” during the long wait before the main event.

Evidence suggests that during the late 1880s, wrestling lost some of its earlier popularity among Winnipeg's residents. Although the reasons for its decline in public standing are not directly apparent, allegations surfaced in August 1888 that Ed McKeown had conspired to fix a boxing match with Len McGregor, a boxing and wrestling instructor from Marquette, Michigan. McGregor, in a sworn affidavit to officials in Selkirk County, Manitoba, stated that upon arriving in Winnipeg to arrange a boxing contest, he met McKeown in front of his saloon and the local man told him that "a square fight was not much good in Winnipeg as he had a business here and it would kill him in the town to get done up."<sup>135</sup> The Michigan man then detailed an elaborate scheme devised by McKeown to generate interest in their matchup. Ed's trainer, "Jack," was also implicated in the affidavit. Although not mentioned by surname, "Jack" was presumably Ed's older brother.<sup>136</sup> McGregor's statement also suggests that McKeown's actions were not isolated to this single incident, but reflective of common practices. The allegations, which simultaneously incriminated Winnipeg's most well-known boxer and wrestler, likely soured public sentiment toward patronizing wrestling matches.

Wrestling limped along through 1890, but garnered little public support. Reflective of both prevailing disinterest during this period and ongoing concerns over the sport's respectability, the Free Press commented that a match between John Richardson of London, who claimed the "Championship of Canada," and G. Perrie, "Champion of the Pacific Coast" attracted "[neither] a very large nor a very select audience" to the Princess Theatre in early November 1890.<sup>137</sup> The condition of the referee, Ed McKeown, was an additional concern. Following the match, a man at ringside offered to back the pugilist for \$100 against either contestant. McKeown declined, stating that in addition to lacking the requisite skill, he was far too drunk at the time to undertake the task.<sup>138</sup> Alcohol's presence was one of the central concerns among Winnipeg's reform-minded citizenry during the campaigns against variety theatres during the 1880s, and by the early 1890s, the temperance movement was a powerful political force in

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<sup>135</sup> Len McGregor, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 13 August 1888.

<sup>136</sup> Previous court records show that Jack had assisted his brother in training for boxing contests.

<sup>137</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 3 November 1890; 5 November 1890.

<sup>138</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 5 November 1890.

Manitoba.<sup>139</sup> Of the many theatres that opened in the city during the early 1880s, only the Princess Theatre remained in operation by 1890, in part because was able to escape much of the criticism levelled against its competitors. The theatre's large facade, spacious interior and comfortable seating gave it an aura of grandeur more commonly associated with European opera houses, and symbolized, for Winnipeg's residents, the city's transition from a frontier town to a stable, respectable community.<sup>140</sup> Described as the finest facility of its kind west of Chicago, and "as pretty a little opera house... as any on the continent," the theatre's management encouraged patrons to avoid many of the activities more commonly associated with less respectable establishments, such as smoking, dangling one's legs over the balcony railings, and over-indulging in alcohol.<sup>141</sup> McKeown's inebriated condition contravened such policies, certainly offended the large number of prohibition-minded residents in the province, and likely did little to boost the theatre's reputation, or by extension, the desire of many residents to cultivate a respectable image for their city.

### **The Winnipeg Gymnasium and the Origins of Amateur Wrestling**

Although professional wrestling had clearly fallen into widespread disrepute by 1890, wrestling's merit as a physical endeavour was nevertheless still recognized by Manitobans, particularly those associated with the Winnipeg Gymnasium. As an institution, the Winnipeg Gymnasium linked physical training on the newly-settled West to far more ancient traditions dating from classical antiquity. Greek philosophers such as Plato viewed gymnasium training, coupled with musical instruction, as essential components in developing well-rounded citizens. However, gymnasium exercise was not valued exclusively for its role in promoting physical improvement, contrasted to music, which enhanced the

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<sup>139</sup> In 1892, Manitoba held a plebiscite on the provincial sale of liquor. The majority of voters cast their ballot in favour of prohibition, but the province did not act on the resolution due to uncertainties over Constitutional jurisdiction. See Morton, *Manitoba*, 251.

<sup>140</sup> Budnick, "Theatre on the Frontier."

<sup>141</sup> Although regarded as a vast improvement over Winnipeg's many variety theatres, the Princess still had a number of structural problems. Its all-wood construction and inadequate exits, coupled with wood stoves for heating and outdated kerosene lamps for illumination, made it a fire trap. Indeed, on 1 May 1892, flames consumed the entire structure, burning it to the ground. See E. Ross Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre* (Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1984), 25; James B. Hartman, "On Stage: Theatre and Theatres in Early Winnipeg," *Manitoba History* 43 (Spring/Summer 2002), [http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb\\_history/43/theatrehistory.shtml](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/43/theatrehistory.shtml) (accessed 20 September 2009).

mind. Instead Plato argued that, “teachers of both have in view chiefly the improvement of the soul.”<sup>142</sup> Thus, both music and gymnastic shared in the role of moral improvement.<sup>143</sup> As early as the 1820s, gymnasiums were being constructed in the English-speaking world with the express goal of harmonizing the body and mind through physical activity. Their credibility in this regard was further enhanced by medical authorities such Dr. William P. Dewes, who, by 1823, was also promoting their moral merit in the Journal of Health.<sup>144</sup> With the popularization of “Muscular Christianity” after mid-century, millennia-old ideas surrounding the virtues of exercise as a morally uplifting experience gained further credibility, and gymnasiums proliferated. By 1882, secondary schools in Ontario were required to have a gymnasium in order to be designated as ‘collegiates.’<sup>145</sup> Settlers who relocated to Manitoba brought with them an invigorated enthusiasm for the age-old institution, and as early as 1883, physical training classes were operated out of Wesley Hall under the auspices of the Winnipeg Athletic Club.<sup>146</sup> The Winnipeg Athletic Club was replaced four years later by the Winnipeg Gymnasium which opened in November 1887 and conducted public exhibitions throughout the remainder of the decade in the Wesley Hall training quarters.<sup>147</sup>

By 1891, wrestling showed some signs of recovery in Winnipeg, not as a stand-alone amusement, but as one of many athletic endeavours being offered by the Winnipeg Gymnasium. In early March 1891, the club staged an ambitious programme at the Princess Theatre which, in addition to a wrestling demonstration between two men named Smith and Baird, showcased hand balancing, horizontal bar, trapeze and ring work, tumbling, club swinging, and bayonet exercises. Also included in the show were

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<sup>142</sup> Plato, The Republic, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 200.

<sup>143</sup> Baker, Sports in the Western World, 25.

<sup>144</sup> John R. Betts, “Mind and Body in Early American Thought,” Journal of American History 54, 4 (1968), 793, 796.

<sup>145</sup> Mary Keyes and Don Morrow, A Concise History of Sport in Canada (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76.

<sup>146</sup> For a photograph of the Winnipeg Athletic Club training in Wesley Hall dated to 1883, see the Manitoba Free Press, 16 July 1920.

<sup>147</sup> The Winnipeg Gymnasium, originally named the Winnipeg Lacrosse Club Gymnasium, formed under the patronage of the Winnipeg Lacrosse Club in early November 1887. Classes began on 19 November and reports five days later noted that the club was “booming.” The club’s grand opening was held on 28 November under the patronage of Winnipeg mayor Lyman Melvin Jones. In the fall of 1889, the Winnipeg Lacrosse Club decided to relinquish control of the gymnasium, and on 26 October, the club became independently incorporated as the Winnipeg Gymnastic Association. Evidence suggests that no wrestling took place at the club between 1887 and 1890, as reports pertaining to the club’s equipment, advertisements for classes, and an examination of reports related to their public programmes make no mention of the sport. See the Manitoba Free Press, 8 November 1887; 24 November 1887; 16 November 1888; 24 October 1889; 28 October 1889; and 12 April 1890.

“fancy bicycle riding” and several non-athletic acts including orchestra music, comedy sketches, and recitations.<sup>148</sup> Press reports were enthusiastic toward the show, as was public patronage, the Free Press noting that “A local entertainment has not for a long time past drawn a better audience.”<sup>149</sup> During the remainder of the winter the club staged at least one well-attended competitive program at Wesley Hall, which included wrestling.<sup>150</sup> Following a visit to the club in early 1892, a Free Press reporter expressed fond admiration not only for the club’s programs, but for its underlying principles. Its president, H.C. Rowley, explained that an effective gymnasium program “involve[d] a great deal of careful diet and abstinence.” Students were encouraged to abstain from excessive use of tobacco and alcohol and likewise cautioned to avoid “late nights and other unwholesomeness.” The Free Press representative applauded the institution’s efforts, stating that, “the gymnasium is an effective factor on the side of temperance and virtue.” Winnipeg’s citizens were therefore encouraged to “visit this meritorious institution” if they had not already done so.<sup>151</sup> The Winnipeg Gymnasium was an institution that, through sport, aided in developing values that many members of the middle class saw as intrinsic to their definition of appropriate ‘manliness’.<sup>152</sup> However, as the report shows, it was not only tasked with inculcating moral virtue (similar to how the Greeks had understood the gymnasium), but as also with *preventing* moral vice. Reformers from the period were acutely concerned with the many ‘unwholesome’ diversions available to young men in rapidly expanding cities. In New York, gymnasiums were revived as early as the 1830s and 1840s explicitly to fight what historian John R. Britts termed “the perils of urban comfort,” and clearly similar considerations were also in play in Winnipeg by 1891.<sup>153</sup>

The club’s emphasis on temperance and moderation offered an apparent contrast to professional wrestling in the city, which was perceived among certain reform-minded segments of the population to be associated with violence, alcohol, and rowdiness. An additional element that separated it from its

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<sup>148</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 12 March 1891.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> See Manitoba Free Press, 28 March 1891; 30 March 1891.

<sup>151</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 29 February 1892.

<sup>152</sup> Mott, “Manly Sports,” 110.

<sup>153</sup> Betts, “Mind and Body,” 803.



professional counterpart was the issue of financial compensation. Unlike in other wrestling bouts staged in the city, competitors did not receive financial reward for their performances either in the form of gate receipts or side-bets. They did, however, receive medals for their performances.<sup>154</sup> The club's decision not to allow monetary compensation reflects its adherence to the middle-class doctrine of amateurism.

Like many of elements of Manitoban culture during the late nineteenth century, amateurism originated among Central Canadians of Anglo-Canadian extraction. The ideas behind amateurism were first articulated in Canada by members of the middle-class, most of whom lived in Montreal and Toronto and held occupations of high social standing.<sup>155</sup> The doctrine's early definitions displayed a distinct class bias, explicitly excluding labourers from membership in many clubs on the basis of their occupation.<sup>156</sup> After 1884, Canadian amateur organizations increasingly focused on the issue of monetary compensation in defining who could be considered an amateur. For acolytes of amateurism, by the late nineteenth century, money was considered to be at the root of the many of the problems associated with sport, and as a result, amateur organizations, in formulating their constitutions, sought to exclude individuals who had competed for prize money, competed against someone who had accepted prize money, or who offered their services at a fee.<sup>157</sup> Class undertones remained implicit in such definitions, as the individuals who did not (or could not) meet the amateur criterion and decided to play for money, had traditionally come from society's lower echelons.<sup>158</sup> During the 1890s, Manitoba did not have a central governing body to oversee and enforce the amateur code. Nevertheless amateurism's tenets were well understood, and many organizations in the province, including the Winnipeg Gymnasium, explicitly defined themselves as amateur.<sup>159</sup> Despite the widespread stigma attached to professionalism in the province, amateur wrestling remained embryonic in Manitoba during the nineteenth century, and by the fall of 1892, professional

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<sup>154</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 28 March 1891.

<sup>155</sup> Metcalfe, Canada Learns to Play, 100.

<sup>156</sup> Ann Hall, et. al, Sport in Canadian Society, 103.

<sup>157</sup> Mott, "Manly Sports," 242-244; Metcalfe, Canada Learns to Play, 104.

<sup>158</sup> Mott, "Manly Sports," 244.

<sup>159</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 29 February 1892.

wrestling was once more on the ascent. Curiously, the Winnipeg Gymnasium provided the initial impetus for its rejuvenation.

### **Professionalism Returns**

In September 1892, the newly-formed Winnipeg Athletic Association hired E.W. Johnston as an athletic instructor.<sup>160</sup> Considerable fanfare heralded Johnston's arrival. A native of Barrie, Ontario, Johnston held numerous athletic records throughout his long career, including in the standing long jump, standing high jump and tossing the caber. In addition to competitive athletics, Johnston previously served as an instructor at a number of institutions, among them the New York Athletic Club, Brooklyn Athletic Club, Toronto Gymnasium, and Mechanics Institute in Belleville. Johnston arrived in the city "at the request of a number of the local amateur athletes for the purposes of training a club" and operated classes out of the Winnipeg Gymnasium.<sup>161</sup> Although claiming expertise in a number of sports, Johnston took "special pride" in wrestling, and "advanced as he [was] in years he [was] yet willing to meet anyone in an all round wrestling contest."<sup>162</sup> The fast response to the news of Johnston's arrival in Winnipeg demonstrates the western metropolis' integration in to the wider North American communication infrastructure and "world of sport" by 1892. Little more than a week later, the Free Press received the following letter from W.H. Quinn of Cornwall, Ontario, dated 6 September:

To the Sporting Editor of the Free Press.

Sir, -- I see by the Montreal and Toronto papers that E.W. Johnston is posing as a wrestler in the Prairie City. Now, I challenged him some time ago and his backers posted a small forfeit, and after all arrangements were made, he hired and billing matter out, Mr. Johnston got ill, very ill, and could not wrestle. Again I challenged him to meet me in Toronto which he agreed to do and he very suddenly finds urgent business at Winnipeg. Now I am anxious to arrange a match with Johnston, and have forwarded \$100 to Mr. Herriman of your city, who will act for me and will arrange a five style match or any kind of match that may suit Mr. Johnston; give or take \$50 for expenses.

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<sup>160</sup> The Winnipeg Athletic Association formed in September 1892 as an umbrella organization for the city's various athletic clubs. Charter members included the Winnipeg Gymnasium, Prairie City Athletic Club, and Winnipeg Lacrosse Club. Part of their initial mandate included renovating the existing Wesley Hall gymnasium and hiring Johnston as the association's physical instructor. For details surrounding the organization, see the Manitoba Free Press, 10 September 1892.

<sup>161</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 31 August 1892

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

W.H. Quinn  
Champion of Canada<sup>163</sup>

Public challenges, such as that offered by Quinn, had their origins among Britain's landed gentry. Aggrieved individuals would challenge other men to duels by writing letters, also called "defi's" where they would declare their desire to engage in combat. Within tavern culture, a similar custom existed, although it usually took the form of an oral declaration. With interest growing in sport during the late nineteenth century, newspaper began to publish wrestlers' challenges.<sup>164</sup> Both athletes and publishers found the arrangement to be mutually beneficial. For the former, it gave them an opportunity to gain public recognition as an athlete and generate interest in an upcoming matchup, and for the latter it provided another commercial incentive for the sport-hungry public to buy their newspaper. The prevalence of newspaper challenges also indicate that certain values associated with sport, including honour and bravery, were becoming marketable commodities by the late nineteenth century.<sup>165</sup> During the 1880s, newspaper challenges did not play a significant role in professional wrestling in Manitoba. However, beginning in the fall of 1892, they became a regular fixture in the sport. The custom lasted for roughly the next thirty years, continuing on long after most other sports had abandoned challenges in favour of league scheduled or pre-arranged meets.

Soon after Quinn's newspaper defi, other athletes began to make similar overtures. Writing from Napinka, Manitoba, John D. McPherson (also spelled MacPherson) offered to wrestle Johnston for \$100 a side, catch-as-catch-can, and to meet him in either a caber tossing match or all-around Caledonian games contest.<sup>166</sup> Athletes of the period were keenly aware of the connections between respectability, professionalism, and gambling in sport that existed in late nineteenth century Canada. Johnston's

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<sup>163</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 9 September 1892.

<sup>164</sup> Gorn, The Manly Art, 99; Wamsley and Kossuth, "Fighting it Out," 418-419; Beekman, Ringside, 16.

<sup>165</sup> Gorn, The Manly Art, 100.

<sup>166</sup> Like Johnston, McPherson was a well-known athlete, excelling in particular at the shot-put. Prior to 1892, both men competed against one another in Caledonian Games competitions. By the end of the 1880s, McPherson had also turned his attention to wrestling, sometimes with unfavourable results, as in January 1888 when he suffered a broken arm at the hands of Jack Carkeek, one of North America's most prominent wrestlers. For McPherson's letter, see the Manitoba Free Press, 13 September 1892. Concerning his records in the shot put, see the Manitoba Free Press, 16 April 1887; and 9 August 1890. On Johnston and McPherson participating in Caledonian Games competition, see for example, the Buffalo Courier, 25 July 1890.

response represents an attempt to distance himself from the often- disreputable world of professionalism and in doing so, appropriate a respectable image. On 14 September he wrote:

Those who know me, know that I would never consider it any honour to meet such men as [Quinn and McPherson]. Before I came to Winnipeg I made up my mind not to be drawn into any contest while engaged as a servant of such an honourable body as the Winnipeg Athletic association. I wish it to be distinctly understood that I shall not pay attention to any challenge unless by the full consent of the association whom I am a servant.<sup>167</sup>

McPherson's subsequent reply questioned Johnston's personal qualities and abilities as an athlete, calling him "cowardly and unsportsmanlike." McPherson stated that Johnston possessed "unlimited gall" in calling himself "champion all-around athlete of the world, and that "the people of Winnipeg [would] soon have him sized up for what he really [was]."<sup>168</sup>

Johnston did not acquiesce to the demands of either Quinn or McPherson. However, newspaper challenges continued to appear, and by late 1893, several professional wrestlers and would-be professional wrestlers, were residing in Manitoba, including C.J. Currie, F.H. Joslin, J.W. Moffatt, Elwood Rourke and John Allen. Fred Plaisted, the prominent American sculler, who opened a gymnasium in Winnipeg in November, also became involved in the sport, staging wrestling exhibitions as part of his gymnasium's public performances.<sup>169</sup> During 1893, publicity related to wrestling appears to have far exceeded the actual amount of wrestling being conducted in the province. However, as the year came to a close, E.W. Johnston finally agreed to a mixed match according to Cumberland-Westmoreland and catch-as-catch-can rules against F.H. Joslin for a \$100 side bet and gate receipts.<sup>170</sup> Indicating the growing willingness of the local press to cater to professional wrestling, the Free Press' sporting editor

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<sup>167</sup> E.W. Johnston, in the Manitoba Free Press, 14 September 1892.

<sup>168</sup> John D. McPherson, in the Manitoba Free Press, 23 September 1892.

<sup>169</sup> Concerning the opening of Plaisted's gymnasium in Winnipeg, see the Manitoba Free Press, 28 November 1893. For reports on public performances, see the Manitoba Free Press, 9 February 1894; 10 February 1894 and Nor'Wester, 10 February 1894.

<sup>170</sup> F.H. Joslin had originally challenged Fred Plaisted to a match, but on 14 December the latter received serious injuries after being attacked and struck in the head with a frozen goose by an unknown assailant. Plaisted was confined to his bed for several days. See the Manitoba Free Press, 15 December 1893; 18 December 1893. Cumberland-Westmoreland wrestling has its origins in the northern districts of England for which it is named. Also widely practiced in southern Scotland, it was frequently included in Caledonian Games competitions. Under Cumberland-Westmoreland rules, opponents would place their left arm over their opponent's right arm and clasp their hands together behind their opponent's back. A match was won when any part of the body except the feet touched the ground or if one of the contestants failed to maintain his grip. For a contemporary overview of the sport's techniques see Armstrong, "Wrestling," 190-196.

appointed Fred Plaisted as the referee.<sup>171</sup> The wrestling contest provided the main entertainment to an ensemble programme that included high jumping, club swinging, boxing exhibitions, singing, whistling and impersonations. Having been fed by months of debate and publicity, the all-male, “decidedly sporting crowd” demonstrated an “intense” interest in the match, and “long before the ‘ball’ opened a medium-sized gathering occupied the benches.”<sup>172</sup> Despite their demonstrable enthusiasm, the spectators, numbering between 250 and 300, remained “most orderly.”<sup>173</sup> Nevertheless, the event and its patrons did not entirely escape criticism. The most glaring concern centred on excessive tobacco consumption, “not a man being present who was not smoking or chewing.”<sup>174</sup> As a result, the floors were slippery with tobacco juice and a perception arose that the atmosphere, thick with smoke, impaired some of the athletic performances.<sup>175</sup>

When the wrestlers appeared on stage, “the audience was in a [state] of expectancy and all rose to their feet.” Ultimately, Joslin proved victorious, winning the second bout under Cumberland-Westmoreland rules, and the third according to the edicts of catch-as-catch-can. Some concern arose within the audience during the final match as whether Johnston had actually been pinned. The Free Press, siding with the man who they appointed, argued that “the referee’s position on the stage would give him a better chance to judge, and his decision was accepted as correct.”<sup>176</sup> Capitalizing on public controversy, however, Johnston began a campaign within the city for a rematch. Joslin’s response to Johnston “blowing his horn on the streets” exhibited similar characteristics to the exchanges between Johnston and McPherson months earlier. His reply, printed four days after their match, juxtaposed both the respectability of the referee, and by extension, the Free Press who appointed him, against Johnston’s own character:

[Johnston’s accusation] is a very poor squeal to make, as the referee, though named by the Free Press, was really the man that Johnston wanted. It is a well-known fact that Mr. Johnston and Mr. Plaisted travelled a number of years together in an athletic troupe, and are firm

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<sup>171</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 28 December 1893.

<sup>172</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 5 January 1894; Manitoba Free Press, 5 January 1894.

<sup>173</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 5 January 1894.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 5 January 1894; Winnipeg Tribune, 5 January 1894.

<sup>176</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 5 January 1894.

friends, while I was only a stranger to Mr. Plaisted, but that gentleman demonstrated the part that he could not be cajoled or bought into anything that was not fair and honourable. The above facts should be sufficient to shame Mr. Johnston for intimating the least against Mr. Plaisted's decision.<sup>177</sup>

Ultimately, Joslin and Johnston met at the Free Press office to draft agreements for a rematch. Fred Plaisted was once more agreed upon by both parties as a referee. However, on the night of their match Plaisted refused to assume the role due to the accusations against him, and after an hour and a half was spent trying to find a suitable replacement, "the audience dispersed not a little disappointed over the termination of the affair."<sup>178</sup>

Although unsatisfactory, the ending did not extinguish public interest in wrestling. With numerous wrestlers in the province and various challenges being bandied back and forth, a tournament was finally arranged for 22 February to decide the heavyweight champion of Manitoba. R.H. Dunbar, a local bartender and prominent athlete in such varied sports as track and field, bicycle racing, and curling, lent his patronage to the event by offering a gold medal emblematic of the provincial title.<sup>179</sup> Five men, John Blackie, E.W. Johnston, F.H. Joslin, W.J. Moffitt, all of Winnipeg, and Elwood Rourke of Emerson, ultimately contested for the championship. Indicative of wrestling's growing appeal in Manitoba's other burgeoning communities and the widespread attention the event generated, John Allen of Brandon and John Sullivan of Rat Portage also signalled their desire to participate.<sup>180</sup> The tournament, staged according to mixed styles, was very well attended by the public, and after a series of matches, F.H. Joslin emerged victorious. Fred Plaisted once again acted as referee after Ed McKeown elected to decline the role. The matches themselves were all contested according to the rules and elicited none of the

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<sup>177</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 8 January 1894.

<sup>178</sup> Nor'Wester, 19 February 1894; Manitoba Free Press, 21 January 1894.

<sup>179</sup> Concerning Dunbar's achievements in track and field, especially running, see the Manitoba Free Press, 28 October 1886; and 21 July 1888. For information on his various cycling exploits, including provincial speed records, see the Nor'Wester, 14 April 1896; Portage la Prairie Weekly Review, 10 June 1897; and Winnipeg Telegram, 18 July 1901. A synopsis of Dunbar's curing achievements is provided by Morris Mott in "Manly Sports," 138-139. See also Morris Mott and John Allardyce, Curling Capital: Winnipeg and the Roarin' Game, 1876-1988 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1989), especially 24-25.

<sup>180</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 21 February 1894. In 1883, the precise location of Manitoba's eastern border remained undetermined. In 1884, however, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council settled the matter, placing Rat Portage, which had a year earlier elected a member to the Manitoba legislature, within Ontario's borders. The political decision had little bearing on wrestling, as athletes from Rat Portage (later Kenora) continued to contest for Manitoba provincial titles as late as the 1920s. See Morton, Manitoba, 228-219.

controversy associated with January's bout between Johnston and Joslin.<sup>181</sup> Still, concerns alluding to the respectability of the event and its patrons were voiced once again, particularly by the Free Press. Following boxing bouts described as "two preposterous exhibitions of juvenile sparring," there was an extended wait before the wrestling contests commenced. In the interim, "the audience was left... to amuse themselves with the foul language and absurd behaviour of a drunken man." Indicating that the management was not entirely acquiescent to such behaviour, however, the man was eventually ejected by the referee.<sup>182</sup> Excessive tobacco smoke was once again an issue, the paper commenting that following a musical rendition of "MacManus' suit o' clothes," by Harry Logrenin in which the audience asked for an encore, "the singer found the smoky atmosphere too much for his lungs and had to withdraw."<sup>183</sup> The report's general tenor suggested that, even if the wrestlers themselves were competent athletes, the event itself was poorly organized and the behaviour of the clientele was, in several instances, less than respectable. Despite such concerns, it is clear that professional wrestling had a strong public appeal and by 1894, other communities in the province, including Brandon, were also staging shows.<sup>184</sup>

The heavyweight wrestling tournament for the championship of Manitoba appears to have been the pinnacle event for the sport during 1894. By July, the public was evidently growing sceptical of the wrestling events being staged by the province's grappling contingent. On 1 July, E.W. Johnston held a variety athletic show in Winnipeg that cast doubt on his heralded athletic reputation. Voicing general suspicion around the event, the Nor'Wester commented, "The exhibition of sparring, wrestling, etc. which was given by E.W. Johns[t]on et. al. of Winnipeg on Dominion Day might be termed a fake."<sup>185</sup> Likewise, a few weeks later, it was reported that "Two Fakirs," Johnston and Joslin, were visiting Fort

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<sup>181</sup> Detailed reports concerning each of the matches are provided in the Manitoba Free Press, 23 February 1894; Nor'Wester, 23 February 1894; and Winnipeg Tribune, 23 February 1894.

<sup>182</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 23 February 1894. For reports of similar responses to drunken rowdiness at wrestling events in Winnipeg during the period, see also the Winnipeg Tribune, 17 May 1894.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> On 21 March 1894 wrestler John Allen defeated E.W. Johnston at the Brandon Opera Hall before a crowd of 150. Signifying their continuing interest in wrestling matches, "a large gathering of the local sporting fraternity" assembled at a local hotel ten days later to arrange a benefit program for E.W. Johnston that included boxing, club swinging, swordsmanship and music in addition to wrestling. See the Brandon Sun, 22 March 1894; and Manitoba Free Press, 2 April 1894.

<sup>185</sup> Nor'Wester, 5 July 1894.

William for a series of matches.<sup>186</sup> The precise source of the suspicion around Joslin is not known, but it is clear that, by the middle of 1894, professional wrestling was entering a period of decline. Amateur wrestling, which remained in the shadows of its professional counterpart, also suffered from a lack of public favour by mid-1894.<sup>187</sup> By 1895, it appears that E.W. Johnston, the much-heralded director of the Winnipeg Athletic Association, had left the city.<sup>188</sup> Nevertheless, newspaper challenges persisted, and wrestlers, including F.H. Joslin, continued to occasionally engage in matches.<sup>189</sup>

## Conclusion

Although it had lost some of its public appeal, by the closing years of the nineteenth century, wrestling was a well established sport in Manitoba. In the quarter-century after Confederation, what had once been a cultural ritual among First Nations peoples, Voyageurs and York Boat men of French-Canadian and mixed-blood descent, came to take on new forms and meanings as large numbers of British-Canadian settlers emigrated to the province. The new majority consciously transferred many of their existing customs and institutions, including wrestling, in an effort to re-create their cultural heritage on the Western plains. Vast improvements to the province's communication infrastructure during the period allowed the public unprecedented access to local, national, and international information about the sport. Developments in transportation infrastructure likewise allowed athletes rapid and convenient physical access to Winnipeg and later, other centres in Manitoba. Wrestling's growth in the province did not, however, occur without difficulty. British-Canadians did not possess a single, homogeneous world view, and competing conceptions of wrestling's appropriate social purpose often helped shroud the sport in

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<sup>186</sup> Nor'Wester, 31 July 1894. For more on Johnston and Joslin's visit to Fort William, see Hatton, "Headlocks at the Lakehead," 32-36.

<sup>187</sup> A wrestling and boxing card held at Winnipeg's Bijou Theatre on 17 May was very poorly attended and considered a financial failure for the management. See the Manitoba Free Press, 18 May 1894; 19 May 1894.

<sup>188</sup> In the 1894 Winnipeg Henderson's Directory, E.W. Johnston is listed as the instructor at the Winnipeg Gymnasium, residing at 798 Main Street. However, he does not appear in subsequent city directories.

<sup>189</sup> For newspaper challenges following the summer of 1894, see for example, the Manitoba Free Press, 22 June 1895. F.H. Joslin wrestled three matches in association with the Winnipeg Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition between 19 and 23 July 1895. The first bout, against W.B. Faulkner of California, resulted in a draw. Four days later he defeated Faulkner who acted as a substitute when a grappler named McCurdy failed to appear, followed by Andrew Crystal, the self-professed "champion of America." Controversy arose over the incident when claims made by Joslin that McCurdy was ill and had retired in favour of Faulkner, proved untrue. Opinion circulated that Joslin had taken advantage of McCurdy's absence to "steal a match on him." Joslin later professed his innocence. See the Manitoba Free Press, 21 June 1895; 20 July 1895; 23 July 1895; 24 July 1895.



controversy and disrepute. On the one end of the spectrum were middle class reformers who viewed wrestling as vehicle for 'manly' physical improvement and character building. On the spectrum's other end were members of the province's large bachelor population. The latter, both as participants and spectators in wrestling, were often affiliated with taverns, variety theatres, and various illicit activities, including blood-sports and gambling, that engendered controversy with reform-minded segments of the population. However, Manitoba society was not always so easily dichotomized. Newspapers, driven by both a reform and profit motive, alternately criticized the sport and those associated with it, while granting it considerable column space. Likewise, wrestlers, while frequently embroiled in controversy, often attempted to appropriate for themselves an image of middle-class respectability. Such issues did not disappear in the ensuing years, and with sport's growing appeal in the province by the turn of the twentieth century, professional wrestling became an even more popular, and simultaneously controversial, activity.

## Chapter II Professional Wrestling in Manitoba, 1896-1914

After a bevy of activity in Manitoba between 1893 and 1895, professional wrestling entered an interlude of relative dormancy that lasted until the early twentieth century. As the central transportation hub for the Prairies, professional wrestlers invariably passed through Winnipeg en route to other parts of Canada and the United States, and challenges sometimes accompanied their arrival in the city. Likewise, wrestlers, including Brandon's W.H. West, continued to reside in the province and expressed their willingness to engage in competitive matches.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, few professional wrestling contests appear to have been staged in Manitoba during the period. The denouement in local wrestling activity may have been partly attributable to the controversies surrounding prominent athletes such as E.W. Johnson and F.H. Joslin. However, it is likely that the Klondike gold rush, which began in the summer of 1897, also redirected many professional athletes' attention away from Manitoba and other regions and toward the far northwest. Many wrestlers and boxers from across North America made the long trek to the Yukon Territory, and both sports became a regular form of entertainment in mining camps and communities such as Dawson City over the next four years.<sup>2</sup> Members of Manitoba's sporting fraternity were similarly lured away to Canada's new mining frontier, including Ed McKeown, who took part-ownership of a freight hauling operation on the rivers north of Whitehorse.<sup>3</sup> Although the Klondike gold rush may have assisted in temporarily stifling wrestling in Manitoba, it ultimately served to bring a great deal of

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<sup>1</sup> In July 1896, for example, American wrestler Frank S. Lewis, who passed through Winnipeg after wrestling on the Pacific Coast, expressed his desire to meet any wrestler in Manitoba in either a handicap match or on even terms. No wrestlers appear to have taken up his offer. W.H. West announced his willingness to meet any wrestler in the province weighing 154 pounds in either a catch-as-catch-can or Graeco-Roman bout for a purse and side bet exceeding \$100 on 22 August 1898. See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 July 1896; *Nor-Wester*, 7 July 1896; and *Manitoba Free Press*, 22 August 1898, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> By the summer of 1898, boxing and wrestling matches were being staged roughly every two weeks in Dawson City at facilities such as the Monte Carlo saloon and Trivoli Theatre. By the beginning of 1899, boxing and wrestling bouts were a weekly feature in the city, and pugilists including Kid Williams and Pat Rooney and grapplers such as Ben Trennaman were making regular public appearances. During 1901, future world heavyweight wrestling champion Frank Gotch, under the *nom de guerre* Frank Kennedy, wrestled a series of matches in Dawson City against Ole Marsh and Colonel J.H. McLaughlin in addition to an unsuccessful turn in the boxing ring against Frank "Paddy" Slavin. For accounts of boxing and wrestling matches in Dawson City, see for example, the *Klondike Nugget*, 4 July 1898; 30 July 1898; 3 August 1898; 13 August 1898; 26 August 1898; 15 September 1898; 20 January 1899; 27 January 1899; and 29 January 1899; and the *Yukon Sun*, 17 January 1899; and 20 January 1899. Various sources provide accounts of Frank Gotch's activities in the Yukon Territory. For the most accurate retelling, see Hewitt, *Catch Wrestling*, 13-34. See also Pierre Berton's account concerning wrestling and boxing matches in *Klondike: The Last Great Gold Rush, 1896-1899* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 363-365.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of McKeown's activities in the Yukon Territory, see the *Manitoba Free Press*, 26 October 1900.

international attention to Canada, and the discovery of vast quantities of gold helped provide economic stimulus to both international markets and Canada's economy.<sup>4</sup> By the turn of the century, a large number of settlers were arriving in the Canadian West, and over the next fourteen years, Manitoba's population increased by over 80 percent. The province's population growth was impressive, but even more remarkable was the growth in sports' overall popularity during the same period. Virtually all sports experienced what Morris Mott termed an "explosion of activity" prior to the Great War as both participation in sport grew and a wider variety of sporting activities became available to the general public for the first time.<sup>5</sup>

Solidly in accord with larger trends, professional wrestling saw a dramatic rise in popularity during the first decade-and-a-half of the twentieth century, as a growing number of athletes appeared in ever more frequent events staged not only in Winnipeg and Brandon, but in communities throughout the province. As a popular spectator activity, professional wrestling, even more than during previous years, became a terrain riddled with varied and frequently competing meanings. In many instances the sport and those who participated in it were heralded as exemplars of ideal human physical form, masculinity, and scientific progressivism. Simultaneously, wrestling also satisfied the demands of many members of the public for rough physical spectacles and expressions of aggressive masculinity. On a more basic level, wrestling also prospered in Manitoba because many athletes, exhibiting some or all of these desirable traits, were seen to represent the communities or regions in which they lived. However, the sport's ongoing association with money continued to ensure that it remained perpetually embroiled in controversy, as excessive violence, poor sportsmanship, inconclusive endings to matches, and evidence of outright fixing regularly threatened to 'kill' its popularity among all segments of the public. Wrestling, however, continued to thrive in spite of its problems, and in the four years before the Great War, was

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<sup>4</sup> James A. Jackson, *The Centennial History of Manitoba* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), 158.

<sup>5</sup> For the use of the phrase "an explosion of activity" in connection with Manitoba sports after the turn-of-the-century, see for example, Mott, "Manly Sports," 173, 174, 226. For a list of new sports introduced during this period, see page 175.

attracting some of the sport's most well-known athletes to the province's largest and most prestigious public venues.

### **Wrestling and the Male Physical Form**

Between 1900 and 1904, professional wrestling cards were periodically staged in centres such as Winnipeg and Brandon, but the sport remained largely out of public favour. After 1905, however, wrestling entered a period of sustained popularity that lasted until the Great War. Public interest in wrestling can naturally be attributed, in part, to the overall rise in attention accorded to all varieties of sport. Wrestling was able to ride the momentum that many other sports experienced in Manitoba during the same era. However, increased interest in wrestling was more than a by-product of the "explosion" that affected other athletic disciplines. Part of the public's fascination with professional wrestling derived from the fact that many practitioners were popularly heralded as exemplars of perfect male physical development. Much more than other prominent sports such as hockey and baseball, wrestling not only allowed for the expression of athletic skill, but a visual display of the ideal physical form. Whereas athletes in most other sports wore a uniform that covered much of their body, a wrestler's apparel typically consisted either of shorts or long wool tights that prevented abrasions to the knee. Generally, wrestlers performed with leather shoes, although some chose to perform barefoot. Almost without exception wrestling took place with both contestants 'stripped to the waist,' completely displaying the upper torso. Underneath the theatre stage lights, spectators were therefore able to gain a full estimation of their physical development. The fact that wrestlers performed according to these conditions was not inconsequential, as both the press and the attendant public displayed a keen appreciation for a wrestler's aesthetic qualities.

As already noted, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a re-orientation among many members of the middle class toward embracing a more physical expression of Christianity. Although interest in sport stemmed, in part, from theological considerations, there was also a growing

concern among many reform-minded members of the population that the modern, urban lifestyle, characterized by long hours of sedentary work and mechanization, robbed men of their physical strength and vigour. By the time Manitoba had entered Confederation in 1870, health reformers were already espousing the notion that members of industrialized society were physically inferior to their more physically active predecessors. Over the next several decades, the idea continued to gain wide circulation, and a growing body of literature related to health and fitness repeatedly emphasized the correlation between modernity and physical degeneracy.<sup>6</sup> In Manitoba, as elsewhere, these ideas received widespread articulation. The Portage la Prairie Weekly Review, for example, reporting on a recent meeting of the British Medical Association, noted concerns regarding “the danger to the nation’s health, owing to the changed habits of the past half-century, which had led to marked muscular degenerations.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in an article that seems remarkable for its characterization of life in the late twentieth century as well, the Free Press stressed that the modern office worker faced the lamentable dilemma of possessing an over-worked mind and an under-worked body:

The modern business man moves as carefully and carries his head as level as if he was carrying a well filled bowl of water. He walks from his easy chair to his carriage, from his carriage to his office desk, he is even taken up one flight of stairs in an elevator. He sits at his desk and presses buttons and the work is done. What has all this done? It has taken away all of his physical activity and multiplied the work of the brain... all these changes have been at the sacrifice of the demand for physical activity.<sup>8</sup>

Officials within Manitoba’s educational system also expressed concerns over the lack of physical activity undertaken by some students, particularly those living in urban environments. Edward Ernest Best, a Manitoba school inspector from 1888 to 1932, contrasted the rural student whose long walks to school produced “a healthy vigour necessary to offset the ills of the school room,” against the urban resident who

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, James H. Smart, Smart’s Manual of Free Gymnastic and Dumb-Bell Exercises (Cincinnati: Wilson, Hinkle and Company, 1863), 3; William Blaikie, How to Get Strong and How to Stay So (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1879), 5-6, 14-16; J. J. Miller, Physical Culture (London: John Leng and Co., c.1908), 2; Luther Gulick, Spalding’s Athletic Library No. 1: Muscle Building (London: Renwick of Otley, 1916), 5; George Hackenschmidt, The Way to Live, 10, 14. For a further discussion of ideas related to physical degeneracy prior to World War I, see Colin D. Howell, Northern Sandlots, 103-104.

<sup>7</sup> Portage la Prairie Weekly Review, 7 August 1907.

<sup>8</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 7 November 1908.

only had to walk a few blocks. The situation, in his view, was being exacerbated by the development of automobiles. Best colourfully lamented that, “One might sometimes wonder how many generations will pass before humanity becomes as legless as a tadpole.”<sup>9</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, the “modern,” degenerate male body was being contrasted against a physical ideal that emphasized a high degree of muscular development and symmetry.<sup>10</sup>

Although the health benefits of sport and exercise had long been espoused, from the 1890s onwards, authorities on health and physical development, termed physical culturalists, drew heightened inspiration from the classical world.<sup>11</sup> Bernarr MacFadden, a former wrestler turned publishing entrepreneur and one of North America’s best known physical culture acolytes during the period, noted (and simultaneously promoted), the shift in popular perceptions concerning the ideal male physique, stating, “Muscular power is beginning to assume its proper importance in the minds of every sensible man and woman. A few years ago, so-called refined persons were inclined to belittle its value. They affected to associate large, well-developed muscles with various undesirable mental and bodily characteristics.”<sup>12</sup> Emphasizing the merits of classical Greek and Roman culture, MacFadden stressed that, “[W]e of to-day are becoming re-born in the wisdom of the ancients in that we no longer see anything but the pitiful or contemptible in the physique that is not strong, undefiled and wholesome.”<sup>13</sup> MacFadden, as well as many of his contemporaries, drew their inspiration both from the physiques recorded for posterity in sculpted marble and the mythological legends surrounding such figures as Apollo and Hercules.<sup>14</sup> However, they simultaneously recognized that ancient ideals of physical perfection, when combined with modern ‘scientific’ innovation, could produce a level of physical development that surpassed the

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<sup>9</sup> Archives of Manitoba, MG9 A95-1, Edward Ernest Best Collection, “Memoirs of a School Inspector, 1888-1932- Revised,” 108.

<sup>10</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 15; Morrow and Wamsley, *Sport in Canada*, 166.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001), 57.

<sup>12</sup> Bernarr MacFadden, *Muscular Power and Beauty* (New York: Physical Culture Publishing Co., 1902), 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 16.

accomplishments seen in previous millennia.<sup>15</sup> By applying rational, systematic principles, the very same ideas that had shaped modern industrial-capitalist society, the problems associated with growing “degeneracy” could be overcome.<sup>16</sup>

The most well-known exemplar of classical physical perfection made better through modern, ‘scientific’ training was Eugen Sandow, a Prussian physical culturist, strongman, stage performer, and wrestler who, at least according to his own publicity, transformed himself from a frail and sickly child into a man whose abilities “rank[ed] him with the heroes who are credited with doing heroic deeds in the Homeric age.”<sup>17</sup> Although certainly not the first performer to earn a living through publicly exhibiting his strength and physique, Sandow, an excellent self-promoter and businessman, did much to further popularize the classically-inspired image of muscular strength and development.<sup>18</sup> Manitoba’s residents were well aware of Sandow’s exploits during the 1890s and early 1900s, and thus part of the larger movement toward embracing the new, highly muscular model of idealized masculinity that harkened back to the pre-Christian era.<sup>19</sup> Winnipeegers were clearly fascinated by the subject of muscular development, and attended stage performances such as those given by Santell, “The Modern Hercules,” who appeared at the Bijou Theatre during March 1906.<sup>20</sup> Other physical culture experts, such as Professor J.B. Roche who visited Winnipeg during 1903 and advertised himself in newspapers with a full-length engraving displaying his muscular physique, toured throughout the continent offering training in how to

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 14; G. Mercer Adam, ed., Sandow’s System of Physical Training (London: Gale and Polden, 1894), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Howell, Blood, Sweat and Cheers, 107.

<sup>17</sup> David L. Chapman, Sandow the Magnificent (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 4; Adam, Sandow’s System, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Lindaman, “Wrestling’s Hold,” 782. For more on Sandow’s rise to international fame and his influence on ideas surrounding the male form, see Chapman, Sandow, especially Chapters 3-6; and John F. Kasson, Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), Chapter 1.

<sup>19</sup> Newspapers throughout Manitoba often reported on Sandow’s impressive physical development, and the Winnipeg Public Library added Sandow’s System of Physical Training to its book shelves shortly after its publication in 1894. Recognizing that the name Sandow was synonymous with strength and health, advertisers commonly invoked it in promoting various gadgets and pills aimed at customers wishing to enhance their physical capacities. See, for example, the Winnipeg Telegram, 6 May 1903; 9 November 1901; Daily Nor’Wester, 16 May 1894; Minnedosa Tribune, 19 March 1903; and Manitoba Free Press, 30 August 1904.

<sup>20</sup> For a photo of a sandal-clad Santell exhibiting his muscular development, see the Manitoba Free Press, 29 March 1906.

“convert[sic] the human body from weakness into strength, curing by systematic, intelligent physical instruction.”<sup>21</sup>

Part of professional wrestling’s appeal during the same period derived from the notion that many of its practitioners represented the pinnacle of male physical development. Heralded as experts in a sport that served as “an unfailing aid to health and longevity and a developer of every muscle,” both the press and the public frequently praised professional wrestlers for their aesthetic virtues. Like their strongman counterparts, matmen were described in terms that invoked classical heroic imagery.<sup>22</sup> Toronto’s Artie Edmunds, a featherweight who made several appearances in Winnipeg as both a boxer and wrestler between 1906 and 1910, performed under the moniker of “The Pocket Hercules.”<sup>23</sup> Although only 122 pounds, the Free Press remarked that “He is such a bunch of symmetrical muscles. At chest expansion he even has the great Sandow skinned... Every ounce of him is muscle and the shoulders resemble those of middleweights.”<sup>24</sup> Remarkably similar language described other wrestlers. “Yankee” Rogers, an American heavyweight wrestler who expressed interest in wrestling in Winnipeg, was variously touted as a “young Hercules” with a “magnificent physique” as well as a “modern Samson” and a “close student of physical culture.”<sup>25</sup>

The public understood that attaining a wrestler’s physique necessitated systematic training and self-discipline, and newspapers regularly reported on the training protocols followed by professional wrestlers prior to their matches.<sup>26</sup> Conscious self-denial for the purpose of improvement had a long-standing resonance within Protestant culture, and wrestlers were often touted for their adherence to this principle.<sup>27</sup> The well-developed physique represented an outward manifestation of conscious self-mastery: a process that involved adherence to a lifestyle that often necessitated a rejection of the very habits that

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<sup>21</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 July 1903.

<sup>22</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 14 November 1908.

<sup>23</sup> For uses of the moniker, see for example the Manitoba Free Press, 21 April 1906; 5 February 1910; and Winnipeg Telegram, 7 February 1910.

<sup>24</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 21 April 1906.

<sup>25</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 21 September 1906.

<sup>26</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 4 September 1911; 1 September 1911; 6 December 1913; 9 December 1913; 11 December 1913; 12 December 1913; Winnipeg Telegram, 29 November 1913; and Winnipeg Tribune, 12 December 1913.

<sup>27</sup> On the value of self-denial in Protestant culture, see Steven J. Overman, The Influence of the Protestant Ethic on Sport and Recreation (Suffolk: Ipswich Book Company, 1997), 202-203.



were allegedly leading to widespread degeneracy.<sup>28</sup> To that end, even if not drawing direct comparisons with mythological heroes, commentary testified to the notion that the grapplers appearing on Manitoba mats represented the ideal male form, and the phrase, “magnificent specimens of manhood” frequently accompanied their descriptions.<sup>29</sup> The public clearly demonstrated its eagerness to show appreciation for the “specimens” who appeared before them. When, for instance, Iowa’s Frank Gotch, the heavyweight catch-as-catch-can wrestling champion of the world and “Farmer” Burns pupil, appeared in the city in March 1911, both he and his opponent, George Eberg received praise for the “remarkable development” displayed after removing their ring robes, and when they came to grips, “a shout of admiration went up [in the audience] over their magnificent appearance.”<sup>30</sup>

Technological advancements in the newspaper industry further reinforced the importance of muscular development as an attractive element in professional wrestling matches. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, photographs were replicated in newspapers as engravings: an extremely time-consuming process that required the availability of skilled artisans. After 1897, however, it became possible to reproduce two-tone photographs on printing presses.<sup>31</sup> Newspapers, including those in Manitoba, quickly adopted the new technology. After 1900, many wrestlers, realizing that their bodies were marketable commodities, began to use their well-developed physiques to good advantage by appearing in photographs showcasing their muscular development.<sup>32</sup> Few athletes in any era took better advantage of their physique to generate widespread publicity than the “Russian Lion,” George Hackenschmidt, an excellent all-around athlete who began his professional career as a Graeco-Roman

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<sup>28</sup> Wrestlers often reinforced the idea that rigorous self-discipline went hand-in-hand with success by publicly touting an abstemious lifestyle. The aforementioned “Yankee” Rogers, the Manitoba Free Press reported on 21 September 1906, “[did] not use tobacco or liquor in any form.” Martin “Farmer” Burns, who claimed the American catch-as-catch-can wrestling title during the mid-1890s, likewise remarked at fifty, “I do not indulge in any vice that weakens a man physically. I am regular in my daily life. I exercise judiciously, constantly, and observe all sensible rules of health and hygiene.” See Halm, The Life Work of Farmer Burns, 48.

<sup>29</sup> The phrase “magnificent specimen of manhood” was used in reference to such wrestlers as Hume Duval, Young Tom Sharkey (Victor McLaglen), Chris Person, Jack Taylor, and B.F. Roller. Similarly, “splendid specimen of manhood” accompanied descriptions of St. Boniface wrestler Pete Menard and Winnipeg’s Knute Hoel. See, respectively, the Manitoba Free Press, 20 July 1907; Winnipeg Tribune, 17 April 1913; 29 January 1909; Manitoba Free Press, 30 November 1907; and 18 February 1909.

<sup>30</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 10 March 1911.

<sup>31</sup> W. Joseph Campbell, “1897 American Journalism’s Exceptional Year,” Journalism History 29, 4, (Winter 2004), <http://academic2.american.edu/~wjc/exceptyear1.htm> (accessed 10 January 2010).

<sup>32</sup> The first known newspaper photo of a wrestler in Manitoba, featuring Monte, “The U.S. Giant,” appeared in the Manitoba Free Press on 6 May 1902.

wrestler in 1899 and later earned recognition as the world's catch-as-catch-can champion after beating the American title claimant, Tom Jenkins, at Madison Square Garden in May 1905.<sup>33</sup> Hackenschmidt, in addition to appearing in wrestling matches throughout Europe, North America, and Australia, gave posing exhibitions, lectured to the public, and published extensively on the subjects of wrestling, physical culture and philosophy.<sup>34</sup> His enormously muscled frame captivated audience's attention wherever he performed, and with the introduction of photojournalism, members of the general public who lived outside the cities where he appeared were able to share in that appreciation. Although he never visited Manitoba during his wrestling career, newspaper reports often carried photographs of the Russian Lion in muscular repose.<sup>35</sup> Naturally, wrestlers who appeared locally before the public also readily used photography to promote themselves for upcoming bouts, and by 1914, pictures either depicting a grappler with his hands behind his back showcasing his neck and torso development or with his arms folded across his bare chest, were well-established conventions in newspapers.<sup>36</sup>

During the two decades preceding the Great War, the public did not only confine their fascination with wrestler's physical development to qualitative descriptions, mythic imagery and photographic representations. Interest also centred on quantifying a wrestler's precise bodily measurements. By the late nineteenth century, part of the public's curiosity with the male form included a near-obsession with the tape measure. Driving this interest was the belief that, like the "scientific" industrial processes which had been made more efficient through careful application of statistics and probability theory, similar data

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<sup>33</sup> For details concerning Hackenschmidt's earliest forays into professional wrestling, see The Way to Live, 123.

Hackenschmidt's victory over Jenkins was well covered by daily newspapers throughout North America, including those operating in Manitoba. See the Manitoba Free Press, 5 May 1905; and Winnipeg Telegram, 5 May 1905.

<sup>34</sup> Within the Canadian context, see the Montreal Gazette, 11 May 1905 for a proposed lecture in Montreal by Hackenschmidt on "physical culture...giving explanations on how to develop the different muscles and how to diet." For a detailed assessment of George Hackenschmidt's philosophy on physical culture, see Terry Todd, "Muscles, Memory: and George Hackenschmidt," Iron Game History 2, 3 (July 1992), 10-15.

<sup>35</sup> Photographs of George Hackenschmidt appeared many times in Manitoba newspapers, the most impressive of which was a collage that appeared in the Manitoba Free Press on 17 December 1910. See also the Manitoba Free Press, 21 January 1910; and 2 September 1911.

<sup>36</sup> For examples of photographs featuring professional wrestlers posed with their hands behind their back, see Le Manitoba, 19 November 1913; Manitoba Free Press, 17 August, 1910; and 19 November 1910; Winnipeg Telegram, 16 December 1909; and Winnipeg Tribune, 4 June 1909; 5 May 1910; 7 February 1911. For photographs depicting wrestlers with their arms crossed on their chests, see the Manitoba Free Press, 13 November 1911; 21 December 1911; Winnipeg Telegram, 13 December 1907; and Winnipeg Tribune, 18 December 1907; 20 April 1912; 22 June 1912; and 26 June 1912.

analysis could help determine the ‘perfect’ human form and predict athletic achievement.<sup>37</sup> Physical culture texts from the period, including those by wrestlers George Hackenschmidt and Arthur Saxon as well as others outside the English-speaking world such as Edmond Desbonnet’s *Les Rois de la Lutte*, devoted considerable space to detailing either the author’s physical proportions or those of other prominent wrestlers.<sup>38</sup> Physical measurements were also examined as a means of determining how proficient athletes were able to accomplish various physical feats. For example, in analysing the unusual endurance of Stanislaus Zbyszko, a heavyweight wrestler whose “physique [was] almost beyond comprehension” and “looked upon by physical culturalists as a marvel,” doctors speculated that his massive chest, measuring 55 inches on a 5 foot 7 inch frame, gave him the collective lung capacity of three average 200 pound men.<sup>39</sup> It was likewise common for newspapers to print charts comparing two combatants’ physical measurements prior to a match with the goal of ascertaining, in an empirical sense, the bout’s probable outcome. The heavyweight catch-as-catch-can wrestling champions, Frank Gotch and George Hackenschmidt, mentioned above, met one another in title bouts on two occasions, the first encounter on 3 April 1908 and the second on 4 September 1911. Throughout North America, enormous public interest surrounded both matches. Winnipeg, as part of the larger world of sport, shared in the enthusiasm, granting both encounters unprecedented media coverage. Part of the speculation preceding the matches centred on both men’s physical proportions. Local wrestler Dan Simpson, in an interview with the Free Press, picked Hackenschmidt as the probable winner, stating that “Hack, I think, is too strong and quick for the American.”<sup>40</sup> Listing the Russian Lion’s measurements, the Free Press reporter seemed inclined to agree, commenting that although technically more proficient at the catch-as-catch-can style, “[Gotch] will give away from ten to fifteen pounds in weight and physically will be inferior to his

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<sup>37</sup> Howell, Northern Sandlots, 100; Blood, Sweat, and Cheers, 109.

<sup>38</sup> See Hackenschmidt’s Way to Live, 108, 112, 118-119, 161; Arthur Saxon, The Development of Physical Power (reprint ed., Farmington MI: William F. Hinbern, 1997), 112, 115, 117; and Edmond Desbonnet, *Les Rois de la Lutte* (Paris: Berger-Levrault et Cie, 1910), 90, 91, 111, 117, 177, 181.

<sup>39</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 20 April 1912.

<sup>40</sup> Dan Simpson, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 25 March 1908. Simpson was a well known local wrestler and referee for wrestling bouts who appeared throughout Manitoba, as well as in Kenora, during 1907 and 1908.

rival in all points of important comparison.”<sup>41</sup> However, when official measurements were released a week later, the Free Press did not seem so disposed to offer strong support for the Russian grappler, stating:

A comparison of measurements of Gotch and Hackenschmidt shows that the men are more evenly matched as to size and weight than most people imagine. Hackenschmidt has the bigger upper body, which is very essential to a successful wrestler, but in other respects there is little to choose between them.<sup>42</sup>

Ultimately, anatomical quantification proved little aid in forecasting the match’s outcome, as Gotch defeated his more muscular counterpart in just over two hours. Nevertheless, the results of a single match, no matter how high profile, did little to stem the larger social inclination toward such ‘scientific’ analysis. Prior to their second title match, which was won in even more convincing fashion by the Iowa native, detailed measurements again formed part of the pre-match speculation.<sup>43</sup>

Although, on the surface, a wrestler’s physical form represented a celebration of such qualities as physical strength, proper physical development and self-discipline, for some individuals there were also, undeniably, explicitly erotic elements to both the images associated with wrestling as well as the matches themselves. The lack of attire worn in wrestling matches and displayed in promotional photographs could be contrasted against the much greater volume of fabric deemed acceptable for wear in everyday social interaction. Even in public spaces which tolerated a larger measure of freedom in this regard such as beaches and swimming pools, the presence of an uncovered male torso breached the limits of respectability. Male visitors to Lake Winnipeg, for example, commonly wore full-length trousers and collared shirts when on the beach, and even those who entered the water were clothed in, at minimum, shorts and sleeveless shirts. The selection of bathing suits offered to men by large-scale department stores such as Eaton’s was likewise wholly in keeping with prevailing social mores.<sup>44</sup> For some segments

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 2 April 1908.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, the Manitoba Free Press, 2 September 1911; and 4 September 1911.

<sup>44</sup> See Archives of Manitoba, L.B. Foote Collection 1217-1, Negative 2197; and Archives of Manitoba, L.B. Foote Collection 1201, Negative 20837 for photos taken on Lake Winnipeg and at Winnipeg Beach in 1912 and 1915, respectively. The illustrations for male bathing suits available for purchase through the Eaton’s Catalogue during the first decade of the twentieth century suggest that modesty had greater commercial appeal than exhibitionism. In 1901, suits were available with tops that not

of Manitoba's population, wrestling likely represented one of the few public environments where they could witness the alluring spectacle of a male body in a combined state of action and undress. Notably, however, no voice of concern was ever raised in Manitoba related to the sport's potentially homoerotic undertones, indicating that heterosexual interpretations of the sport's purpose remained distinctly privileged over the interests of those who, through wrestling, sought to explore alternative erotic desires.<sup>45</sup>

## **Wrestling and Science**

The public appreciated wrestling as a form of training that helped perfect the male form, and wrestlers were often heralded, on the basis of their impressive physical development, as exemplars of ideal manhood and self-mastery. However, wrestling was not merely popular due to the aesthetic qualities exhibited by its practitioners. Wrestling itself was described as a "scientific" undertaking by many of its advocates. Since, by the end of the nineteenth century, many members of western industrialized society viewed science with a near-religious reverence for its capacity to further human progress, characterizing any undertaking as a "scientific" endeavour lent it a degree of legitimacy. As was the case with prize fighting during this period, appropriating the language of science represented an attempt by the sport's advocates to create a broader public support base and dampen criticism that had long been levelled against it.<sup>46</sup> However, using the term "science" in reference to wrestling was not purely a rhetorical device that veiled otherwise disreputable behaviour. Scientific wrestling referred to a specific style that emphasized an extensive technical knowledge base. In particular, wrestlers who displayed the ability to apply effective offensive manoeuvres and efficiently counter or escape from

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only covered the upper portion of the arm, but long hems that extended down to the upper thigh. A decade later, similar attire was still available, although one of the six suits available was of the sleeveless variety. See the 1901 [Timothy Eaton's Spring-Summer Catalogue](#); 1911 [Timothy Eaton's Spring-Summer Catalogue](#).

<sup>45</sup> The absence of direct documentation related to men patronizing wrestling matches for erotic purposes does not necessarily indicate that such activities did not take place, since they would have, by necessity, been covert. As demonstrated by Maria Wyke's analysis of "beefcake" bodybuilding literature from the 1950s and 1960s, photographers were often prosecuted for producing what censors considered to be obscene material. One method of circumventing legal troubles was by ensuring that pictures appearing in magazines were accompanied by pseudo-Greek and Roman imagery. Appealing to 'higher' culture meant, as Wyke notes, that, "a man's body could now be looked at, admired, and even desired safely, without appearing to exceed the constraints imposed by state censorship." It is quite probable, therefore, that wrestling matches in Manitoba provided a similar 'cover' for some segments of the community. See Maria Wyke, "Herculean Muscle!: The Classicizing Rhetoric of Bodybuilding," [Arion](#), 4, 3 (Winter 1997), 59-61

<sup>46</sup> Wamsley and Whitson, "Celebrating Violent Masculinities," 421.

dangerous positions and holds, were regarded as scientific.<sup>47</sup> Speed accompanied science, and wrestlers or matches branded as scientific were usually also described in terms that alluded to their brisk character.<sup>48</sup> Strength and science were not mutually exclusive, and both traits were considered to be important.<sup>49</sup> However, a wrestler who accomplished by brute force what might have been otherwise accomplished by technique, was not scientific.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, scientific wrestling also implied a close adherence to the rules and was therefore also denoted to be “clean” wrestling.<sup>51</sup> Thus, just as knowledge, efficiency and speed were regarded as hallmarks of scientific progress in the larger social context, so too were they seen as the most desirable traits in a wrestler. Early twentieth-century Manitobans clearly showed their enthusiastic support for scientific wrestling exhibitions. Jack Downs, for instance, “fairly electrified” Brandon wrestling fans with the “superior science” he demonstrated during a January 1906 appearance in the Wheat City, and two years later, “[t]ime after time the crowd jumped to their feet shouting their applause at some more than usually clever piece of attack or defensive work,” during a “fast” bout of “scientific wrestling” between local Winnipeg wrestlers Dan Simpson and Herman Mace.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, technical, fast, and clean bouts of this nature led the Free Press’ sporting editor to label wrestling as “the world’s most scientific indoor pastime.”<sup>53</sup>

### **Wrestling’s Local Appeal**

Professional wrestling drew support from the Manitoba public because they found in it many of the values that they, as a society, held in high esteem.<sup>54</sup> However, wrestling also engendered a significant public following for more immediate reasons, the most significant being that a number of highly skilled

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<sup>47</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 26 October 1907; 30 November 1907; 11 March 1910; 2 December 1913; and Winnipeg Telegram, 27 January 1906.

<sup>48</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 June 1908; 23 November 1907; 27 June 1910; and 22 November 1910.

<sup>49</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 20 October 1905; 27 November 1907.

<sup>50</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 7 November 1907; 30 November 1907; 21 December 1907.

<sup>51</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 25 September 1909.

<sup>52</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 1 February 1906; Manitoba Free Press; 27 February 1908. Herman Mace appeared on professional mats many times in Manitoba and Kenora during 1907 and 1908 and claimed the Manitoba lightweight championship.

<sup>53</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 2 December 1913.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the same feature in Manitoba hockey during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Morris Mott, “Flawed Games, Splendid Ceremonies: Hockey Matches of the Winnipeg Vics, 1890-1903,” Prairie Forum 10,1 (1985), 178-179.

athletes chose to take up residence in the province's various communities. In many sports, the presence of strong hometown talent proved critical to its long-term viability. Athletes with legitimate ties to a town or city became sources of civic pride, and their achievements were often seen to represent the community as a whole.<sup>55</sup> In professional wrestling, establishing oneself in a particular area was referred to as homesteading.<sup>56</sup> As the largest urban centre in the province, Winnipeg attracted wrestlers who called the city "home" for various lengths of time. Certainly the three most prominent in this respect prior to World War I, however, were Charles Gustafson, Ernest Sundberg and Alex Stewart.

Born on 5 April 1886 in Halmstad, Sweden, Charles Gustafson arrived in Winnipeg from the United States in 1907, where he had lived for the previous four years.<sup>57</sup> During his early years in the city, Gustafson worked for the local Nelson Sash and Door Manufacturing Company, but later went into business for himself as a hotel proprietor.<sup>58</sup> Wrestling as a middleweight (158 pounds), Gustafson made his first appearance on Winnipeg mats on 4 October 1907.<sup>59</sup> As a member of the local Swedish community, Gustafson received considerable support from his fellow countrymen even during his earliest forays onto local mats.<sup>60</sup> Over the next several years, he secured numerous victories over both local and visiting wrestlers, and among Winnipeg's Swedish population, the Free Press noted in 1909 that "[Gustafson] is their idol, and they believe him invincible."<sup>61</sup> However popular Gustafson was among his countrymen, it is also clear that, as he garnered further accolades, including claims to both the Manitoba and Canadian middleweight titles in November 1907 and November 1909, respectively, his popularity

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<sup>55</sup> Mott, "Flawed Games," 180; Howell, Northern Sandlots, 157; Kidd, The Struggle for Canadian Sport, 189.

<sup>56</sup> Lou Thesz, Hooker: An Authentic Wrestler's Adventures Inside the Bizarre World of Professional Wrestling (Norfolk, VA: By the Author, 1995), 8.

<sup>57</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 2 November 1956. Gustafson's place of birth is provided on his 28 April 1915 Attestation Paper, Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3893 – 35.

<sup>58</sup> Gustafson is listed as an employee of N. Nelson in the 1910 Winnipeg Henderson's Directory. Nicholas Nelson owned the Nelson Sash and Door Manufacturing company. Difficulties exist in ascertaining exactly when Gustafson began his own business. However, in the 1911 Canadian Census, Manitoba, Winnipeg District, Winnipeg Sub-District, Enumeration District 46, Page 33, Gustafson's occupation is listed as a "manager" and "employer," suggesting that embarked on his career as a hotelier either during late 1910 or 1911. According to the 1914 Henderson's Directory, Gustafson was manager of the Oberon Club and his Attestation Paper from a year later lists him as a hotel proprietor.

<sup>59</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 5 October 1907; Manitoba Free Press, 5 October 1907.

<sup>60</sup> Swedish-Canadian fans were present at Gustafson's first wrestling match in Winnipeg and the Free Press noted on 13 November 1907 that he had a "large following" among the local Swedish population.

<sup>61</sup> See Appendix I for a list of Gustafson's matches in Winnipeg. For commentary on Gustafson's reputation among the Swedish population in Winnipeg, see the Manitoba Free Press, 21 November 1909.

became more widespread.<sup>62</sup> By 1910-11, he was hailed variously as “Winnipeg’s pride,” and “the pride of Winnipeg wrestling fans.”<sup>63</sup>

Ernest (Ernie) Sundberg, like Charles Gustafson, was a native of Sweden. Born in Luleo on 2 March 1884, he made his Winnipeg debut less than three weeks after his fellow countryman, appearing as a preliminary attraction prior to the main event between Charles Gustafson and another well-known local wrestler, Herman Mace.<sup>64</sup> When not engaged in wrestling matches, Sundberg worked as a carpenter and carpentry foreman for the Nelson Sash and Door Manufacturing Company.<sup>65</sup> As a featherweight (124 pound) wrestler, Sundberg did not garner the same degree of public attention as his larger counterpart, Gustafson. Between late 1907 and early 1910, he appeared exclusively on undercards, winning all but one of his matches.<sup>66</sup> Finally, on 8 February 1910, having defeated numerous local and visiting wrestlers, Sundberg bested Toronto’s “Pocket Hercules” Artie Edmunds, in a main-event for the American featherweight championship. Described as a match “that [had] never been equalled in Winnipeg, and for speed, maybe never in America,” Sundberg had clearly gained a considerable local following by this point, as the theatre “reverberated with cheers” after his victory.<sup>67</sup>

As Ernie Sundberg reached his athletic zenith, a second featherweight wrestler, Alex Stewart, arrived in Winnipeg. Stewart had accrued numerous wrestling titles in both England and Scotland before moving to Manitoba in 1910 and taking employment as a clerk with the Timothy Eaton’s Company.<sup>68</sup> Initially, Stewart had difficulty securing an opponent in the city, but public interest soon dictated that he

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<sup>62</sup> On the basis of his victory over Peter Menard on 29 November 1907, Gustafson claimed the middleweight title of Manitoba. Nearly two years later, billed as “Champion of Western Canada” he defeated Montreal’s George LePage, “Champion of Eastern Canada” on 26 November 1909 in a match advertised as “For the Middleweight Championship of Canada.” See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 30 November 1907; *Winnipeg Telegram*, 26 November 1909; and *Manitoba Free Press*, 27 November 1909.

<sup>63</sup> For the use of terms in reference to Gustafson, see for example, the *Manitoba Free Press*, 10 February 1910; 21 March 1910; 12 April 1910; and 28 January 1911. A caption accompanying a photo of Gustafson in the 26 February 1910 *Manitoba Free Press* labelled him “Winnipeg’s Favorite Wrestler.”

<sup>64</sup> For Ernest Sundberg’s place and date of birth, see his *Attestation Paper*, Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9425 – 24. Details concerning his first match in Winnipeg can be found in the *Manitoba Free Press*, 16 November 1907.

<sup>65</sup> *Winnipeg Henderson’s Directory* 1908, 1910. See also his *Attestation Paper* concerning occupation. Curiously, the 1911 *Canadian Census*, Manitoba, Winnipeg District, Winnipeg Sub-District, Enumeration District 46, Page 33, lists Sundberg’s ethnicity as Icelandic. All other sources, however, give his ethnicity as Swedish.

<sup>66</sup> See Appendix I. A brief overview of Sundberg’s record-to-date was also provided by the *Manitoba Free Press*, 1 February 1910.

<sup>67</sup> *Winnipeg Telegram*, 9 February 1910.

<sup>68</sup> See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 21 May 1910; and the 1911 *Canadian Census*, Manitoba, Winnipeg District, Winnipeg Sub-District, Enumeration District 37, Page 1.



face Sundberg who, as Winnipeg's extant featherweight standout, was his most logical opponent. Sundberg and Stewart, who were extremely well matched, wrestled each other three times, and it was only on their third encounter that the Scot managed to gain a victory over his Swedish opponent, and in doing so, secure claim to the Canadian featherweight title.<sup>69</sup> Thereafter, Sundberg retired from professional mats and Stewart took his place as Winnipeg's featherweight *par excellence*. Like Sundberg, Alex Stewart proved to be a popular wrestler among local fans, and he went on to defend his title locally in main events against such visiting wrestlers as Moose Jaw's Bert Simmons and Boston's Jack Forbes.<sup>70</sup>

During the period before the Great War, various theatres, arenas and halls throughout Winnipeg hosted professional wrestling, often before large and crowded houses. Between late 1906 and late 1909, however, one facility absent from that list was the city's largest and most prestigious venue for live entertainment, the Walker Theatre. Cornelius Powers (C.P.) Walker, the Walker's proprietor, opened his namesake facility in December 1906, with the purpose of offering the public large-scale, "high-class" productions that were otherwise impossible to stage in Winnipeg's existing facilities.<sup>71</sup> By that time, Walker was already familiar with professional wrestling, having staged several bouts during the previous five years as owner of the smaller Winnipeg Theatre. Walker's desire to ensure that his enterprise retained its status as legitimate theatre may have prevented him from staging wrestling on the premises. However, by November 1909, recognizing that the sport had considerable commercial appeal, Walker re-entered the wrestling business. In keeping with his existing policy, however, Walker chose to only stage matches featuring well-known talent in the main event. As established local wrestling stars, Gustafson and Sundberg headlined the first five wrestling programs staged at the Walker.

By early 1910 wrestling had proven itself to be a popular attraction for the Walker Theatre, and thereafter it began to host internationally known professional wrestlers, including Chicoutimi, Quebec's

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<sup>69</sup> For the details of their matches, see the Manitoba Free Press, 22 November 1910; 6 April 1912; and Winnipeg Telegram, 24 May 1912.

<sup>70</sup> For the details of Stewart's match with Simmons see the Manitoba Free Press, 15 January 1913; and Winnipeg Tribune, 15 January 1913. Concerning his match with Jack Forbes, see the Manitoba Free Press, 4 March 1914. See the Manitoba Free Press, 21 February 1914 for commentary pertaining to Stewart's local popularity.

<sup>71</sup> Reg Skene, "C.P. Walker and the Business of Theatre: Merchandizing Entertainment in a Continental Context," in The Political Economy of Manitoba, eds. James Silver and Jeremy Hull (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1990), 144; Winnipeg Real Estate News, 4 March 1994; Stuart, The History of Prairie Theatre, 32.

Eugene Tremblay, recognized as the holder of the Police Gazette lightweight (135 pound) wrestling belt, and Minnesota's Walter Miller, claimant to the world's welterweight wrestling title.<sup>72</sup> Since 1896, Winnipeg had periodically staged heavyweight wrestling, but the vast majority of local matches, and local talent, were in the lighter weight divisions. In 1910, C.P. Walker began to book some of the world's most recognized heavyweights, beginning with Seattle's Benjamin Franklin (B.F.) Roller, who appeared against Pat Connelly in June of that year. Other elite heavyweight talent, including Stanislaus Zbyszko, contender for the world's heavyweight title, subsequently appeared before Winnipeg audiences in 1912. Certainly eclipsing all of them in fame, however, was the undisputed world's heavyweight champion, Frank Gotch. When Gotch appeared at the Walker Theatre in March 1911, he was the most expensive athlete ever brought to the city.<sup>73</sup> Although the exact sum paid to retain Gotch's services was never disclosed, he generally commanded a minimum guarantee of \$1,000 for an appearance.<sup>74</sup> However, close to 3,000 people attended his match against George Eberg, with ticket prices ranging from \$0.75 to \$3.00, so it is probable that owner C.P. Walker received a substantial return on his investment.<sup>75</sup> Charles Gustafson, Ernest Sundberg and Alex Stewart continued to wrestle in Winnipeg, but by the time C.P. Walker began to book internationally-renowned athletes, beginning with B.F. Roller in March 1910, they generally did so either as preliminary attractions at the Walker Theatre or as headliners in the city's smaller venues.

As in virtually all other areas of economic and cultural life, Winnipeg remained Manitoba's dominant centre for professional wrestling. However, wrestling also proved to be an attraction in some of the province's smaller communities. Here again, successful local talent provided much of the impetus for

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<sup>72</sup> Eugene Tremblay won the world's lightweight professional wrestling title on the basis of his victory over George Bothner on 27 November 1908 in Brooklyn New York. On Tremblay's victory over Bothner and his claim to the Police Gazette title, see respectively the Montreal Gazette, 28 November 1908; and Manitoba Free Press, 2 May 1910. According to one account, Walter Miller began his wrestling career after coming to the attention of George A. Barton, sports editor for the Minneapolis Daily News in 1906. Miller, who was then working at the coal docks in Duluth, began his training as a boxer, but soon thereafter switched his emphasis to wrestling. Arthur A. Moeller, who acted as Miller's manager, also claimed credit for discovering the welterweight grappler. Regardless of either claim's veracity, by the time he first appeared in Winnipeg 1910, he was billed as the world's welterweight champion. See George A. Barton, My Lifetime in Sports (Minneapolis: The Lund Press, 1957), 10-11; Manitoba Free Press, 17 January 1914; and Winnipeg Tribune, 5 May 1910.

<sup>73</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 8 March 1911; Winnipeg Telegram, 8 March 1911.

<sup>74</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 8 March 1911.

<sup>75</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 10 March 1911.

public interest. In Souris during 1908, for example, Herb Lee emerged as a popular attraction by defeating several prominent Winnipeg wrestlers, among them Charles Dalager, Herman Mace, and Dan Simpson. In Lee's case, what was particularly remarkable was the fact that he never trained for the sport, and only ever stepped onto a mat to engage in matches.<sup>76</sup> As the Souris Plaindealer noted in October, "Lee has activity and strength, but has never been in a position to acquire the science."<sup>77</sup> Despite his technical shortcomings, Lee's position as a Souris resident evidently granted him a vociferous local backing, and fans were "greatly elated over [his] success" and "the [Sowden Hall] roof was well raised high by the wild and appreciative cheering" when he proved the superior of out of town opponents.<sup>78</sup> In other Manitoba towns, including Minnedosa, professional wrestlers also made periodic appearances.<sup>79</sup> Even in the absence of local matches, however, the public, as in earlier years, was kept abreast of important contests being staged both in Winnipeg and abroad.<sup>80</sup>

### **Wrestling and Aggressive Manhood**

Professional wrestling's popularity in Manitoba before World War I was certainly linked to prevailing notions concerning the male body and the sport as a "scientific" enterprise. Additionally, the presence of strong local talent helped engender in local fans a deep sense of community pride. However, interwoven with these ideas were other interpretations of the sport that were often connected to less "progressive," and frequently more controversial, social aims and desires. Much like boxing, wrestling was what Kevin Wamsley and David Whitson termed a "confrontative sport." As such, wrestling had, as its central goal, the deliberate physical domination of another human being. Like in the 1880s, many members of the public valued wrestling not only as a scientific exhibition of skill, but as an expression of masculinity that embraced physical toughness, aggressiveness, and overtly rough behaviour. Indeed, by

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<sup>76</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 26 March 1908; 17 June 1908.

<sup>77</sup> Souris Plaindealer, 30 October 1908.

<sup>78</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 17 June 1908; Souris Plaindealer, 30 October 1908.

<sup>79</sup> See for example the Minnedosa Tribune, 3 March 1910; 4 August 1910.

<sup>80</sup> In Portage La Prairie, for example, little professional wrestling appears to have occurred during this period. Nevertheless, the local newspaper carried reports of various matches staged in Winnipeg. See the Portage La Prairie Weekly Review, 13 January 1909; 8 June 1910; 15 March 1911; and 10 December 1913.

the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, aggressive expressions of masculinity gained even more widespread acceptance than in previous decades, and were contrasted against qualities such as gentleness and passivity, which were commonly derided for being effeminate, and therefore unmanly.<sup>81</sup> Domination became regarded increasingly as a worthy, manly value.<sup>82</sup>

A degree of roughness was widely accepted, and even celebrated, in professional wrestling. To be certain, wrestling was not some form of free-fighting, as had existed in the voyageur and York boat tripman era.<sup>83</sup> In Manitoba, professional wrestling was commonly conducted according to the Police Gazette rules, which were considered as “the recognized authority on wrestling on this continent.”<sup>84</sup> As early as 1904, the Manitoba Free Press retained a copy of Gazette publisher Richard K. Fox’s Book of Rules for All Sports, which included the rules for wrestling, and it is clear that, even in smaller communities such as Souris, Police Gazette methods were adhered to.<sup>85</sup> However, in professional wrestling contests, it was expected that the referee governing the matches “display a certain amount of discretion apart from the rules.”<sup>86</sup> As such, “If Police Gazette rules [were] observed [in professional wrestling bouts] considerable roughing [was] to be expected.”<sup>87</sup> In commenting on Frank Gotch’s 1911 performance at the Walker Theatre against George Eberg, for instance, the Free Press noted that the challenger, “roughed it about in the most approved style before they went to the mat after ten minutes.”<sup>88</sup> In a corresponding, albeit more poetic fashion, the Tribune stated, “in slapping one another for a hold they resembled two bulls about to engage in a death conflict.”<sup>89</sup> Once on the mat, Frank Gotch asserted his superior ground wrestling skills, and Eberg, “took a bit of roughing from a punishing arm-lock.”<sup>90</sup> The Tribune likewise noted the many “punishing holds” employed by the world’s champion and how, while

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<sup>81</sup> Burstyn, Rites of Men, 68, 72.

<sup>82</sup> Rotundo, American Manhood, 234, 236; Howell, Blood, Sweat and Cheers, 33; Moss, Manliness and Militarism, 127.

<sup>83</sup> See Chapter I.

<sup>84</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 22 March 1910. For professional Police Gazette catch-as-catch-can rules, see George Bothner, Scientific Wrestling (New York: Richard K. Fox Publishing Co., 1912), 11-13.

<sup>85</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 22 November 1904; Souris Plaindealer, 9 October 1908.

<sup>86</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 4 June 1910.

<sup>87</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 16 March 1910. Overman similarly notes the “loose” interpretation of rules common in wrestling matches in The Influence of the Protestant Ethic, 141.

<sup>88</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 10 March 1911.

<sup>89</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 10 March 1911.

<sup>90</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 10 March 1911.

he had his adversary splayed on the mat, “his knee was always pressing some portion of Eberg’s body.”<sup>91</sup> None of the three daily newspapers, however, evidenced any negative reaction to either Eberg or Gotch’s methods during his match, nor did the public object to their style of wrestling.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the Telegram opined that “[Gotch] did not, however, show any trace of rough tactics... but on the other hand there is nothing ladylike in the manner in which he goes after his opponent,” further suggesting that his methods, although somewhat aggressive, were commonplace in professional wrestling at the time and within the realm of public acceptability. Such statements also implicitly emphasized the contrast between the explicitly masculine endeavour of aggressively striving for physical dominance against more feminine traits such as gentleness and passive civility. To highlight the point, it was often stated in celebratory terms, that wrestling was “no pink tea affair.”<sup>93</sup>

As might be expected, due to the sport’s aggressive nature, wrestlers frequently ran the risk of physical harm when engaging in matches. Many matches did, in fact, terminate as the direct result of an injury sustained by one of the participants. Wrestlers found themselves subject to ear contusions, shoulder dislocations, various sprains, and even fractured bones.<sup>94</sup> Part of this may, in fact, have been due to the circumstances under which the matches occurred. By the early twentieth century, sporting equipment had improved considerably, with professionally-manufactured products replacing many homemade items. Commercial sporting goods were widely available in Manitoba through a variety of distributors and manufacturers by the late nineteenth century.<sup>95</sup> Despite developments in sporting equipment technology, some professional wrestling matches were nevertheless contested under very adverse conditions. The most important piece of equipment in a wrestling match, the mat, was generally made of canvas, laid over some form of improvised padding which could include straw, hay, or sawdust.

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<sup>91</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 10 March 1911.

<sup>92</sup> It should be noted, however, that not all Winnipeg fans received Gotch warmly. Many of those present were Hackenschmidt supporters and greeted the American grappler with “hisses and booing” when he made his appearance. See the Manitoba Free Press, 10 March 1908.

<sup>93</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 16 March 1910; 14 May 1910; Winnipeg Tribune, 28 February 1910.

<sup>94</sup> See, respectively, the Manitoba Free Press, 18 March 1909; Winnipeg Tribune, 18 March 1909; Manitoba Free Press, 5 April 1909; Winnipeg Telegram, 5 April 1909; Manitoba Free Press, 18 December 1907; 2 April 1908; 17 September 1910; 27 February 1908; 21 February 1907; 20 February 1908; and 11 July 1911.

<sup>95</sup> Mott, “Manly Sports,” 133-134; Morrow and Wamsley, Sport in Canada, 48-50.

Wrestling mats, depending on their construction, sometimes provided wholly inadequate protection for the participants. In a few instances, wrestlers refused to continue with a match after the mat proved to be unacceptable, but this was generally not the case.<sup>96</sup> Abrasions were, as a result of wrestling matches, an extremely common occurrence during the period and one of the primary factors that dissuaded many would-be grapplers from participating in the sport.<sup>97</sup>

Since many in the public accepted a degree of roughness in a match, they also respected a wrestler who could endure the punishment meted out against him. In a match between Charles “Kid” Cutler and Minneapolis’ Henry Ordemann, both of whom later wrestled in Winnipeg, the former suffered a kneecap broken in two places during a match in the latter’s home city during October 1910. Cutler eventually had to capitulate due to his injury, but, under the headline “Remarkable Pluck in Wrestling Bout” his performance was described in the Manitoba Free Press as “the most remarkable case of endurance under pain that has been seen on a Minneapolis mat for a long time.”<sup>98</sup> Similarly, when Walter Miller fractured his ankle in a bout with Charles Gustafson, his decision to continue to wrestle led to him being hailed as a man with “pluck,” and his “grit and gameness made him many friends.”<sup>99</sup> Although they respected such qualities as “pluck” and “gameness” in a wrestler, the sport’s supporters in Manitoba were by no means unsympathetic to the physical and financial hardship caused by severe injuries. During Frank Gotch’s appearance at the Walker Theatre in March 1911, Ernie Sundberg wrestled in a preliminary bout against another local professional grappler, Charles Dalager. Sundberg, by then well-known among Winnipeg’s sporting public, had, according to the Winnipeg Tribune, “no men of his weight in this section of the country who seem[ed] able to give him a good argument, with the possible exception of Alex Stewart.”<sup>100</sup> As a result, Sundberg expressed his keen desire to have Gotch watch him wrestle and, if advised to do so by the world’s heavyweight champion, begin taking matches in major

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<sup>96</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 31 August 1906; 5 October 1907. In the latter instance, which was Charles Gustafson’s debut in Winnipeg, the Swedish grappler refused to continue after six minutes of wrestling, owing in part to the mat’s construction, which consisted of a rug spread over a bale of hay.

<sup>97</sup> Leyshon, Of Mats and Men, 49.

<sup>98</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 26 October 1910.

<sup>99</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 11 July 1911. See also Peter Gay, The Cultivation of Hatred: The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud Volume III (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 236.

<sup>100</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 7 March 1911.

centres throughout North America.<sup>101</sup> However, Sundberg's enthusiasm to impress Gotch was soon halted when his opponent, in attempting to escape from one of the Swede's holds, banged his leg against the floorboards outside of the mat. The bone in his leg fractured so forcibly that the crack could be heard throughout the hall. Three doctors immediately attended to Dalager's injury, applying chloroform for the pain before removing him to St. Boniface Hospital. The three thousand fans occupying every seat in the theatre and crowding the aisles began to toss coins onto the mat until "it resembled a hail storm." Eventually Walter Deering, who assisted C.P. Walker in promoting wrestling matches at the Walker Theatre, began to pass around a collection hat, and \$251.62, which included two \$10 bills, was collected on Dalager's behalf.<sup>102</sup> In a letter to the Free Press the next day, Dalager extended his appreciation to the public for their generosity stating that, "when my leg is all right again I will challenge my friend Ernie Sundberg to a finished match and will thank them all personally."<sup>103</sup> The Free Press reporter who visited him in the hospital noted that although in great pain, "he bore it well." To further emphasize his pluck and gameness, the reporter stated that, when being chloroformed, the injured wrestler said to the doctors, "Give me ten more minutes and I will beat him."<sup>104</sup> Unfortunately, despite his well-appreciated toughness, Dalager never wrestled again on Winnipeg mats.

### **The Problem of Excessive Violence**

Although wrestlers were granted a certain amount of latitude with the rules and were expected to show physical aggressiveness and determination in matches, there was a limit to how much roughing the public would tolerate. By the end of the nineteenth century, professional wrestling still had a dubious reputation among many members of the public, and despite its rapid growth in popularity, due in large measure to the positive characteristics ascribed to the sport and its practitioners, it remained regularly embroiled in controversy. Professional sport, in general, still retained a stigma of dishonesty during the period before World War I, and many wrestlers who appeared in Manitoba did little to dissuade the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 10 March 1911; Winnipeg Telegram, 10 March 1911; and Winnipeg Tribune, 10 March 1911.

<sup>103</sup> Charles Dalager, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 11 March 1911.

<sup>104</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 11 March 1911.

critical public from that perception.<sup>105</sup> Much of this had to do with athletes regularly pushing the bounds of what was considered acceptable sportsmanship. Examples of such behaviour abound. However, one case, involving Winnipeg's most prominent wrestler, Charles Gustafson, will serve to illustrate the persistent problem.

On 8 June 1909, Charles Gustafson and Hume Duval (also known by the surname Macdonald) wrestled as the main attraction in an event staged at the Grand Opera House. Duval was already well known to the public as a result of many appearances at the Happyland Amusement Park two years earlier where he gave numerous wrestling and weight lifting exhibitions on the grandstand stage.<sup>106</sup> He and Gustafson had also wrestled on two previous occasions in Winnipeg, and in both instances, neither man was able to secure a definitive win.<sup>107</sup> Their third bout was universally decried by the press, and most of the attendant public, as a "fiasco."<sup>108</sup> Upon commencement, Duval immediately resorted to slapping Gustafson "more in the nature of a prizefight," using "blows that echoed through the half empty house."<sup>109</sup> Gustafson, supported by the vast majority of the audience, appealed to the referee, a boxer named Caspar Franklin, who disregarded his protest. Duval then began to "rough-house" even more, striking his opponent in the nose and mouth with his palm heel and gouging his face. When further pleas to the official were disregarded, Gustafson refused to continue with the match and Duval was immediately awarded the win. The majority of the people present were incensed over what was seen to

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<sup>105</sup> Frank Cosentino, "A History of the Concept of Professionalism," 255.

<sup>106</sup> Happyland Park, constructed by the American Park Company and managed by W.O. Edmunds, was built on 32 acres of land in Winnipeg's West End, south of Portage Avenue in the area between Aubrey and Dominion streets. Opened in May 1906, it boasted various rides, including an 80 foot tall circular swing, ferris wheel, mirror gallery, miniature railway, merry-go-round and rollercoaster, in addition to a restaurant, Japanese tea garden, athletic grounds and a grandstand capable of holding 3,000 people. For more on Happyland's rise and fall as a popular Winnipeg recreational attraction, see Edith Paterson's articles in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, 1 June 1974 and 8 June 1974 as well as Bruce Cherney, "Happyland- Winnipeg's 'Mammoth Amusement Park' First Opened on 23 May 1906," <http://www.winnipegrealtors.ca/editorials.aspx?id=43> (accessed 26 January 2010). For advertisements pertaining to Duval's various strongman acts and wrestling challenges at Happyland during the summer of 1907, see, for example, the *Manitoba Free Press*, 29 May 1907; *Winnipeg Telegram*, 3 June 1907; 25 June 1907; and *Winnipeg Voice*, 7 June 1907.

<sup>107</sup> In their first match, staged on 20 December 1907, Gustafson won as a result of a handicap, Duval being unable to secure three falls in one hour. Neither man secured any falls. Their second match, held on 17 March 1909, terminated prematurely when an attending physician refused to allow Gustafson to continue as a result of an ear injury. Both men had secured one fall by the time the bout terminated. See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 21 December 1907; and *Winnipeg Tribune*, 18 March 1909.

<sup>108</sup> Both the *Manitoba Free Press* and *Winnipeg Tribune* used the word "fiasco" when describing the match in their headlines. The *Winnipeg Telegram*, did not explicitly use the term, but the article's general tenor suggests the same conclusion. Likewise, the *Voice*, on 11 June 1909, stated that the audience "got little or nothing for their money," and that "the entertainment was dependent upon a very poor class of sports."

<sup>109</sup> *Winnipeg Tribune*, 9 June 1909; *Winnipeg Telegram*, 9 June 1909.



be incompetent officiating and grossly unfair tactics. Matters were made worse when one of Duval's seconds, Fred C. McLaglen, who had disappointed the audience earlier in the evening by refusing to engage in a boxing exhibition with his brother Victor on account of a sprained ankle, antagonized his detractors by inviting them back stage to settle differences. According to Tribune reports, "only by the introduction of a little diplomacy was a small riot narrowly averted."<sup>110</sup> Commenting both on the match and the general state of professional wrestling in the city, the Tribune warned:

The wrestling game in Winnipeg, apparently, is going from bad to worse, and it will only need a few more prods like those that have developed recently in the "high class" bouts to disgust the local enthusiasts of the game so thoroughly that they will pass up the sport for all time to come."<sup>111</sup>

In the days following, various parties spoke out in the Free Press concerning the incident. The first to do so was Charles Gustafson, who stated that he would "never have anything more to do with the McLaglen or Duval clans," and that Duval "violated every rule of [the catch-as-catch-can] method," because "he ha[d] a yellow streak in him" and feared facing him in an honest match. Asserting his own propriety, Gustafson stated, "I am well known to the Winnipeg public as always having acted on the square, and I know they will believe me when I say I quit because of the foul methods used by my antagonist."<sup>112</sup>

A response, from an anonymous "Spectator," most likely Duval, one of the McLaglen brothers, or a close associate, followed the next day. In it, he asserted, quite to the contrary of all newspaper reports, that "I was an eye witness of the bout of which he speaks and did not see any of the foul play of which he complains." In a direct attack to Gustafson's masculinity, "Spectator" asserted that, "If Gustafson is a wrestler at all he must be of a very effeminate type, but I have a very strong conviction that he knows very little of the game, but might put up a good exhibition at an afternoon tea." He likewise stressed both wrestling's value as a sport and Duval and the McLaglen's honesty, stating, "Wrestling and boxing provide capital and manly entertainment, but the sport has been killed in Winnipeg by the cheapest kind

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<sup>110</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 9 June 1909. Reports by all three Winnipeg dailies described the events surrounding the match in a similar fashion.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Charles Gustafson, in the Manitoba Free Press, 10 June 1909.

of tin horns, and I for one earnestly hope that by the coming of such good sports as Duval and the McLaglen boys the day of the tin horn has passed.” An offer was also made on behalf of Charles Herbert, owner of the Savoy hotel, to back Duval in another match against Gustafson.<sup>113</sup>

Winnipeg resident, J.W. Gibson, under the headline “An Injustice to Clean Sport” provided the final word on the subject. Gibson utterly dismissed “Spectator’s” allegations, reinforcing the contemporary newspaper interpretations concerning the evening’s events, stating that, “I have never seen a more brutal or unsportsmanlike exhibition than that of Duval. The treatment accorded to Gustafson by the former, by the former’s seconds, the two McLaglens, and by the referee, was disgraceful throughout.” He also opined that “Duval was no match for the Swede in the matter of science, and could only hope to beat him through superior weight and strength, so there can be little doubt as to his motive in roughing matters.”<sup>114</sup>

Gibson’s letter to the Free Press brings several issues to light. First, both his assertion, reinforced by public reaction the night of the bout, demonstrates that wrestling fans were far from being passive consumers of public entertainment. Just as they were willing to applaud actions and attributes that they saw as meritorious, they were equally willing to condemn those that were viewed to be unacceptable. Additionally, there appeared to be a broad understanding among the public on what constituted “fair play” in wrestling matches by that period, and breaching the commonly-held standard of etiquette would not be tolerated. Indeed, as an affirmation of their general disapproval, Hume Duval was never again booked to wrestle before the Winnipeg public. Gibson’s letter also indicates the conflicting sentiments felt by the public throughout the period toward professional wrestling, which was on one hand attractive as an exhibition of numerous highly-regarded virtues, but simultaneously a sport that seemed to attract unsportsmanlike behaviour.

## **Fixing Matches**

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<sup>113</sup> “Spectator” in the Manitoba Free Press, 11 June 1909.

<sup>114</sup> J.W. Gibson in the Manitoba Free Press, 12 June 1909.

Excessive roughness was not the only problem plaguing professional wrestling in Manitoba during this period. Outright fakery also proved to be an ongoing concern. Gibson's letter echoed the public's general frustration and ambivalence surrounding the issue, declaring, "As a lover of the game, I have attended every wrestling match that has been pulled off in the city, paying the exorbitant prices demanded for what, in nearly every instance, have proved to be fakes."<sup>115</sup> In examining the period leading up to the Gustafson-Duval match, there does appear to be evidence that this was the case. In January and February of 1906, three wrestlers, Jack Root, Jack Downs, and the "The Human Derrick" Ole Oleson wrestled a series of engagements in Winnipeg and Brandon, in which various side bets were said to have been placed on the outcome.<sup>116</sup> It is clear that the public was actively engaged in the betting process as well. In one instance, Ole Oleson, by far the largest of the three, proposed to defeat two local wrestlers, James Theran and James Ramsay, as well as Downs, in one hour. Oleson disposed of the local wrestlers in thirty four minutes, and during the interval prior to the start of the match with Downs, Jack Root, acting as "the Human Derrick's" manager, offered to bet ten dollars that his man would defeat his final opponent in the allotted time. According to the Free Press, "Pandemonium then ensued, the audience falling over each other in the mad rush to place their money on the big fellow."<sup>117</sup> Oleson, however, proved unable to accomplish the task. One week later, however, a letter appeared in the Free Press, written by North Dakota professional wrestler Charles Moth attesting to "the methods of the gang of confidence men and fake wrestlers" appearing in Winnipeg. Moth alleged that Downs and Root were, in fact, two brothers named Al and Frank Hallett, and had appeared in wrestling matches under numerous assumed names. Moth also implicated Oleson in the fixing scheme, stating that he had "a reputation everywhere he appeared as a fakir." Appealing to public decency, Moth exhorted, "This gang operated through parts of Minnesota and as I am not in sympathy with anything that tends to degenerate athletic sports. I advertised them and now they are practically tarred out of most of the towns in that section."<sup>118</sup> A

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> See Appendix I for an overview of the matches. Concerning side-bets, see the Manitoba Free Press, 1 February 1906; 3 February 1906; and 8 February 1906.

<sup>117</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 15 February 1908.

<sup>118</sup> Charles Moth, in the Manitoba Free Press, 22 February 1906.

reply appeared in the paper two weeks later from Sidney A. Slocum, a local resident who also occasionally refereed boxing and wrestling matches, defending Downs and Root, while claiming to hold in his possession testimonials from such well-known wrestlers as Frank Gotch, his trainer, Martin “Farmer” Burns, and Tom Jenkins, which “condemn[ed] the methods and tactics of that famous hippodromer, Chas. Moth, of Berthold, N.D.”<sup>119</sup> Moth’s testimonial proved enough to confirm public suspicion, as none of the three men again appeared on Manitoba mats.

Although a series of frauds were apparently perpetrated against the Manitoba public, professional wrestling matches continued to be staged regularly for the next year and a half, with little overt suspicion surrounding them. In October 1907, amid considerable press fanfare, Duncan C. Ross, the well known wrestler and all-around athlete, arrived in Winnipeg to face Donald Gaunt, “wrestling champion of Grey, Huron and Bruce counties,” for an apparent side bet of \$500.<sup>120</sup> By 1907, Ross had been well known to the Winnipeg public for more than thirty years, and the local press was not hesitant in detailing his many accomplishments. The Tribune, in outlining his various accolades affirmed, “Sceptics will say that such is impossible, as no athlete of these attainments lives or has ever lived, but records will show that the above assertions are true in every respect.” Ross also received praise for his “excellently proportioned” physique, of which “every ounce of his 218 pounds [was] nothing but bone and muscle- pure muscle.”<sup>121</sup> Advanced billing did not meet the Winnipeg public’s expectations. Neither man appeared to extend much effort, and within one minute, Ross, “laid down” for his opponent. During the second period, the crowd arose from their seats and left the hall in disgust. The bout, scheduled for three out of five falls, was thereafter called off.<sup>122</sup> The Manitoba Free Press described the match as “a huge fake” and declared, “Winnipeg sportsmen have been ‘up against’ some fakes in the way of boxing and wrestling matches

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<sup>119</sup> Sidney Slocum, in the Manitoba Free Press, 5 March 1906. Charles Moth, despite his purported desire for clean athletic competition, did not escape similar controversy himself. On 25 April 1902, the Marshfield (Wisconsin) Times reported that Moth, having “worked Milwaukee so persistently that he found it advisable to seek other pastures,” was now wrestling and boxing in other centres under such assumed names as Charles Wright and W.H. West. The paper condemned his practices and those of other professional wrestlers, stating that, “Wrestling has been irretrievably damaged by faking.” See <http://wrestlingperspective.com/working/1902/marti0425.html> (accessed 29 January 2010).

<sup>120</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 1 October 1907; Winnipeg Telegram, 1 October 1907; Winnipeg Tribune, 1 October 1907.

<sup>121</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 3 October 1907.

<sup>122</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 5 October 1907; Manitoba Free Press, 5 October 1907.

during the last few years but it is questionable if they have ever been stung so hard as the three hundred or more who journeyed to the German hall last night with the intention of seeing a really first class wrestling match.”<sup>123</sup>

Despite the obvious “fake,” perpetrated against them, the public, once again, was not dissuaded from attending professional matches. Two weeks later, a bout between Dan Simpson and Herman Mace at the German hall attracted “a very fair attendance.”<sup>124</sup> On 26 October, in an attempt to further assuage public suspicion around the sport, Dan Simpson announced that a new organization, the National Athletic Club had been formed “for the purpose of pulling off legitimate boxing and wrestling matches” on a weekly basis.<sup>125</sup> Over the winter, the National Athletic Club staged more than twenty professional wrestling cards, featuring numerous local wrestlers, including Charles Gustafson, Ernie Sundberg and Herman Mace. North Dakota’s Charles Moth, who had previously exposed Root, Downs, and Oleson as co-conspirators, was also among the out-of-town talent to appear under the auspices of the National Athletic Club. Despite claiming to stage only legitimate matches, however, the National Athletic Club also found itself embroiled in controversy. In mid-December, Charles Dalager was immediately disqualified in a match with Herman Mace after his skin was discovered to be coated in Vaseline. Dan Simpson, who was refereeing the bout, was “almost furious with indignation” and declared that Dalager’s action was “no manly thing to do.”<sup>126</sup> The fans, although disappointed, nevertheless concurred with his decision. Dalager countered a few days later by asserting in a letter to the Free Press, that Simpson had approached him to pre-arrange the match.<sup>127</sup> Public suspicion was evidently on Dalager’s side, as a “big crowd of sympathisers” turned out to support him in a rematch three months later. Mace quickly disposed

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<sup>123</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 5 October 1907. Approximately three weeks later, Ross was once again involved in a controversy in Regina when he failed to appear in a match against a local police officer. The spectators chased Ross back to his hotel and demanded their admission fee back. Ross, however, contended that his manager had absconded with the gate receipts. The following day, Ross was arrested by the police officer with whom he was scheduled to wrestle for failing to pay the appropriate licensing fee for staging the match. See the Manitoba Free Press, 24 October 1907.

<sup>124</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 19 October 1907.

<sup>125</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 26 October 1907.

<sup>126</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 14 December 1907. Similar accusations were brought against Dalager during a match in Souris in October 1908. His opponent, Mack Moir, complained to the referee that Dalager “had drugs in his hair that were affecting him prejudicially.” In this instance, the referee saw no evidence to substantiate the claim. See the Souris Plaindealer, 9 October 1908.

<sup>127</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 16 December 1907.

of his adversary in two straight falls, which may have silenced public controversy surrounding the issue.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, the Dalager incident was not the last indictment to be levelled against Simpson, Mace, and the National Athletic Club. In April 1909, Dauphin's Charles Willis gave testimony to the Manitoba Amateur Athletic Association that, during the previous year, he had sought out Mace as a practice partner. Before he could locate him, however, he first encountered Dan Simpson, who advised him not to meet Mace. Instead, Simpson arranged for a match between the two men, billing Willis from Brainerd, Minnesota.<sup>129</sup> Willis stated that, "It was only a make believe show and I believe he advertised it for \$100 a side."<sup>130</sup> By the time the allegations were made, neither Simpson nor Mace appear to have been actively involved in wrestling in Manitoba, yet the implications against them nevertheless contributed to the public lament articulated by J.W. Gibson two months later.

### **Controversial Characters**

Professional wrestling attracted considerable adverse publicity for the various transgressions perpetrated in the ring by its practitioners. As in decades past, certain well-known individuals who were widely associated with the sport also continued to engage in dubious behaviour outside of the ring. One prominent figure in this respect was Fred C. McLaglen, earlier noted as an associate of Hume Duval, and the older brother of Academy-award winning actor Victor McLaglen.<sup>131</sup> Born in Kent, England, Fred

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<sup>128</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 26 March 1908.

<sup>129</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 3 April 1909.

<sup>130</sup> Charles Willis, in the Manitoba Free Press, 3 April 1909.

<sup>131</sup> Victor McLaglen, like his brother Fred, had an active career in Winnipeg both as a boxer and wrestler. McLaglen served a short tenure with the Winnipeg City Police, lasting from 11 June to 9 September 1907. While on the police force, he wrestled in professional matches under the name Young Tom Sharkey (a moniker borrowed from former heavyweight boxing title contender and wrestler, Sailor Tom Sharkey) including two against Hume Duval. By late 1907, McLaglen had left Winnipeg to ply his trade as both a boxer and wrestler on the West Coast. On 10 March 1909, he boxed six rounds against heavyweight champion Jack Johnson in Vancouver, before returning to Winnipeg during the summer and engaging in both boxing and wrestling matches under his real name. On 4 June 1909, McLaglen undertook a unique challenge to throw an entire football team in one hour at Happyland. Although only eight athletes appeared, McLaglen accomplished his task in the allotted time. However, he faced considerable criticism from the spectators when he allegedly strangled and bloodied the mouth of his first opponent, Edwin Quist. Quist, in addition to playing football, also wrestled professionally. In February 1910, McLaglen, once more on the West Coast, wrestled heavyweight wrestling champion Frank Gotch. According to the Spokane Spokesman-Review, Gotch, much the superior to his challenger, "simply toyed with the young Hercules" before disposing of him at his own discretion. McLaglen, however, continued with his fistic pursuits until 1920, when he turned his attention to motion pictures, appearing in the British production The Call of the Road. In 1924, having appeared in a dozen films, McLaglen relocated to Hollywood, winning the Academy Award for Best Actor in 1935 for his portrayal of "Gypo" Nolan in John Ford's The Informer. His win gave him the unique distinction as being the only person in history to have competitively boxed and wrestled the heavyweight champions in both respective sports in addition to winning an Academy Award. On McLaglen's tenure with the Winnipeg City Police, see the

McLaglen moved to Manitoba and served as a member of the Winnipeg City Police department between July 1907 and April 1908.<sup>132</sup> Following his resignation, “Big Mac,” as he was colloquially known, took employment as a bartender at the Savoy Hotel in Winnipeg’s North End and embarked on a marginally successful career as both a professional wrestler and boxer.<sup>133</sup> McLaglen frequently attracted public attention due to his proclivity for disrupting political rallies involving non-Conservative party candidates. On the 21 October 1908, he drew Manitoba Free Press publisher John W. Dafoe’s ire for causing a disturbance during a Liberal party meeting at the Walker Theatre. “Big Mac,” accompanied by a cadre of supporters, repeatedly interrupted former-Minister of the Interior and Free Press owner, Clifford Sifton, during his address, appearing in various parts of the theatre and shouting questions at the prominent politician. McLaglen sued Dafoe for defamatory libel as a result of front page reports printed in the Free Press the next morning, but ultimately lost the case.<sup>134</sup> In July 1910, McLaglen interrupted an open air address by Labour candidate F.J. Dixon, and was ejected from the Grand Opera House by police later in the year for disruptive behaviour during a meeting staged by mayoral candidate E.D. Martin.<sup>135</sup> During the 1910 municipal election campaign, McLaglen was also allegedly involved in a plan to manipulate

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Winnipeg Police Museum, Police Commission Books. Concerning his wrestling and boxing career, see the Manitoba Free Press, 22 June 1907; 28 June 1907; 20 July 1907; 5 June 1909; 7 June 1909; 10 February 1910; Winnipeg Saturday Post, 20 March 1909; Winnipeg Tribune, 29 May 1909; and Bidly Bishop, “What Price Movies?” in Ring Magazine, January 1932, 20-21, 40. For an overview of McLaglen’s film career, see David Shipman, The Great Movie Stars: The Golden Years (London: Hamlyn, 1970), 387-191.

<sup>132</sup> Winnipeg Police Museum, Police Commission Books; Winnipeg Henderson’s Directory, 1908.

<sup>133</sup> See the Manitoba Free Press, 22 October 1908; 6 August 1910 concerning Fred McLaglen’s employment at the Savoy Hotel. McLaglen’s first known wrestling match in Winnipeg was, in fact, as an amateur when he faced A.J. Mitchell in the preliminary round of the inaugural Manitoba Amateur Wrestling Championships in 1908. Although weighing 205 pounds to Mitchell’s 148, he was defeated on points. As a professional, McLaglen’s most well-publicized wrestling bout was against Knute Hoel. Described as a “very tame” contest by the Winnipeg Telegram, Hoel was forced to resign due to injury after losing the first fall. See the Manitoba Free Press, 27 November 1908; and Winnipeg Telegram, 5 April 1909. Concerning Fred McLaglen’s boxing career in Manitoba, see for example the reports pertaining to his January 1910 fight in Dauphin against Walter Adams for the “Heavyweight Championship of Manitoba,” which are found in the Dauphin Herald, 27 January 1910; and Dauphin Press, 27 January 1910. See also the reports related to his match against Tony Caponi in Winnipeg four months later, detailed in the Manitoba Free Press, 17 May 1910; Winnipeg Tribune, 17 May 1910; and Winnipeg Telegram, 17 May 1910.

<sup>134</sup> The 22 October 1908 Free Press report labelled McLaglen as “intimately bound up with the Conservative machine” and the leader of a “Band of Thugs and Toughs,” which constituted “the scourgings and riff-raff of the lowest dives and bar-rooms in the city.” In addition to disrupting the rally with “unintelligible questions” McLaglen allegedly demonstrated his “much-vaunted brute strength” by knocking a fifteen year old boy to the floor. McLaglen filed charges as a result of these and other accusations on 4 November. The court proceedings, which ran between 14 November and 2 December, were covered in copious detail by the Manitoba Free Press. Concerning the charges brought against John W. Dafoe, see Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1219, Roll 10, no. 22235, 4 November 1908. See the Manitoba Free Press, 25 November 1908; 28 November 1908; 30 November 1908; 1 December 1908; 2 December 1908; and 3 December 1908 for reports on the trial.

<sup>135</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 7 July 1910; 9 December 1910.

voters lists in the Centre Winnipeg ward.<sup>136</sup> “Big Mac” appeared in Winnipeg Police Court at least five times for assault, although the charges were dismissed on four of the occasions.<sup>137</sup> In February 1911, after what was described as “one of the most keenly contested legal fights in the history of the Winnipeg Police court,” McLaglen was sentenced to one month imprisonment for theft after assaulting Vassal resident Jilos Carpenter during a visit to the city’s red light district and subsequently relieving him of \$80.<sup>138</sup> Due to his local fame, the courtroom was extremely crowded, and many in attendance refused to leave during the lunch intermission for fear of losing their seat when the session resumed.<sup>139</sup> Other professional wrestlers, including McLaglen’s one time opponent, Knute Hoel, also encountered frequent legal difficulties. Hoel, who was brought before the Winnipeg Police Court on several occasions, faced conviction for theft on 30 July 1909 and was sentenced to one year of imprisonment with hard labour. Thirteen months later, he was again convicted of the same crime after taking \$20 from a sick man’s hotel room. Hoel had promised to use the funds to summon a doctor, but instead kept the money. As a result, he received another year’s imprisonment.<sup>140</sup> Visiting professional wrestlers who drifted into Winnipeg looking for matches also sometimes faced charges if authorities felt that they had overstayed their welcome in the city, or if legal troubles incurred for dubious wrestling-related activities in other jurisdictions came to police attention.<sup>141</sup> All of this could have done little to boost the sport’s esteem in the public’s eye.

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<sup>136</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 21 June 1910; 30 June 1910.

<sup>137</sup> Concerning dismissed assault charges brought against McLaglen, see Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1219, Roll 10, no. 2415, 6 July 1909; no. 31043, 9 December 1909; no. 32462, 17 February 1910; and Roll 11, no. 39911, 18 November 1910. On 15 December 1910, McLaglen was required to pay a five dollar fine, plus court costs, when he struck a man named Alex M. Young twice in the face outside of the Savoy Hotel. Several witnesses testified on McLaglen’s behalf, stating that Young had called him foul names. See Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1220, Roll 10, no. 40529, 15 December 1910; and the Manitoba Free Press, 16 December 1910.

<sup>138</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 6 February 1911.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* Further details pertaining to the case can also be found in the Manitoba Free Press, 6 February 1911; and the Winnipeg Tribune, 6 February 1911.

<sup>140</sup> Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1219, Roll 10, no. 27750, 30 July 1909; and M1220, Roll 11, no. 37496, 1 September 1910. For details concerning the latter case, see the Manitoba Free Press, 2 September 1910.

<sup>141</sup> In August 1912, for instance, Herman Mond, who wrestled under the name “Young” Mond, was arrested by the Winnipeg city police for having obtained money under false pretences while in North Bay, Ontario. The charges stemmed from his involvement in ‘fixed’ wrestling matches. Mond and his alleged manager John Frazin were ordered to leave the city within 24 hours or face three months in provincial jail for vagrancy. See Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, M1221, Roll 12, no. 61361; no. 61402, 3 August 1912; Winnipeg Tribune, 5 August 1912.



## Attempts to Regulate and Control Professional Wrestling

Although many professional wrestlers engaged in behaviour both on and off the mat that was widely considered disreputable, little evidence suggests that authorities at either the provincial or municipal levels took any action to regulate the sport or counteract the more egregious offenses committed by its practitioners. The only attempt at regulation occurred in 1908 when Winnipeg city officials enacted an amendment to City By-Law 5069, pertaining to licensing, which stipulated that a \$5 fee had to be paid to stage public wrestling exhibitions.<sup>142</sup> Evidently, city officials were primarily interested in capitalizing on the potential revenue generated by the National Athletic Club's then-weekly wrestling cards, not in directly controlling the conditions surrounding the matches themselves. It is apparent that, during this the same period, boxing faced considerably more public reproach than wrestling. Although the two sports were often staged together, wrestling escaped the legal censure that befell its fistic counterpart. On 31 March 1908, for instance, the local constabulary intervened to halt boxing bouts in Saint Boniface, but allowed wrestling matches, which were scheduled for the same evening, to continue.<sup>143</sup> Other Manitoba communities such as Portage la Prairie, also occasionally took steps to prohibit boxing.<sup>144</sup> Boxers continued to face periodic arrest for prize fighting which, nebulously distinct from "boxing matches," remained prohibited under the Criminal Code of Canada.<sup>145</sup> In 1913,

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<sup>142</sup> See the Winnipeg City Archives, City of Winnipeg Minutes of Council, 121, 181; Winnipeg City Archives, City of Winnipeg By-Laws 1908, 74; and Winnipeg City Archives, City of Winnipeg Municipal Manual 1909, 72.

<sup>143</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 1 April 1908. Professional boxing was facing censure at the same time across the river in Winnipeg, and it was hoped that St. Boniface would serve as a 'safe haven' for staging matches. Following the police intervention in St. Boniface, however, the Free Press reported on 1 April, "All hope of Winnipeg sports using St. Boniface as an annex for the holding of boxing bouts was nipped in the bud yesterday when the municipal authorities, through the chief of police, stepped in." The Free Press incorrectly reported that both boxing and wrestling matches had been stopped in the city, but action was only taken to prohibit the former.

<sup>144</sup> In early May 1909, Portage la Prairie town council voted to disallow a Victoria Day boxing contest featuring Hume Duval. See the Manitoba Free Press, 6 May 1909.

<sup>145</sup> Under the Criminal Code of Canada, a prize fight was defined as "an encounter or fight with fists or hands, between two persons who have met for such purpose by previous arrangement made by or for them." Such a broad definition would seem to apply to any boxing encounter. In general, however, a prize fight was perceived to be distinct from a boxing match inasmuch as prize fights carried with them the intention to inflict sufficient harm on an opponent so as to incapacitate him from either fatigue or injury, whereas a boxing match was merely considered to be an exhibition of skill. In reality, it was difficult to easily discern the difference between the two, and many professed boxing matches in Manitoba ended in a knockout or some other form of physical incapacitation. Periodically, fighters were arrested prior to their matches as a precautionary measure against their encounters escalating into a prize fight. On 14 January 1911, pugilists "Young" Peter Jackson and John Willie were taken into police custody for being "about to engage in a prize fight." Peter Jackson was released on a \$1,000 peace bond, and his opponent, having already posted a bond the year earlier, was not required to re-bond. Their match went on as scheduled, and both men gave "a good exposition of the art." Following the Arthur Pelkey- Luther McCarty fight in Calgary on 24 May 1913, which culminated in the latter's death during the first round, boxing underwent increased scrutiny and criticism in Manitoba. On

professional boxing matches of any kind were temporarily banned in Winnipeg, due in part to the belief among the city police department that boxing matches were attracting too many “undesirable citizens” to the city.<sup>146</sup>

Even if government officials in Manitoba seemed to be far more concerned with preventing prize fighting than limiting professional wrestling’s excesses, some commentators nonetheless expressed the desire regulate grappling matches as well. After a match in Winnipeg during January 1913 which resulted in Alex Stewart receiving two black eyes, the Winnipeg Tribune stated:

Boxing is not the only sport that requires commission rule. There are numerous forms of athletics which would be all the better if the same taut rules as feature boxing in New York were adopted. As a follow up on the foregoing, the writer only has to cite the case of Alex Stewart as convincing proof of the disregard for sporting ethics.<sup>147</sup>

Although no regulation was forthcoming, promoters did make some effort to allay various grievances associated with wrestling. As evidenced, certain athletes deemed guilty of unacceptable conduct were never again invited to appear before the public. Promoters also attempted to implement proactive measures to prevent potential problems, albeit with very limited success. After a particularly disappointing performance by wrestler Ferdinand Cook, who appeared to give up in his match against Charles Gustafson, the Walker Theatre thereafter decided against booking any “unknown” wrestlers to appear on their stage.<sup>148</sup> As Manitoba’s most prestigious theatre, the Walker certainly had the ability to attract well-known talent, as it proved in subsequent years. However, this did not necessarily guarantee a satisfactory outcome. In one instance, the Walker Theatre attempted a different strategy. To ensure his

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3 July 1913, six boxers were taken into police court and required to put up bonds before their entry into the ring. As in the previous incident, the police seemed sufficiently satisfied that their encounters were “comparatively clean” sparring matches. For the original act regulating prize fighting, which received assent on 21 March 1881, see “Chapter 30: An Act Respecting Prize Fighting,” Orders in Council, Proclamations and Regulations Having Force of Law in the Dominion of Canada Issued during the Years 1880 and 1881 (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1881), 174. Concerning the aforementioned arrests, see Archives of Manitoba, Police Court Winnipeg, ATG0030, GR 651, N1220, Roll 11, no. 41221, 14 January 1911; the Manitoba Free Press, 16 January 1911; 17 January 1911; and 4 July 1913. The Pelkey-McCarty incident received extensive newspaper coverage throughout North America. For a detailed synopsis, see Murray Greig, Go in’ The Distance: Canada’s Boxing Heritage (Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1996), 44-52.

<sup>146</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 3 December 1913.

<sup>147</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 22 January 1913.

<sup>148</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 17 December 1909.

bouts remained “high class,” manager Walter Deering ordered Eugene Tremblay and Walter Miller to arrive in Winnipeg several days before their 1 December 1913 match, “so that there [would] be no chance for a hitch and that everything [would] be above board and on the level.”<sup>149</sup> Walter Miller, as ordered, arrived in the city four days ahead of time and completed his training with several local wrestlers at the Boy’s Club.<sup>150</sup> Tremblay disregarded the stipulation and, citing prior bookings, did not appear in Winnipeg until two days before the match.<sup>151</sup> Deering’s effort to implement his proviso likely proved impotent because considerable advertising had already been purchased in local newspapers and advance ticket sales were already underway several days before the card.<sup>152</sup> Additionally, as the recognized world’s lightweight champion by virtue of his possessing the Police Gazette belt, his reputation as an attractive, “high class” drawing card gave him the leverage to effectively ignore such requests if they were not in accord with his interests.

Another strategy employed by promoters was to modify the sport’s conventions in an attempt to ensure a more satisfactory outcome for the spectators. In professional wrestling, inappropriate conduct was not the sole source for public controversy. Another contentious issue was the tendency for matches to occasionally devolve into marathon-like endurance contests where neither athlete emerged victorious.<sup>153</sup> Under Police Gazette rules, professional wrestling matches could be lengthy affairs. If, at the end of a stipulated time limit (commonly around two hours), both men had secured a single fall, or neither had secured any falls, the match was determined to be a draw. In some cases, despite the generous time limit, the question of the ‘better man’ still remained unsettled at the event’s termination: an outcome that was generally unpopular with the public, who preferred to see a definitive victory in sporting contests. Obtaining a victory proved difficult, however, if one of the wrestlers chose to adopt defensive tactics. In Winnipeg, debate over possible rule changes was particularly keen during 1912, as two recent main event matches had ended with neither man scoring a fall. The first, between Charles Gustafson and

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<sup>149</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 November 1913.

<sup>150</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 November 1913.

<sup>151</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 1 December 1913.

<sup>152</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 November 1913; 28 November 1913.

<sup>153</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 23 April 1912.

Cleveland's Otto Suter at the Walker Theatre, ended after approximately two hours when the referee terminated the match.<sup>154</sup> The second, between local featherweight standouts Ernie Sundberg and Alex Stewart, was finally called off at 3:00 am.<sup>155</sup> Following the Stewart-Sundberg match, several ideas were proposed. One suggestion, brought forward by Tom Cannon, a contemporary to Duncan C. Ross, who visited Winnipeg in early 1912, was to award the victory to the man who wrestled most aggressively, even if both men were even in falls or if no falls occurred.<sup>156</sup> Another proposed method, utilized by promoter Harry W. Heagren in Salt Lake City, Utah, was to abolish time limits altogether and have the men wrestle until two falls were secured. If one wrestler left the mat his purse was withheld. Similarly, if both contestants tried to agree to a draw, they received no pay.<sup>157</sup> When Stewart and Sundberg met for their final contest at the Empress Theatre, a third rule variation was implemented whereby both wrestlers agreed to go unpaid if no falls were secured. Further, if no falls were recorded in one hour, the first fall would win the match. To quell possible public discontent, and to reassure Empress Theatre owner John M. Cook with respect to his facility's good reputation, the match's promoter, Tom Russell, also agreed to refund all gate money if either man failed to appear or refused to step on the mat.<sup>158</sup> That Stewart finally secured a victory suggests the new rule structure may have assisted in overcoming the problem with stalemates. However, they were never again implemented in the province, and Manitoba remained adherent to the internationally-recognized Police Gazette standards. Despite complaints related to long, tiresome, and inclusive wrestling, most matches did not end in such an unsatisfactory fashion. In subsequent months, debate over the issue appears to have abated, and wrestling matches continued to attract good audiences.

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<sup>154</sup> With the time approaching midnight and both Suter and Gustafson visibly tiring, spectators began to call for a draw. After five minutes of virtual inactivity, referee R. Sutherland ended the match, and "there were few objections" expressed to his decision by those present. See the Manitoba Free Press, 22 December 1911.

<sup>155</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 April 1912.

<sup>156</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 17 April 1912.

<sup>157</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 23 April 1912.

<sup>158</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 21 May 1912; 23 May 1912; Winnipeg Telegram, 23 May 1912.

## Survival Amidst Controversy

In general, the question arises as to why professional wrestling, so frequently embroiled in controversy, remained a viable form of public entertainment. In one instance, after wrestler George LePage refused to participate in a match with Charles Gustafson due to a sparse turnout, both the Free Press and Tribune predicted that the sport had finally reached the point where public support would no longer be forthcoming. The Free Press described the incident as wrestling's "death blow" and the Tribune opined that "Wrestling in Winnipeg, which for some time past has been tottering, had its last pin kicked out from under it."<sup>159</sup> The Telegram, although not as fatalistic in their pronouncement, called the match as "fizzle" and stated that "Another black eye was given to the wrestling and boxing game in the city."<sup>160</sup> Still, shortly more than a month later, C.P. Walker and Walter Deering staged their first heavyweight contest at the Walker Theatre, and various venues throughout the city continued to host the sport, in many instances, drawing large crowds. Several factors appear to explain why wrestling, despite the numerous grievances against it, retained public favour.

First, wrestling was not alone among professional sports in Manitoba in receiving public criticism. Beyond the aforementioned issues concerning boxing, charges of excessive violence and fixing bedevilled many other athletic undertakings, including both team games such as hockey and baseball, and other individual sports such as running. Even newer sports, including motorcycle racing, did not escape suspicion.<sup>161</sup> The negative stigma surrounding money and sport remained well ingrained in many people's minds in the years prior to World War I, and professional wrestling was just one of numerous professional sports that attracted (and often warranted) adverse press. Although professionalism came under frequent attack, there was also a growing understanding that the most skilled athletes were the ones who could demand- and receive- remuneration for their services. As a direct corollary, additional practice time, made possible through receiving money for athletic performances, allowed the practitioner's skills

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<sup>159</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 19 May 1910; Winnipeg Tribune, 19 May 1910.

<sup>160</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 19 May 1910.

<sup>161</sup> Mott, "Manly Sports," 244-245; Manitoba Free Press, 20 May 1910; 25 March 1911; 24 August 1912; 22 July 1914.

to be further honed.<sup>162</sup> Wrestling fans were cognizant that, when Charles Gustafson, Ernie Sundberg, Frank Gotch, Eugene Tremblay, and Walter Miller appeared before them, they were witnessing the best exponents that their province, and the world, had to offer.

Another critical element to professional wrestling's survival was the fact that, although many grapplers displayed poor sportsmanship, were exposed as "fakers," or exhibited otherwise controversial behaviour, this was not true of all practitioners. In Winnipeg, the city's three most prominent professional wrestlers, Charles Gustafson, Ernie Sundberg, and Alex Stewart, were involved in numerous bouts that elicited negative reactions both from the public and the press. However, it was consistently their opponent's actions, not their own, which were the sources for public complaint. To the contrary, all three men were seen to exemplify the many positive attributes accorded to professional wrestling, to the exclusion of its more nefarious elements. Gustafson's claim after the incident with Hume Duval at the Grand Opera House, of "always having acted on the square" appears to have been a widely-held perception. The Free Press noted in at least two instances that Gustafson was "always out to win" in his matches, and described him as "the cleanest middleweight that has ever appeared in Winnipeg."<sup>163</sup> After George LePage's refusal to wrestle due to poor attendance in 1910, the Tribune, in foretelling the sport's doom, lamented:

The popular local middleweight [Gustafson], together with Ernie Sundberg, has built up wrestling in this city, and it is unfortunate in the extreme that the end should come in a bout in which he was one of the principals. The writer does not hesitate to express the opinion that Gustafson is honest to the core. He has won his bouts on merit, and it is doubtful if a more straight-forward wrestler ever drew on pads. Gus has been a credit to the game and those who have followed his career since making Winnipeg his home will certainly not hold him responsible for the death blow dealt last night.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Frank Cosentino, "A History of the Concept of Professionalism in Canadian Sport" in Proceedings from the Third Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education, 18-21 August 1974 (Halifax, NS: Dalhousie University, 1974), 9; Cosentino, "A History of the Concept of Professionalism," 177, 205.

<sup>163</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 26 February 1910; 28 January 1911.

<sup>164</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 19 May 1910. In a retrospective look at wrestling matches staged during 1910, the Tribune, 17 December 1910, also stated concerning Gustafson and Sundberg that, "They may never arise beyond the local horizon, but when time has forced them from the arena they can look back on an honourable career... were all wrestlers as honest as Charlie Gustafson and Ernie Sunberg[sic] the game would never be under a shadow."

In a similar vein, after the wrestling match wherein he received two black eyes, the Tribune contended that Alex Stewart was, “as clean a little wrestler as ever stepped into a pair of wrestling trunks.”<sup>165</sup> The newspaper reinforced the idea that dishonesty was not a universal axiom among paid athletes in its call for regulation, stating that “Professional sport has suffered extensively as a result of a few renegades.”<sup>166</sup>

Wrestling fans certainly expected matches to be legitimate encounters, and as in previous decades, when athletes were discovered to be “faking,” the public no longer supported them. However, since the general perception surrounding many athletes remained favourable, the public was not inclined to disavow interest in the sport. When the latest perpetrator had left the vicinity, wrestling aficionados were soon willing to forget past transgressions and re-invest their faith in local talent and well-known visiting grapplers with strong reputations. Newspapers sportswriters likewise proved fickle in their condemnation, as just two days after the Free Press sounded wrestling’s “death blow” in Winnipeg, for example, they announced Alex Stewart’s arrival in the city, unabashedly singing his praises as an athlete who “plays the game fair every time.”<sup>167</sup>

## **Conclusion**

By World War I, professional wrestling, the issues noted above aside, had emerged as an indisputably popular past-time, far eclipsing the immediate post-Confederation decades both in terms of the number of athletes involved and the frequency with which events were staged. Wrestling’s popularity stemmed, in part, from the overall growth in interest surrounding sport during the period. However, public affinity for wrestling is also attributable in large measure to its growing capacity to represent, through ritualized physical combat, numerous values which Manitobans held to be important during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet, as wrestling’s popularity grew, it was also beset by ever more frequent controversies that threatened to alienate its many supporters. Despite the

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<sup>165</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 22 January 1913.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 20 May 1910.

many problems surrounding it, professional wrestling was able to thrive because of public faith that many athletes represented the better qualities intrinsic to the sport, not its abhorrent excesses.

Professional wrestling, however, did not prosper in the years before the Great War solely because its practitioners exemplified such qualities as ideal male physical development, scientific progressivism and aggressive masculinity. As Manitoba's population expanded rapidly after 1896, its ethnic composition likewise altered dramatically. Changing demographic characteristics had a profound effect on professional wrestling, as various ideas related to nativism, ethnic pride, cultural survival, and ethnic nationalism found expression on the mat.



### **Chapter III Wrestling and Ethnicity, 1901-1914**

As the summer of 1901 began, Winnipeg's residents were greeted by the sight of an immense, dark-skinned man on the city's downtown streets. At a height of 6' 4 ½" and a weight of 246 pounds, the new arrival certainly dwarfed most of the individuals around him. What made him stand out even more than his size was his adornment in "the costume of his country": a form of "picturesque oriental attire" that caused many Manitobans to take pause as they went about their business. Soon accompanied by a cadre of admiring young boys, he made his way to the various newspaper offices, where it was officially announced that he would wrestle and defeat any ten men that could be put against him in one hour, or forfeit \$200. He further expressed his willingness to deposit \$500 "at a moments notice" with the Winnipeg Tribune sports editor for a match in Winnipeg against "any man in the world, bar nobody." As both the summer and the century dawned, Mouradoulah, the "Terrible Turk," had arrived in town.<sup>1</sup>

The Terrible Turk's appearance in Winnipeg occurred during a period of dramatic demographic change in Western Canada. At the turn of the twentieth century, both the region and, more particularly, its dominant metropolitan centre, were undergoing a remarkable metamorphosis as large numbers of immigrant settlers arrived in Canada's "Last Best West." Although previous decades saw British-Canadians establish both numerical and cultural dominance, after 1896 settlers were being drawn from a variety of nations. Over the next two decades, Winnipeg was transformed from a city whose population was mainly of British heritage, into Canada's most diverse multicultural urban centre. At the same time, professional wrestling grew remarkably in popularity. As a sport, it echoed Western Canada's growing diversity, drawing athletes from a variety of nationalities. Due to its multicultural character, wrestling never carried a single, transcendent meaning that all Manitobans could universally agree upon. Depending on the context in which it took place, wrestling could represent very different things to different ethnic groups. For members of the Anglo-Canadian majority, wrestling often highlighted the

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<sup>1</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 19 June 1901; Winnipeg Tribune, 19 June 1901.

apprehension that many residents felt with the region's growing diversity. Even among peoples of British ancestry, however, wrestling occasionally helped to illustrate old-country rivalries. For European immigrant peoples in general, wrestling represented a culturally relevant and accessible form of public entertainment that served to reinforce their own nationalist sentiments. Although wrestling frequently fuelled inter-group enmity, it also served more constructive purposes. For non Anglo-Protestant minority communities with a long settlement history in the West, traditional folk wrestling could be an expression of a desire to preserve their own customs. Representative of this point were, for example, the Icelanders, who saw in their ancient glima wrestling a way of retaining important links to their past in the face of assimilationist pressures. For other ethnic groups of more recent arrival, particularly those coming from regions of Continental Europe where statehood was tenuous or embryonic, the sport could serve more expressly political ends. As an examination of the Winnipeg Polish community suggests, wrestling provided a medium through which to express and publicize a blossoming sense of national consciousness.

### **The Immigration Boom**

By the late 1890s, Western Canada's ethnic composition began to dramatically alter due to a combination of international and domestic factors. The last few three years of the decade marked the end of a global economic depression that had begun in 1873. Increased economic prosperity in Europe resulted in greater demand for Prairie grain. Simultaneously, agricultural expansion ceased on the American frontier. The American West had long been the preferred destination for immigrants seeking homestead grants, but with land becoming increasingly unavailable, settlers turned to the Canadian prairies.<sup>2</sup> While the majority of new settlers continued to be drawn from the United States, Great Britain, and Eastern Canada, changes to Canadian immigration policy following the election of Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal Party in 1896 resulted in thousands of new arrivals from non-English speaking countries. Clifford Sifton, Member of Parliament for Brandon, was appointed Minister of the Interior by the new prime

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<sup>2</sup> Morton, *Manitoba*, 264; Bellan, *Winnipeg First Century*, 59, 62; Thompson, *Forging*, 72.

minister and made considerable effort to settle the West, as in 1892, immigration had fallen under that department's mandate.<sup>3</sup> Under Sifton's direction, the Department undertook an aggressive campaign to lure immigrants from Northern, Eastern and Central Europe. Sifton's overarching objective was to populate the West with agrarian settlers, and he believed it necessary to look beyond Britain and other English-speaking dominions to find a sufficient number of people who were suitable for the task of farming in the challenging prairie environment.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to many Canadians of his era, Sifton later contended that he was "indifferent as to whether or not [the immigrant] is British born." Instead, he famously maintained that, "a stalwart peasant in a sheep-skin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children," was of greater value to the expanding nation than, for example, an urban British trades unionist who would not engage in farm labour.<sup>5</sup>

The immigration boom that began during the late 1890s did not result in an equal distribution of population between Manitoba and the regions of the Northwest that, after 1905, constituted Saskatchewan and Alberta. Although rural Manitoba received approximately 94,000 immigrants between 1896 and 1914, such numbers paled in comparison to the 244,000 and 215,000 that settled in Saskatchewan and Alberta, respectively.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Manitoba's growth was impressive, and a comparison of the 1901 and 1911 censuses reveals an 80.8 percent increase in the province's population, compared to an overall national increase of 34.2 percent during the same period.<sup>7</sup> Winnipeg's growth was far more dramatic. In 1895, the city's population was approximately 38,500.<sup>8</sup> Over the next five years, growth continued at a modest pace, reaching 42,300 persons by 1901. In the decade thereafter, the city's population exploded, totalling over 136,000 by 1911.<sup>9</sup> As the "Gateway to the West," Winnipeg became the railway hub through which virtually all immigrants passed in Western Canada. In many cases, the new arrivals took

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<sup>3</sup> Hall, Clifford Sifton Volume One, 123.

<sup>4</sup> Bellan, Winnipeg First Century, 63; Hall, Clifford Sifton Volume One, 261- 265; and Hall, Clifford Sifton Volume Two, 68.

<sup>5</sup> Clifford Sifton, "The Immigrants Canada Wants," Maclean's, 1 April 1922.

<sup>6</sup> Marvin McInnis, "Migration," Historical Atlas of Canada Volume III, Plate 27.

<sup>7</sup> W. Peter Ward, "Population Growth in Western Canada, 1901-1971," The Developing West, 159.

<sup>8</sup> Bellan, Winnipeg First Century, 56.

<sup>9</sup> Artibise, Winnipeg, 142.

up residence in the city, either as itinerant labourers or as permanent residents.<sup>10</sup> After 1896, the city's ethnic character began to change considerably, as the percentage of the population drawn of British ancestry steadily diminished.<sup>11</sup> Although Winnipeg society had never constituted a homogeneous mass either in terms of ethnicity or world view, English-speaking Canadians were well established as the cultural majority by the mid-1890s, and the overwhelming consensus, at least among Anglo-Canadians, was that both Winnipeg and the rest of the province should retain their British-Canadian character. As Alan Artibise notes, "the concept of cultural pluralism (or a cultural mosaic), used so often to describe Canadian society in later years, was not even contemplated in Winnipeg during this period."<sup>12</sup> However, Winnipeg's growing non-English speaking 'foreign' population was seen by many to hinder the ongoing mission, articulated decades earlier, of extending the British Empire onto Prairie soil.<sup>13</sup>

As disturbing as the spectre of 'foreign' immigration was for many members of Manitoba society during the period, attracting peoples of non-British origin to the Prairies proved to be an economic necessity for further growth. Officially, the Immigration Branch of the federal government sought people who would assist in expanding the West's agricultural economy, either as homesteaders or as farm labourers.<sup>14</sup> Agricultural development did not occur in economic isolation, and rapid expansion of the existing railroad infrastructure was required to ensure that farmers had efficient access to national and international grain markets. Winnipeg's growth during the years after 1896 was linked to its ongoing role as the central hub for the region's railway industry and grain trade. Additionally, as the prairie population continued to expand, Winnipeg became the region's major manufacturing centre, providing a variety of finished goods to the Prairie population.<sup>15</sup> Officially, the federal government viewed homesteading and settlement as the objective of its immigration policy, yet many immigrants, lacking the capital required to

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<sup>10</sup> Coates and McGuiness, Manitoba, 62, 65.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel J. Hiebert, "Winnipeg: A Divided City," Historical Atlas of Canada Volume III, Plate 31.

<sup>12</sup> Artibise, Winnipeg, 196.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-198.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Avery, Reluctant Host: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1995), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Phillips, "The Prairie Urban System, 1911-1961: Specialization and Change," in Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development, ed. Alan Artibise (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1981), 11-13. For a discussion of the manufacturing industries that appeared in Winnipeg during this time, see Bellan, Winnipeg First Century, 76-77.

establish themselves on farms, instead provided the cheap labour required by Prairie industry to support continued economic advancement.<sup>16</sup>

Winnipeg became home to a large number of the new immigrant industrial proletariat who settled in the city. Although economic conditions during the first decade of the twentieth century were generally quite favourable and jobs were relatively plentiful, immigrant wages, particularly among the non-English speaking segments of the population, frequently failed to reflect the region's overall prosperity. Prior to the beginning of the Great War, many immigrant workers were earning less than half of the wage required to maintain an adequate standard of living in the city. Accordingly, many families were required to live in cramped, unsafe, and unsanitary conditions.<sup>17</sup> Civic authorities generally ignored the appeals made by charitable institutions on behalf of the poor, and provided negligible funds toward relief efforts.<sup>18</sup> During the last few years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, Winnipeg's ethnic character took on a distinct spatial form, as poor immigrants came increasingly to settle in the city's North End in ethnic "ghettoes," isolated from the rest of the population by the massive railway marshalling yards north of Logan Street.<sup>19</sup> Their generally poor living conditions, and the resultant filth and disease, exacerbated existing ethnic tensions in the city, feeding Anglo-Canadian perceptions of many immigrant peoples as 'dirty foreigners.'<sup>20</sup> Additionally, many English-speaking labourers and their representatives in the union movement quickly grew resentful of immigrant peoples who, through their willingness to work for wages "below the Canadian standard," drove the cost of labour down.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Avery, Reluctant Host, 21; Friesen, The Canadian Prairies, 246-247; Thompson, Forging, 77.

<sup>17</sup> Artibise, Winnipeg, 186; David Jay Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations and General Strike (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), 4; Coates and McGuiness, Manitoba, 75.

<sup>18</sup> Artibise, Winnipeg, 186.

<sup>19</sup> For an excellent visual representation of Winnipeg's growing ethnic diversity and the spatial separation that accompanied it, see Heibert, "Winnipeg: A Divided City."

<sup>20</sup> Les Wawrow, "Nativism in English Canada: Attitudes of Anglo-Saxons to the Influx of 1896-1914 Immigration," in From Prairies to Cities: Papers on the Poles in Canada, ed. Benedykt Heydenkorn (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute, 1975), 73, 75.

<sup>21</sup> Elisabeth B. Mitchell, In Western Canada Before the War: Impressions of Early Twentieth Century Prairie Communities (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1981), 184; Doug Smith, Let Us Rise! A History of the Manitoba Labour Movement (Winnipeg, MB: Public Press, 1985), 21.

Anglo-Canadians retained their preeminent position as the economic, political and social leaders in Manitoba society, despite frequent cries by the press and public that immigrants posed a threat to the ‘proper’ social order.<sup>22</sup> Tempering hostility toward immigrant peoples in the pre-war period was the general belief that, over time, non-English speaking Europeans could be assimilated to the dominant society’s cultural norms and practices.<sup>23</sup> However, during the early twentieth century, assimilation remained largely a hopeful prognostication, not a description of contemporary reality. The shrill call for cultural uniformity according to the Anglo-Canadian model, in fact, did little to assuage the concerns of many immigrants that they were, and would remain, unwelcome second-class citizens with little opportunity for advancement in their new home.<sup>24</sup>

### **Wrestling and Ethnic Tensions**

In the first decade of the twentieth century, wrestling experienced a remarkable growth in popularity in large part because the sport’s one-on-one character allowed ethnic diversity to be accentuated in a fashion that was not always possible with team sports. While popular games such as hockey or baseball may have capitalized on a specific players’ nationality to draw spectators, it was difficult, although not impossible, to stock an entire roster with athletes from a single ethnic group. Thus, at least with respect to ethnicity, there typically existed the potential for ambiguity concerning a team’s ‘representative’ nature.<sup>25</sup> With wrestling, it was a much more straightforward matter to create the conditions where ethnic pride and inter-ethnic tensions could play the central role in generating interest amongst spectators because only two individuals were directly involved in the contest.

During the 1880s and 1890s, Manitoba’s wrestlers, much like the majority of the province’s residents, were drawn from British-Canadian backgrounds. John Blackie, John McKeown, John Allen,

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<sup>22</sup> Thompson, *Forging*, 76, 77. See, for example, “The Menace of Anti-Canadian Nationalism” in the *Manitoba Free Press*, 29 July 1914

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, *In Western Canada*, 177.

<sup>24</sup> Artibise, *Winnipeg*, 196.

<sup>25</sup> One notable exception in this regard, albeit from a later period, concerns the Manitoba Falcons hockey team, which won Canada’s first gold medal at the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp. The Falcons’ squad was composed almost entirely of Icelandic-Canadian players.

E.W. Johnston, F.H. Joslin, Elwood Rourke, John Allen, and J.W. Moffitt, Manitoba's most prominent wrestlers during the period, all had British surnames. Matsuada Sorakichi's appearances in Winnipeg during 1886 do not appear to have generated any overt racism either from spectators or the press, although both certainly noted his ethnicity. This likely stemmed from the fact that British peoples then saw no concrete threat to their dominance from peoples of other ethnic backgrounds. A Japanese wrestler in Manitoba, while certainly a novelty, was not a cultural threat. Therefore, while commentary concerning wrestling's "respectability" as a sporting past-time appeared in public discourse, and would continue to do so, the cultural homogeneity of its participants ensured that race and ethnicity were not yet a significant concern. However, by the turn of the century, with immigrant numbers rising, local wrestling bouts were becoming an outlet for expressing nativist sentiments. A striking example of this emergent trend can be seen as early as 1901 and 1902, in the series of bouts featuring Mouradoulah, the Terrible Turk.

When Mouradoulah (also spelled Mourad Alah) arrived in Winnipeg on 18 June, local wrestling devotees were already familiar with Turkish wrestlers. Three years earlier, the original "Terrible Turk," Ismael Yousouf, appeared on North American mats. During 1898, Winnipeg dailies reported regularly on his wrestling tour throughout the United States and Central Canada.<sup>26</sup> Although Yousouf perished aboard *LaBourgogne* when it sank off the coast of Newfoundland in July of that year, a number of Turkish wrestlers (many of whom were actually Bulgarian by ethnicity), followed his example by emigrating to American shores.<sup>27</sup> Within a few days of Mouradoulah's arrival, a match was arranged with American

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<sup>26</sup> See for example the *Manitoba Free Press*, 2 May 1898; 6 June 1898; 27 June 1898; and the *Nor'Wester*, 21 March 1898; 5 May 1898; and 19 May 1898.

<sup>27</sup> Graham Noble provides an excellent examination of the original "Terrible Turk's" North American tour and the racist legends that developed surrounding his demise in "The Life and Death of the Terrible Turk," *Journal of Manly Arts* 1 (2001), [http://ejmas.com/jmanly/articles/2001/jmanlyart\\_noble\\_0501.htm](http://ejmas.com/jmanly/articles/2001/jmanlyart_noble_0501.htm) (accessed 23 April 2010). Hali Adali, variously termed "The Sultan's Lion" and the "Lion of Constantinople" was one of the Turkish wrestlers who arrived in North America shortly after Yousouf's demise. Press reports during his 1899 tour noted his easy handling of American and British wrestlers such "Farmer" Burns, "Gripman" Rooney, and Tom Cannon who "bowed to his strength and cunning." Adali was reputed to be even more dangerous than his predecessor, who he was said to have defeated in the presence of the Sultan of Constantinople. See the *Winnipeg Voice*, 3 March 1899.

Tom Jenkins, “a wrestler of well known ability,” in which the Turk agreed to pin him three times in an hour.<sup>28</sup>

The bout between “Terrible Turk” Mouradoulah and Tom Jenkins, held on 27 June at the Winnipeg Theatre, attracted a large audience. The Turk succeeded in defeating his American opponent within the prescribed time limit, pinning him twice with a half-nelson and then forcing him to submit, or suffer a broken arm, with a hammerlock. One of the event’s most striking features was the crowd’s vocally partisan nature. Jenkins was the overwhelming favourite, and the people in attendance “cheered themselves hoarse,” when he was able to extricate himself from Mouradoulah’s grip.<sup>29</sup> Conversely, when the Turkish grappler scored his victories, “the gallery gods expressed their extreme disapprobation.”<sup>30</sup> The crowd’s reactions during the match do not appear to have been the result of direct antagonism on the Turk’s part. The Winnipeg Telegram opined that he was “a born wrestler, and fully demonstrated his right to claim championship honours,” and even in securing the painful hammerlock, used “a skillful piece of strategy,” as opposed to violence or brute force.<sup>31</sup> The Free Press corroborated their rival’s views, stating that, “when the Turk was awarded his falls... he was perfectly entitled to them.”<sup>32</sup> Additionally, no reports appeared in the papers before the match testifying to Mouradoulah’s poor behaviour while in the city, and even advertisements prior to his performance did nothing to accentuate a “Terrible” reputation. To the contrary, the Turk himself expressed misapprehension before the match about meeting Jenkins, stating that “[Jenkins] would not hesitate to put his fingers in my eyes if he got the chance, or commit other fouls. I have been warned by other people he has met and go prepared.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 24 June 1901; 26 June 1901. The Tom Jenkins appearing in Winnipeg was not the more famous grappler of the same name who claimed the American heavyweight catch-as-catch-can title on several occasions. He did, however, claim to be his cousin. See the Manitoba Free Press, 25 June 1901.

<sup>29</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 28 June 1901.

<sup>30</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 28 June 1901.

<sup>31</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 28 June 1901.

<sup>32</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 28 June 1901.

<sup>33</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 26 June 1901; Manitoba Free Press, 26 June 1901.



Nevertheless, the audience was firmly behind the American. The Turkish wrestler was much larger than the American, (6' 4 ½" and 246 pounds to Jenkins' 6' and 200 pounds).<sup>34</sup> However, when Mouradoulah wrestled Monte, the 6' 8", 345 pound "U.S. Giant" on 7 May the following year in a similarly well attended and "scientific" match, crowd reaction was much the same.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore probable that the audience belligerence was a direct result of his "foreign" nature. The apparently spontaneous character of the public's reaction is testimony to the already widespread nativist sentiment in the city at the turn of the century. Even J.S. Woodsworth, director of Winnipeg's All-Peoples Mission and one of the greatest humanitarians Canada has ever produced, was a product of his time and context, writing under a decade later that peoples of Turkish descent, along with other 'Levantine Races' "constitute[d] one of the least desirable classes of immigrants."<sup>36</sup> Dr. Allan McLaughlin was more specific in his criticism, claiming that they had an "Oriental subtlety," and that years of oppression had bred in them the necessity to lie, deceive, and "only tell the truth when it will serve their purpose best."<sup>37</sup> Other sources on Turkey available to turn-of-the-century Manitobans such as Reverend Edwin M. Bliss' Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities were not as wholly condemnatory, but nevertheless reinforced negative views, noting that, "With some noble qualities [the Turk] unites some that are brutal and contemptible in the extreme."<sup>38</sup> Although few Turks could be counted among Winnipeg's population at the turn of the twentieth century, Mouradoulah's strikingly "swarthy" appearance, and his keen ability to dispose of more domestic-looking foes, would have been a reminder of the perceived threat posed by "Mr. Sifton's Grand 'Round Up' of European Freaks and Hoboes," to British-Canadian ascendancy.<sup>39</sup>

In the ensuing years after Mouradoulah's turn on local mats, ethnicity took on heightened importance in promoting wrestling matches. Beginning in 1905, another "Turk," James Theran, popularly billed as "The Young Turk," made Winnipeg his home and captured a great deal of attention in

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<sup>34</sup> Both men's measurements are given in the Manitoba Free Press, 19 June 1901; and 25 June 1901, respectively.

<sup>35</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 7 May 1902; 8 May 1902.

<sup>36</sup> J.S. Woodsworth, Strangers Within Our Gates or Coming Canadians (Original edition 1909; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 167.

<sup>37</sup> Allan McLaughlin, quoted in *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>38</sup> Edwin M. Bliss, Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities (Location Unknown: J. Coghlan, 1896), 84.

<sup>39</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 28 June 1901; Coates and McGuinness, Manitoba, 65.

a number of matches with explicitly ethnic overtones. His first bout on local mats following his arrival from Eastern Canada, staged as an additional attraction to an amateur boxing tournament, was against Tom Dixon (Dickinson), a native of London, England, a former member of the Finchley Harriers athletic club, and later the wrestling instructor at the Winnipeg YMCA.<sup>40</sup> Their bout, won by Theran after a single fall in eleven minutes, was described as “the prettiest exhibition of wrestling ever seen in the city.”<sup>41</sup> Thereafter, Theran issued, and received, numerous challenges for matches, and posted cash forfeits with the Free Press. Several of his opponents and would-be challengers, were clearly of British heritage, including Charles Beards and Duncan Johnston.<sup>42</sup> However, matches did not always simply adhere to the convention of pitting an Anglo-Canadian against a “foreigner,” and thus reinforcing nativist sentiments toward “undesirable” immigrants.<sup>43</sup> To the contrary, turn-of-the-century wrestling reflected a far more dynamic interplay between various ethnic groups than simply pitting members of Manitoba’s economically and socially dominant British population against peoples of other ethnicities.

James Theran wrestled extensively in Manitoba during 1905 and 1906, both in Winnipeg and other centres, with his moniker of “The Young Turk” ever-present in the press surrounding his matches. He made his first appearance in Brandon little more than a month after his initial match in Winnipeg. Performing to a “fairly good” crowd of spectators, Theran agreed to defeat Peter Larsen, “a Dane” from Brandon three times in thirty minutes or forfeit \$25 to the local hospital. The crowd appeared to be strongly behind the local Danish grappler and became so excited that the referee threatened to stop the match. When Theran ultimately failed in his attempt, those in attendance took up a collection on Larsen’s behalf in appreciation for his efforts. Although four boxing bouts were scheduled to take place after the wrestling, they were called off because, “having spent all its enthusiasm,” the crowd left.<sup>44</sup> Theran’s

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<sup>40</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 20 October 1905. Founded in 1879, the Finchley Harriers was a prominent athletic club in England’s Middlesex county that was particularly well known for its many regional and national titles in cross-country running. See William Page, ed. A History of the County of Middlesex Volume 2 (Suffolk, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2004), 302.

<sup>41</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 30 June 1901.

<sup>42</sup> See the Manitoba Free Press, 3 November 1905; 6 November 1905; 9 November 1905.

<sup>43</sup> In mid-November, for example, Theran’s manager was also approached by “two Russians” in the city who wished to face the Turk for a side-bet match. Manitoba Free Press, 15 November 1905.

<sup>44</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 November 1905.

matches continued to generate considerable interest in the ensuing months. In one instance, both the sheer number and fervour of the spectators proved too much for Winnipeg's Arcade Theatre, when the small facility's top balcony partially collapsed during a best three-of-five falls match between "the Young Turk" and Minnesota grappler Jack Root.<sup>45</sup>

No evidence exists to suggest that Theran received the same degree of negative public reaction as his (alleged) countryman Mouradoulah three years earlier. Nevertheless, it was clear, by the attention surrounding his matches, that the "Young Turk" moniker was standing him in good stead as a box office attraction. Many other 'ethnic' wrestlers subsequently appeared on mats in the province, including "Italian Champion" W. Vic, who faced "German Grappler" T. Cook, Pat Connelly, "The Irish Giant," who likewise faced "The German" Max Schultz, and many others.<sup>46</sup> Even a number of British-born wrestlers adopted explicitly ethnic monikers including "Scotch Giant" Charles Taylor, and Alex Munro, the "Scottish Lion."<sup>47</sup> In some cases, statements made by wrestlers clearly reflected, or capitalized on, feelings of inter-cultural rivalry. Although commonly exploiting Anglo-Canadian concern over "foreigners," sometimes the reverse was also true. For instance, prior to Max Schultz's match with Pat Connelly, the Free Press commented that, "the German says that he is going to insist on having either a German or Polish referee in this match... and is asking for his kind of referee so as to have a fair shake, as he knows that Connelly is very popular here and thinks that unless he has one of his own countrymen for a referee they will show partiality to Connelly."<sup>48</sup> Schultz's statement, even if nothing more than promotional hyperbole, nevertheless illustrates that ethnic rivalry and mistrust were recognized by wrestlers from various backgrounds as a viable means for attracting their fellow countrymen to wrestling contests.

Inter-ethnic competition proved to be a strong drawing card in Manitoba during the early twentieth century, but it is also clear that within British-Canadian society itself, long-held rivalries

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<sup>45</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 January 1906; Winnipeg Telegram, 27 January 1906.

<sup>46</sup> See the Winnipeg Tribune, 5 November 1910; Manitoba Free Press, 18 July 1910;

<sup>47</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 2 January 1908; 15 March 1912.

<sup>48</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 20 July 1910.

between different regions in the ancestral homeland could engender similarly passionate feelings.

Although the ratio of non-British settlers relative to British settlers on the Prairies increased in the years after 1896, Manitoba nevertheless continued to receive large numbers of English-speaking immigrants. When compared to the other Prairie provinces, in fact, the percentage of British-born arrivals in the province remained higher than in both Alberta and Saskatchewan during the years prior to the Great War.<sup>49</sup> In general, as John Herd Thompson argues, a broad sense of British identity emerged on the Prairies that, through membership in common civic and religious institutions, dulled the intensity of differences among the English, Scot, Welsh and (Protestant) Irish. Perceived economic threats from Continental European immigrants in particular served as the catalyst for uniting British peoples.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, old-country rivalries could be brought to the fore, particularly in events that did not generally include members from outside the English-speaking community, such as the inaugural Scottish Athletic Association's Highland Games.

Scottish athletics already had a history in Manitoba dating back more than a generation by the time the Scottish Athletic Association of Winnipeg began staging annual highland games programs, beginning on Labour Day, 1906. During the inaugural event, attended by over 3,000 people from across Manitoba, athletes competed in various events for cash prizes of up to \$20. In subsequent years, the re-named Scottish Amateur Athletic Association of Winnipeg, eschewing the principle of monetary compensation for athletes, instead offered prizes to event winners such as gold cups, tobacco, cigars, medallions and gold and silver watches.<sup>51</sup> The Scottish Athletic Association officially invited "Men of All Nationalities" to compete in their Highland Games competitions, but an examination of prizewinner lists from the first year of competition suggests that nobody of non-British descent participated.<sup>52</sup> In the absence of "foreign" participants, parochialism instead came to the fore, especially in public commentary

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<sup>49</sup> McInnis, "Migration."

<sup>50</sup> Thompson, *Forging*, 76-77.

<sup>51</sup> Winnipeg *Telegram*, 4 September 1906; Manitoba *Free Press*, 4 September 1906; Archives of Manitoba, MG10 D3, Scottish Amateur Athletic Association of Manitoba Collection, Scottish Amateur Athletic Association of Winnipeg Highland Games Official Program, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1911.

<sup>52</sup> See the Manitoba *Free Press*, 4 September 1906.

surrounding the wrestling events, where debate following the Games centred on the respective merits of Highland and border Scot athletes. Writing to the Free Press under the pseudonym “Icthart,” a border county spectator jabbed the “kilted clans” for their failure to secure victory in the wrestling events. In open mockery of the clansmen’s athletic prowess, Icthart noted that “a little elderly man called Robert Miller” from Denholm, Roxfordshire, and weighing 133 pounds, was able to “send to the grass the Highland champion Charles McLean, a man of 220 lbs.”<sup>53</sup> Likewise, the wrestling tournament’s winner, George Hume, “a raw plowman... who came in on the morning train to share in the fun... [and was ] not within 50 lbs of the weight of the defeated Highland champion [J. McDermid],” earned praise for winning the \$20 first prize.<sup>54</sup> Icthart’s inflammatory remarks immediately elicited a response. A slighted Highlander, under the name “Mac Inopa” claimed that many of Icthart’s allegations regarding the wrestling events were inaccurate. He concluded his response to the border man by stating that, “[I]f any Border wrestler in the city wishes a match, either in Cumberland, Graeco-Roman, or catch-as-catch-can, he will be immediately accommodated. This I insert to hold up the honour of the highlands and to keep the Borderer from thinking mighty things.”<sup>55</sup> The debate continued in the newspaper, although an Englishman named A. Tyke, himself questioned the necessity for such vitriol, asking, “Why does [Icthart] not take an interest in his countrymen from Scotland instead of knocking them down, as he is doing with his very clever and sarcastic remarks.”<sup>56</sup> Little appears to have come of the highland-border Scot debate, although its colourful and heated character indicates that sporting rivalries could, at times, accentuate cultural cleavages amongst even the narrowest sub-stratums of the population. Following the second-annual highland games, the old country regional antagonism does not appear to have been renewed, perhaps owing in part to the fact that non-British athletes were beginning to make inroads into the competition. In 1907, wrestling titles were contested under catch-as-catch-can rules in two weight

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<sup>53</sup> Icthart, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 5 September 1906.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Mac Inopa, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 6 September 1906.

<sup>56</sup> A. Tyke, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 6 September 1906.

divisions, with the heavyweight title going to Stanley Sielski, a local Polish wrestler. Two Polish athletes, S. Bolek and L. Stafek, also competed in the lightweight class (145 pounds and under).<sup>57</sup>

### **Wrestling's Broad Ethnic Appeal**

The widespread presence of non-Anglo-Canadian athletes in Manitoba wrestling by the first decade of the twentieth century reflected more general trends in which members of many ethnic groups began to adopt greater interest in sports.<sup>58</sup> However, wrestling appears to have had a particularly wide appeal outside of the English-speaking community, as evidenced by both the large number of “foreign” grapplers headlining professional wrestling cards, and the success of non-British athletes in traditionally-British events such as highland games wrestling competitions. Wrestling's strong multicultural appeal can be traced to a number of interrelated factors. Wrestling was one of the few sports that many European immigrants, regardless of their country of origin, had some level of familiarity with upon their arrival in Canada. By the time the Canadian West became a popular destination for non-British settlers, many ethnic groups, including Austrians, Estonians, Finns, Germans, Hungarians, Italians, and Poles, could already boast of a network of athletic organizations that taught wrestling, as well as national champion wrestlers, in their homelands.<sup>59</sup> Many sports such as ice hockey, baseball, and soccer were first imported by British-Canadians and then adopted, or in the case of the latter, consciously taught, to immigrant peoples as part of a larger mission to assimilate them to Anglo-Canadian norms.<sup>60</sup> Wrestling certainly accompanied early English-speaking settlers to the Canadian West, but could not claim a similar position as a unique element of their cultural heritage. To the contrary, because of its widespread popularity in Europe, wrestling facilitated a level of cultural continuity between the New World and the

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<sup>57</sup> Archives of Manitoba, MG10 D3, Scottish Amateur Athletic Association of Manitoba Collection, Scottish Amateur Athletic Association of Winnipeg Highland Games Official Program, 1907.

<sup>58</sup> Morris Mott, “One Solution to the Urban Crisis: Manly Sports and Winnipeggers, 1900-1914,” *Urban History Review* 12, 2 (October 1983), 64.

<sup>59</sup> For a historical overview of wrestling in each respective country, see Heikki Lehmusto, *History of Wrestling* (Helsinki: By the Author, 1939), 58-85. In continental Europe prior to 1900, important wrestling tournaments were attracting participants from many nations. One tournament, held in Paris during November 1899 for instance, attracted athletes from France, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Belgium, Turkey, and Russia. One athlete from Africa also participated. See Hackenschmidt, *The Way to Live*, 123.

<sup>60</sup> Mott, “One Solution,” 64, 65-66.

Old. Although the most prevalent wrestling style in Continental Europe during the period was Graeco-Roman wrestling, many prominent European wrestlers proved themselves capable of adapting quickly to catch-as-catch-can rules and competing on even terms with their English-speaking counterparts.

Aiding wrestling's position as an intelligible and culturally relevant sporting pastime for many Continental European immigrants, was its continued association with theatres. Soon after the turn of the century, Manitoba's theatre owners realized that the influx of European immigrants represented a new market for commercial entertainment. Although linguistic barriers made certain theatrical entertainments such as plays inaccessible to many European-Canadians, vaudeville theatre, which often featured non-speaking physical performances, did not present the same obstacles to universal understanding.<sup>61</sup> For profit-seeking theatre owners, wrestling represented a similar form of "universal" entertainment, whereby language posed no impediment to enjoyment. As a result, wrestling matches were regularly staged in the province's many theatrical venues. In addition to the Arcade and Winnipeg theatres, Manitoba's capital also hosted matches featuring wrestlers of various ethnicities at the Dominion Theatre and Grand Opera House, and in Brandon, wrestlers performed at the Wheat City's Opera House.<sup>62</sup> In some instances, wrestling acts were included as part of the vaudeville entertainment, such as when Scandinavian wrestler Ollie (Ole) Samson and the German, Max Schultz, agreed to "close the show" in a series of engagements at Winnipeg's Dominion theatre by offering "a scientific demonstration of the art of wrestling" with "nothing fixed up" during the end of May and beginning of June, 1910.<sup>63</sup> In a direct effort to appeal to non-English speaking peoples, wrestling promoters also took out advertisements for matches in non-English language newspapers.<sup>64</sup>

Although wrestlers were drawn from a diverse array of backgrounds in Manitoba at the turn of the century, it is evident that the sport was not uniformly popular among all ethnic groups. Some

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<sup>61</sup> Reg Skene, "C.P. Walker and the Business of Theatre: Merchandizing Entertainment in a Continental Context," in *The Political Economy of Manitoba*, eds. James Silver and Jeremy Hull (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1990), 137.

<sup>62</sup> See, respectively, the Winnipeg *Tribune*, 18 March 1909; 5 April 1909; Brandon *Sun*, 15 May 1902.

<sup>63</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 25 May 1910; 28 May 1910.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, *Le Manitoba*, 26 November 1913 for an advertisement concerning an upcoming match at Winnipeg's Walker Theatre between French-Canadian Eugene Tremblay and Polish-born Walter Miller.

communities displayed a particularly strong propensity for wrestling, and attached to it their own distinctive set of cultural values and practices. Notable in both respects were two peoples with highly disparate histories: Icelanders and Poles. Both made unique contributions to Manitoba's early wrestling heritage, but did so in very different ways.

### **Wrestling and the Icelandic-Canadian Community**

Icelandic settlement in Manitoba dates to the fall of 1875, just three years after passage of the Dominion Lands Act. Although Aboriginal and Metis settlement occurred long earlier, Icelanders were the second major non-British ethnic group to populate the province after Confederation, having been preceded a year earlier by Mennonites from Russia who formed bloc settlements southeast of Winnipeg along the Rat River. Unlike their Anabaptist contemporaries, environmental catastrophe, as opposed to religious persecution, provided the impetus for Icelandic emigration. Repeated volcanic eruptions on their island, beginning in 1783 and continuing throughout the nineteenth century, rendered large tracts of pasture unsuitable for agriculture. At the behest of Canadian Immigration officials, several hundred farmers made the journey to Western Canada to establish themselves on the land. Eschewing the southern grasslands in favour of the more rugged pastoral terrain in the Interlake district, the settlers founded the colony of Gimli on the shores of Lake Winnipeg in 1875, just north of what was then the Manitoba border. Following the initial Icelandic cohort of 285 individuals in 1875, a group of approximately 1,200 arrived the next summer. Despite numerous setbacks including poor weather, flooding, and a smallpox outbreak in 1876, the colonists persevered and by 1890, numbered approximately 7,000.<sup>65</sup>

Once settled in their new homeland, Icelandic-Canadians resumed many of their old-world economic practices, including animal husbandry and fishing. Unlike many immigrant peoples who came later from Central and Eastern Europe, literacy was virtually universal in the Icelandic community, and

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<sup>65</sup> Morton, Manitoba, 160, 162; Waite, Canada, 1874-1896, 62; Jean R. Burnet and Howard Palmer, "Coming Canadians" An Introduction to a History of Canada's Peoples (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 26.



early residents devoted free time to Bible study and reading. Efforts by settlers therefore also focused on establishing churches, schools and libraries.<sup>66</sup> The intensive nature of farming in the Interlake district, in general, left little time for sport and recreation. However, physical prowess was held in high regard among the Icelandic people, so qualities such as strength and endurance were well respected within the community.<sup>67</sup> Although team sports were growing rapidly in popularity in the English-speaking world during the period when Icelanders were establishing themselves in Manitoba, they appear to have held little appeal among the first generation of settlers. With a strong cultural emphasis on individualism, the few sporting pursuits practiced by the Icelanders were of an individual nature.<sup>68</sup> Wrestling naturally lent itself well to this world view, and literally formed part of the sojourning experience, as members of the 1876 colonial cohort who travelled to Canada aboard the steamship *Phoenician* entertained themselves with songs, dance and bouts of traditional glima.<sup>69</sup>

Glima formed an important role in cultural maintenance for Icelanders following their arrival in Canada, helping to preserve a sense of continuity between the Old World and the New. Although debate exists concerning its cultural and etymological origins, glima, which means “Game of Gladness,” traces its origins to the Viking settlement period.<sup>70</sup> The earliest written reference to glima dates to circa 1230, appearing in *Egil’s Saga*.<sup>71</sup> Another early reference to the term appears in the 1325 law book *Johnsbok*, in which it was stated that anyone who participates in the activity must assume responsibility for themselves if injured.<sup>72</sup> Glima practitioners placed particular emphasis on skill and technique over brute strength. By emphasizing tripping and off-balancing using the legs, glima negated the advantage that

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<sup>66</sup> W. Kristjanon, *The Icelandic People in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: By the Author, 1965), 42, 44; Ingibjorg Sigurgeirsson McKillop, *Mikley The Magnificent Island. Treasure of Memories Hecla Island 1876-1976* (Steinbach, MB: By the Author, 1979), 183.

<sup>67</sup> Nelson S. Gerrard, *Icelandic River Saga* (Arborg, MB: Saga Publications, 1985), 147.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Kristjanon, *The Icelandic People*, 45.

<sup>70</sup> As noted by M. Nicholas Bennett in *Glima: Icelandic Wrestling* (New Orleans: By the Author, Date Unknown), 7-8, historical debate surrounds wrestling’s origins in Iceland. Some historians, notably Guy Jaouen and Henri Beon, argue for an exclusively Celtic origin to the activity, while Bennett himself rejects the theory as too simplistic, suggesting that a blending of traditional Celtic and Viking practices may have ultimately contributed to glima’s development.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>72</sup> Pete Kautz, “The Gripping History of Glima,” *Journal of Western Martial Art* 1 (January 2000), [http://ejmas.com/jwma/articles/2000/jwmaart\\_kautz\\_0100.htm](http://ejmas.com/jwma/articles/2000/jwmaart_kautz_0100.htm) (accessed 6 November 2009).

wrestlers with superior upper body strength often had over their weaker adversaries.<sup>73</sup> Although virtually no records exist specifically pertaining to matches during the first decade and a half of settlement in Manitoba, it is reasonable to assume that, if practiced en route to the North America, people continued to do so once established in their new home. Therefore, the Icelandic national wrestling style was likely being enjoyed in the Interlake district during the same period that the McKeown brothers were earning fame, and notoriety, in Winnipeg sporting circles. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, glima formed an integral part of the events associated with the annual *Islendingadagurinn* celebration, held annually on or around 2 August to commemorate the adoption of the Icelandic constitution on that day in 1874.<sup>74</sup>

Manitoba's *Islendingadagurinn* festivities, staged in Winnipeg between 1890 and 1932, and thereafter in Gimli, represented a conscious attempt to preserve important Icelandic traditions from assimilation. Simultaneously, the festivals also stressed the important role that Icelanders played in Canadian society. From the beginning, programmes contained elements that accentuated both ideas with varying intensity. Speeches by important Icelandic-Canadian officials emphasized the importance of cultural traditions and survival. During the inaugural event in 1890, organizer John Olafsson noted that Icelanders, "while they should aim to be... citizens of this country they should not forget to have warm emotions to the old land."<sup>75</sup> Similarly, E. Johannsson speaking on the same occasion, opined that, "While he was opposed to building a Chinese wall around his [community] to prevent assimilation, he was equally against too rapid assimilation, holding that strength of character and a proper degree of conservatism was a good thing for the individual and the nationality."<sup>76</sup> Many of the events associated with first *Islendingadagurinn* festivals also emphasized Icelanders' prominent place in their adopted

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<sup>73</sup> Kristjanon, *The Icelandic People*, 461; Manitoba *Free Press*, 4 August 1903.

<sup>74</sup> Quill Historical Society, *Reflection on the Quills* (Quill Lake, SK: Quill Lake Historical Society, 1981), 676. The decision to hold the festival annually on 2 August only occurred after considerable debate within the Icelandic community, which during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was prone to factional infighting. For details concerning both the decision making and planning processes surrounding the first *Islendingadagurinn* Festival, see Jonas Dor, *Islendingadagurinn 1890-1989: Saga Islendingadagsins: An Illustrated History* (Gimli, MB: The Icelandic Festival of Manitoba, 1989), 21-23.

<sup>75</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 4 August, 1890.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

homeland. Public addresses by dignitaries invited from outside of the community spoke of Icelander's many positive cultural traits, including industry, temperance, and thrift, which were well in accord with 'proper' Anglo-Canadian values. Additionally, the day's festivities were concluded with a rendition of "God Save the Queen." Editorial commentary regarding Icelandic-Canadians and their annual festival also eulogized their positive characteristics as immigrants.<sup>77</sup> While early Icelandic immigrants, like any non-English speaking peoples, faced prejudice upon their arrival in Canada, by the end of the nineteenth century, the *Islandingadurinn* festival also offered opportunities for assimilation-minded newspaper editorialists to contrast older, "desirable" immigrant peoples such as Icelanders against the newer Central and Southern Europeans who were taking up residence in the West.<sup>78</sup>

Although the *Islandingadurinn* festivals contained aspects that highlighted both the Icelandic and Canadian elements of their culture, the athletic programmes staged during the 1890s and just after the turn-of-the century, were a conscious expression of the former. Early events, adhering to Icelandic traditions of individualism in sports, favoured of such activities as footraces, pole vaulting, and swimming. In particular, however, the *Islandingadurinn* wrestling competitions represented an attempt to preserve Old World customs. While the various other individual sports were popular throughout Manitoba and practiced by athletes of various nationalities, *glima* wrestling was unique to Icelandic culture. Within a short time after their arrival in Manitoba, New Iceland's residents were already in the process of constructing a migration myth that placed their latest relocation within the context of a longstanding tradition of heroic voyage and settlement.<sup>79</sup> As an event that harkened back to the Viking age, *glima* wrestling placed Icelandic residents in a state of communion not only with their immediate predecessors, but with migrant ancestors from a millennium before.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Editorial comments in the *Free Press* on the same day noted that, "We in the Northwest have no better immigrants... The Icelanders possess to a large degree to power of adaptation, as well as the valuable faculty of assimilation. They become of ourselves without the least apparent effort. They adopt the ways of the country and lose no time in mastering the language of the majority... They are bound to succeed here and we can only wish that we had more of them."

<sup>78</sup> The Winnipeg *Telegram*, for example, commented on 3 August 1899, that "Those who were present [at the festival] could not but have been impressed with the superior character of that element of our population over the class now being imported in such large numbers into the country."

<sup>79</sup> Kirsten Wolf, "Emigration and Mythmaking: The Case of the Icelanders in Canada," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 33, 2 (2001), <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ahl&AN=A000517700.01&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (accessed 11 November 2009).

An examination of records pertaining to the first twenty-five *Islendingadurinn* festivals reveals that *glima* contests were not staged every year. This fact, however, does not suggest that the sport was peripheral to the festivities. *Glima* contests, like the other *Islendingadegurinn* athletic events, were always staged outdoors, so poor weather or lack of daylight occasionally prevented scheduled bouts from being held.<sup>80</sup> Matches occurred whenever the August weather permitted it, allowing Icelandic men to showcase their prowess in their age-old combative sport. In addition to preserving the art itself, by the first decade of the twentieth century, efforts were also being made to recognize individuals who adhered to *glima*'s prized principle of emphasizing technique over brute strength, even if they did not win their matches. In 1903, for instance, wrestler Paul Magnusson won a prize for "most skilful wrestling" despite finishing outside of the top three positions, and in 1906, Halldor Mathusalemsson, although suffering defeat, earned an award for "most scientific wrestler."<sup>81</sup> During the same period, however, the *Islendingadegurinn* sports programme also began to reflect Icelanders' growing acceptance of certain Anglo-Canadian customs. In 1901 and 1902, catch-as-catch-can wrestling bouts were staged alongside *glima*, and by 1909, baseball, a popular activity among Icelandic-Canadian youth for over a decade and periodically included in *Islendingadagurinn* programs, was also added to the regular itinerary.<sup>82</sup> Simultaneously, the Icelanders who frequented the festival were themselves displaying evidence that a quarter-century of living in a predominantly English-speaking province had resulted in their adopting many attributes of the dominant culture.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, British-Canadian sporting traditions never achieved complete hegemony, and the fact that *glima* retained a place in the *Islendingadagurinn* festivities throughout the pre-war period, suggests that despite their status as highly desirable, and assimilable,

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<sup>80</sup> Such was the case, for instance, in 1890 and 1899. See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 August 1890; and 3 August 1899.

<sup>81</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 August 1903; 3 August 1906. See also Appendix III.

<sup>82</sup> *Winnipeg Telegram*, 3 August 1901; *Winnipeg Voice*, 15 August 1902; *Manitoba Free Press*, 31 July 1909. See also Gerrard, *Icelandic River Saga*, 148; and Kristjanon, *The Icelandic People*, 459, concerning baseball's adoption as a popular sporting pastime among Icelanders by the 1890s. Manitoba school inspector Edward Ernest Best noted that Magnus Bjarnason, a school teacher in the rural Arnes school in the Interlake district, and "an ardent lover of clean sport," introduced baseball and other games to the Icelandic students there in 1889. See Archives of Manitoba, MG9 A95-1, Edward Ernest Best Collection, "Memoirs of a School Inspector, 1888-1932- Revised," 95.

<sup>83</sup> The *Free Press* noted on 3 August 1899, for example, that, "It was doubtful whether a majority of those present had ever seen Iceland. The picturesque Icelandic costumes worn in former years by a few of the ladies were yesterday absent, and so far as dress was concerned, there was nothing to distinguish any of the people from other citizens. Had a stranger have been told that they were Scotch, he would never have known."

immigrants, Icelandic-Canadians felt that their traditional wrestling style was of sufficient importance to their identity to warrant preservation in the face of pressures toward cultural conformity.<sup>84</sup>

### **Wrestling and the Polish-Canadian Community**

While Icelandic-Canadians were seeking to maintain their native style of wrestling as a symbol of their unique ethnic heritage, Polish-Canadians were making their own important impact on the sport in Manitoba. Unlike their Icelandic contemporaries whose geographic separation from the rest of Europe facilitated the maintenance of an indigenous wrestling form, Poland's location in Central Europe encouraged the adoption of the highly popular Graeco-Roman style. During the late nineteenth century, Graeco-Roman wrestling, which originated in France, became the dominant wrestling system, and indeed one of the most popular sports, in Continental Europe, and early Polish wrestling stars such as Laudislaus Pytlasinski were earning international recognition for their victories in important tournaments by the early 1890s.<sup>85</sup>

By 1910, it was evident that Winnipeg's Poles, like members of other ethnic groups, were providing a great deal of patronage to wrestling matches, and over the next four years, the city hosted the three most prominent Polish wrestlers then active in the sport. World welterweight title claimant Walter Miller, who despite his rather Anglo-sounding surname, described himself to the Winnipeg press as "a Pole from the fingertips," appeared on Winnipeg mats on four occasions in 1910-1911.<sup>86</sup> Of even greater fame, however, were the Zbyszko brothers, Stanislaus and Wladek, two of the most well-known heavyweight grapplers in the world, who appeared on Winnipeg mats in 1912 and 1914, respectively. In both instances, the press noted a strong Polish contingent in the audience. Following his bout with

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<sup>84</sup> See for example, the Manitoba Free Press, 3 August 1911 and 1914, respectively.

<sup>85</sup> Bruce Sharp, "Short History of Wrestling From 3000 B.C. to the Present Day," in The Science of Wrestling, ed. Dick Cameron (Sydney: Scotow Press, Undated), 4; Meyers, Wrestling from Antiquity to Date, 68-69; Beekman, Ringside, 19; Wojciech Liponski, "Still and Unknown European Tradition: Polish Sport in the European Cultural Heritage," International Journal of the History of Sport 13,2 (August 1996), 18; Pytlasinski, recognized as one of Poland's earliest wrestling stars, learned Greco-Roman wrestling in Paris while visiting the city in 1888, and won a world title in the sport in 1892. See Lehmusto, History of Wrestling, 68-69.

<sup>86</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 10 July 1911; Winnipeg Tribune, 5 May 1910.

“German Oak” Paul Sigfried on 24 April 1912, Stanislaus received “applause, then some more applause” from his fans, after which “a Polish maiden tripped up to the ring and handed the victor a large bunch of roses.”<sup>87</sup> Wladek’s appearance a little more than two years later against Joe Collon, the later described as “a Teuton from the strip of bare scalp he carried aloft, six feet or more in the air, to the socks and running shoes beneath which the stage creaked,” was similarly well attended by his fellow countrymen. Zbyszko defeated his larger German opponent, a substitute for the well-known Dr. B.F. Roller, winning two falls in one hour, “much to the gratification of the Polish section of the spectators, with whom, it was easy to see, the youthful European, and coming World’s champion, was a regular hero.”<sup>88</sup> Amongst Manitoba’s Polish residents, however, local interest in wrestling did not begin with the appearance of internationally-known athletes such as Walter Miller and the Zbyszko brothers. To the contrary, wrestling was first kindled in the province by early immigrants with an explicitly nationalistic agenda.

In Manitoba, extensive Polish immigration to the province occurred after 1896. It is critical to note, however, that Poland did not exist as a national entity during this period, its territory instead being partitioned among Austria, Germany and Russia.<sup>89</sup> The majority of individuals who arrived in the province came from Galicia, located in the south-western region of present-day Poland. Economic hardship was the primary reason for their departure from Europe, and like many other immigrant movements before and after, males made up a disproportionately large segment of the early immigrant cohort.<sup>90</sup> Winnipeg, already the dominant metropolitan centre in Western Canada by 1896, soon became the centre for Polish cultural life in Manitoba. In general, early Polish immigrants had difficulty integrating into Canadian society given that their language, customs, and Catholic religion made participation in existing institutions problematic. Additionally, Polish immigrants, as part of the larger Central and Eastern European exodus to Canada, were generally regarded with suspicion and derision by

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<sup>87</sup> Winnipeg Telegram 25 April 1912.

<sup>88</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 12 May 1914.

<sup>89</sup> Henry Radecki and Benedyky Heydenkorn, A Member of a Distinguished Family: The Polish Group in Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 3.

<sup>90</sup> Wiktor Turek, Poles in Manitoba (Toronto: Polish Alliance Press Limited, 1967), 33; Radecki and Heydenkorn, Distinguished Family, 55; Fred Stambrook and Stella Hryniuk, “Who Were They Really? Reflections on East European Immigrants to Manitoba Before 1914,” Prairie Forum, 25, 2 (Fall 2000), 216.

assimilation-minded Anglo-Canadians.<sup>91</sup> Given both their cultural dissimilarity to the host society and the hostile attitudes exhibited toward them, few Poles would likely have chosen to participate in most English-language institutions even had they the opportunity to do so. In the decade following 1896, the vast majority of Polish immigrants came from peasant backgrounds, where familial and clerical relationships formed the cornerstone of everyday life. Polish organizational life during the late nineteenth century therefore centred around establishing separate religious institutions for Polish-language worship.<sup>92</sup> In 1897, Winnipeg's Poles established a church building committee to raise funds for a Polish-language Roman Catholic Church in the city. By the next year, sufficient funds allowed for the construction of the Holy Ghost church on 341 Selkirk Avenue in Winnipeg's North End. At the time, owing to a worldview that prioritized spiritual and familial matters, few immigrants possessed any larger sense of a Polish national consciousness. Such would remain the case throughout the period before World War I.<sup>93</sup> However, by 1906, Winnipeg was also home to a small group of Polish-Canadian citizens who saw sport as a vital component in the larger struggle to establish a sovereign Poland free from external rule.

Winnipeg's Polish-national sporting movement began in December 1906 with the formation of Branch 377 of the Polish Gymnastic Association Sokol (Falcons).<sup>94</sup> The Polish Sokol movement originated in 1867 and came to Manitoba by way of the United States. Thereafter, as was generally the case with organized sport in the province, Sokol chapters were subsequently founded in other centres, including Brandon, whose club was formed in 1908.<sup>95</sup> During its initial years in operation, Winnipeg's Sokol club focused primarily on physical training, although in later years many activities were carried out under its banner including military recruiting, scouting, Polish language classes and choir. The motivation for Sokol's physical training programmes went beyond a simple interest in promoting its

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<sup>91</sup> Radecki and Heydenkorn, *Distinguished Family*, 55; Avery, *Reluctant Host*, 42; Wawrow, "Nativism in English Canada," 75-79.

<sup>92</sup> See Henry Radecki, *Ethnic Organizational Dynamics: The Polish Group in Canada* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979), 48.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 43, 45.

<sup>94</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 2 June 1907. The precise date of the organization's founding was either 3 or 13 December, 1906. See also Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble, *Historia Zespolu Piesne I Tanca Sokol. History of the Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble 1906-1990* (Winnipeg: Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble, 1990), 1.

<sup>95</sup> Turek, *Poles in Manitoba*, 207; Radecki, *Ethnic Organizational Dynamics*, 51, 63; Liponski, "Still an Unknown," 12.

member's health and well-being. Guided by an explicitly nationalistic agenda, exercise was used to develop both the requisite physical fitness and mental alertness required to establish an independent Polish homeland. Additionally, Sokol's programs were viewed as a way to draw young people living in the city to the nationalist cause.<sup>96</sup> In 1907, the organization opened up a gymnasium on the corner of Magnus Avenue and Power Street in Winnipeg's North End, equipped with dumbbells and horizontal bars. Classes were conducted twice a week for "the mental elevation of the Polish people," and the Free Press reported that, "a large number of intelligent patriots [were] devoting time and energy to this sublime object" by the beginning of January, 1908.<sup>97</sup> Although bearing the emblem of a gymnastics club, during the years before the First World War, Sokol athletes were actively involved in competitive wrestling. In particular, two of the organization's founders, Stanley and Ben Sielski, at whose home the organization conducted its first meeting, were among Winnipeg's most prominent wrestlers prior to the Great War.<sup>98</sup>

Although their exploits go largely unrecorded in the literature pertaining to Polish-Canadian history, the Sielski brothers, through their involvement in wrestling, were the public faces of the early Polish national movement in Manitoba. Stanley Sielski, who wrestled at a weight of 160 lbs., was a Graeco-Roman practitioner in Europe, where he had won 23 medals prior to his arrival in Winnipeg.<sup>99</sup> After moving to Manitoba's capital, he worked variously as a printer and a bartender in addition to serving as the Sokol club's first athletic director.<sup>100</sup> Ben, who worked as a cook in the city, was smaller in stature than his brother, and wrestled regularly in matches on Winnipeg professional wrestling cards.<sup>101</sup> The eldest brother, Kazimierz, does not appear to have been involved directly in wrestling, but nevertheless retained an active role in the Sokol club.<sup>102</sup> A detailed account of the Sielski brothers' wrestling exploits in Manitoba would warrant lengthy discussion. However, a brief exposition

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<sup>96</sup> Turek, Poles in Manitoba, 234; "History of the Polish Gymnastic Association Sokol," [http://www.poloniacanada.ca/winnipeg/images/historia\\_polskie\\_tow\\_gimn\\_sokol\\_en.pdf](http://www.poloniacanada.ca/winnipeg/images/historia_polskie_tow_gimn_sokol_en.pdf) (accessed 12 November 2009); Manitoba Free Press, 1 March 1913.

<sup>97</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 5 January 1908.

<sup>98</sup> Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble, Historia Zespołu, 1, notes that the inaugural Sokol meeting occurred at the Sielski home on Selkirk Avenue.

<sup>99</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 24 October 1907.

<sup>100</sup> Winnipeg Henderson's Directory, 1910, 1911; Manitoba Free Press, 5 January 1908.

<sup>101</sup> Winnipeg Henderson's Directory, 1910. For matches featuring Ben Sielski, see Appendix I.

<sup>102</sup> Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble, Historia Zespołu, 1.



concerning Stanley's early wrestling activities highlights their place within Manitoba's Polish community.

The first significant foray into Manitoba wrestling by either of the brothers came in late June 1907, when a public challenge to Scottish-born wrestler Hume Duval appeared in the Free Press on behalf of Stanley. Duval, at the time, was appearing at Happyland Park giving strongman exhibitions and entertaining public challenges in which he agreed to throw any wrestler in fifteen minutes or forfeit \$20. The newspaper defi stemmed from his inability to meet Sielski after the Polish grappler had already approached him for a match on the park grounds.<sup>103</sup> Although there was nothing novel about a newspaper challenge for a wrestling match, what was particularly unique in this instance was that it was issued on behalf of the Polish Gymnastic Association Sokol and its secretary-treasurer, C.P. Hamisusk.<sup>104</sup> Challenges, even if ghost written, were almost as a rule issued under an individual's own name, suggesting in this instance that Sielski's appearance on the mat carried with it a high degree of importance not merely to himself, but for the larger movement to which he belonged. When Sielski and Duval met three days later in a match under Graeco-Roman rules, it was immediately apparent that the former was, in fact, backed by a contingent of ardent supporters. Wrestling on a "poorly improvised heap of sawdust under a sheet of canvas," Sielski adopted a largely defensive posture, owing to the fact that he merely had to last the required fifteen minutes with Duval to claim victory. After nine and a half minutes, Duval slipped on the edge of the mat, and fell backwards, his shoulders touching the ground. The referee declared the fall invalid, and the Sokol athlete, already exhausted by that point, protested the ruling and refused to go on. Although the fall occurred off the mat, Sielski's supporters, firmly behind the Polish grappler, were adamant that their man had pinned the Scot.<sup>105</sup> While unsuccessful on this occasion in his attempt to claim the \$20 prize offered by Hume Duval, both Stanley and Ben Sielski had numerous opportunities thereafter to demonstrate their skills before the public on behalf of the Sokol club.

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<sup>103</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 25 June 1907.

<sup>104</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 24 June 1907.

<sup>105</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 June 1907.

Although the Sielski brothers had a base of local supporters and carried out their wrestling activities as representatives of the Polish nationalist Sokol movement, they were not without their detractors within the Polish community. At the same time that they were beginning their local wrestling careers, they found themselves at the centre of a dispute that fractured Winnipeg's Poles into two opposing camps. By the early summer of 1908, the schism was of significant enough intensity to gain the attention of the English-language press in Winnipeg. On 29 May, the Free Press reported that, "The congregation of the Holy Ghost Catholic church... is split into two warring factions with Father [Groetsschel], the priest, and his friends on one side and the Sielski brothers and their followers on the other," and that "the breach between the two factions of the church is one of long standing."<sup>106</sup> The Church, around which organizational life had its genesis within the Manitoba Polish community, objected to Sokol because of the organization's secular character and its unwillingness to remain subject to clerical control. Conversely, Sokol members wished for the church to adopt a more explicitly nationalist outlook.<sup>107</sup> Conflict between the two factions became so heated during 1908 that both sides found themselves drawn into court over their differences.<sup>108</sup> Ultimately, Sokol retained its autonomy from clerical control and remained at the forefront of the Polish national movement.<sup>109</sup> The Sielski brothers, described as the "moving spirits" in the club, continued to appear on Winnipeg mats as late as 1912.<sup>110</sup> Although their involvement in wrestling remains unheralded in subsequent literature, their extensive participation in the

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<sup>106</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 29 May 1908.

<sup>107</sup> Turek, Poles in Manitoba, 197. For further discussion of the schism between the nationalistic Sokol members and the Polish Roman Catholic clergy in Winnipeg, see Wictor Turek, Polish-Language Press in Canada (Toronto: Polish Alliance Press Limited, 1962), 66-67, 100.

<sup>108</sup> On 28 May 1908, Stanley Sielski was brought up on charges of disorderly conduct stemming from an argument with Father Groetsschel following mass on 24 May. The plaintiff accused Sielski of causing a disturbance at the church and publicly ridiculing him. Sielski, who claimed Groetsschel had started the dispute by calling him "a pig," likewise contemplated taking legal action against the priest. See the Manitoba Free Press, 29 May 1908.

<sup>109</sup> Sokol diversified its activities rapidly during and after the Great War, and by 1922, could boast approximately 90 active members. By mid-century, Winnipeg's Sokol Gymnastic club, which had expanded vastly beyond its athletic roots, could boast a local membership of 270, in addition to branches in Brandon and St. Boniface. More than a century after its founding, both the Sokol Gymnastic Club and the Sokol Polish Folk assembly which it spawned in 1914, continue to promote Polish culture Manitoba. See the Manitoba Free Press, 2 January 1922; Turek, Poles in Manitoba, 208; <http://www.sokolensemble.ca/history.htm> (accessed 15 November 2009).

<sup>110</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 29 May 1908. On 16 February 1912, Ben Sielski wrestled Charles Gustafson at the Empress Theatre following the vaudeville show. The match was well attended by the public, "every seat being taken." See the Manitoba Free Press, 16 February 1912; 17 February 1912.

sport made them the public faces of the early Polish nationalist community in Winnipeg, fostered ethnic pride, and helped draw attention to the Sokol club and its vision of an independent Poland.

## **Conclusion**

During the two decades prior to the Great War, Manitoba grew rapidly in ethnic diversity, as Anglo-Canadians were joined by large numbers of immigrant peoples from a variety of non-English speaking nations. Wrestling's popularity expanded rapidly during the same period as athletes representing numerous nationalities began to appear on mats in the province. The sport's one-on-one nature made it easy to appeal both to the acute sense of Anglo-Canadian nativism then prevalent in the West as well various immigrant groups' own sense of ethnic pride. Although the sport promoted tension between ethnic groups, it also helped to bolster group cohesion, and often in very different ways. Among the Icelanders, glima wrestling helped preserve their national identity and reinforce their self-identity as a sojourning Viking people. Conversely, among the Poles, wrestling served as a means of nurturing a growing sense of nationalism within their community and promoting a nationalist agenda. In the multicultural environment of early twentieth century Manitoba, wrestling therefore served several different social purposes for the various peoples who lived there.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Amateur Wrestling Before the Great War**

By the outbreak of war in 1914, Winnipeg had hosted some of the world's most prominent professional wrestlers, and both the province's capital city as well as some smaller centres could boast the accomplishments made on the mat by local athletes. Professional wrestling also earned widespread popularity because many of its practitioners were seen to possess a host of culturally desirable attributes that were worthy of accolades. The sport's appeal likewise transcended ethnic boundaries, as various non-English speaking peoples, already familiar with wrestling before their arrival in Canada, patronized contests which featured their fellow countrymen. For all its appeal, professional wrestling was nevertheless beset by continual controversy, as various allegations of corruption and impropriety impeded its path to universal acceptance. Additionally, by explicitly playing upon ethnic and regional rivalries, profits were made at the expense of promoting greater cultural toleration. Professionalism, however, was not the only model for sport that existed in Manitoba.

During the decade and a half before World War I, amateur wrestling also attracted many participants, particularly in Winnipeg, where the vast majority of organized wrestling took place. Amateur wrestling in Manitoba evolved in a very different fashion than its professional variant, and its growth can be divided into two stages, the demarcation point occurring between 1906 and 1908. Changing understandings of amateurism, new methods for conducting wrestling contests, and greater organization and integration between amateur sporting bodies at the provincial, national and international levels, helped further delineate differences between the sport's two branches. Many of the distinctions (and alleged distinctions) between professional and amateur wrestling emerged due to a conscious attempt on the latter's part to distance itself from its often-disreputable cousin. Despite its advocates' intentions, amateur wrestling was unable to separate itself completely from its professional counterpart before World War I, and ironically, professional expertise proved critical in ensuring that Manitoba's grapplers were able to compete on a high level with athletes from across the country. Additionally, although the sport

experienced remarkable growth, participation remained largely limited to members of middle-class Anglo-Canadian society.

### **Amateur Wrestling at the Turn of the Twentieth Century**

As noted in Chapter I, amateur wrestling matches were staged in Manitoba under the auspices of the Winnipeg Gymnasium beginning in 1892. Evidence suggests that amateur wrestling matches may, in fact, have been organized in the city as early as 1884, when Winnipeg's Harry Warren was presented with a trophy for the provincial amateur wrestling title by local variety theatre owner Dan Rogers.<sup>1</sup> However, documentation concerning Warren's amateur wrestling exploits during the 1880s has not surfaced, so little analysis can be offered.<sup>2</sup> During the last half of the 1890s, the sport did not garner much attention in Manitoba, but by the beginning of the twentieth century, amateur wrestling began to capture public interest. A series of matches staged between October 1901 and January 1902 as well as the events surrounding them, illustrate amateur wrestling's character in Manitoba during the period.

On 18 September 1901, wrestlers Dave Simon and Bert Phillips, accompanied by several supporters, met at Winnipeg's Leland Hotel to arrange details for a match to decide the "amateur lightweight championship of Canada, Graeco-Roman style."<sup>3</sup> The specific conditions for the match were outlined in a contract, which was signed by both men as well as two witnesses.<sup>4</sup> Ten days later, the date for the match was finally set at 16 October. Although a referee had not yet been agreed upon, the Winnipeg Theatre, which hosted the contest, assured the public that "a match devoid of all fakish

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<sup>1</sup> Variety theatre owner Dan Rogers, described by the Manitoba Free Press on 31 December 1898, as "father of the business" in Winnipeg, moved to the province's capital in 1881. During his first few years in the city he owned and operated the Hub Saloon and promoted various athletic contests, most notably female pedestrian races. In February 1884 he opened the Royal Theatre on the premises of the old Winnipeg courthouse. Unable to obtain a liquor license, he ceased operations in late May. In November, Rogers opened the Victoria Theatre, but four months later, after facing numerous fines for alcohol-related infractions, he was once again forced out of business. Thereafter, he returned to the United States, where he owned a saloon in Huron City and later managed a tobacco plantation in Virginia. Concerning pedestrian races see the Manitoba Free Press, 9 October 1882; 12 October 1882; 17 October 1882; 18 October 1882; 20 October 1882; and Winnipeg Sun, 10 October 1882. For an overview of Roger's theatre ventures, see Budnick, "Theatre on the Frontier." On his later activities after leaving Winnipeg, see the Manitoba Free Press, 29 July 1890; and 31 December 1898.

<sup>2</sup> Warren claimed in the Manitoba Free Press on 13 March 1894 to have been given his title by Dan Rogers "ten years ago." Unfortunately, Rogers' advertisements in the local press concerning entertainment features at the Royal or Victoria theatres did not typically describe the events he staged in any detail, so it is difficult to ascertain when Warren was awarded the distinction.

<sup>3</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 19 September 1901; Winnipeg Telegram, 19 September 1901.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

characteristics [was] promised.”<sup>5</sup> Over the next several weeks, the Winnipeg public remained informed of the progress that both men were making in their training, and careful comparisons were made between their physical attributes, including over a dozen measurements.<sup>6</sup> The event itself, which also included a boxing match, attracted between three and four hundred spectators.<sup>7</sup> The Free Press, which was far more critical in its commentary than the Telegram, noted that attendance was low due to “The series of fizzles which have been perpetrated upon the Winnipeg in the past under the name of ring contests.”<sup>8</sup> Although there was some criticism over the long waits between features and the announcer’s poor elocution, the wrestling match itself was well received, and at the evening’s conclusion, Phillips, who lost the match, offered to meet his conqueror again. The Free Press clearly disillusioned with boxing matches, opined that “they may get some spectators if no ‘ring’ contests are announced in connection with it.”<sup>9</sup> Phillips and Simon agreed to a second match under Graeco-Roman rules, to be held on 22 November. As before, articles were signed at the Leland Hotel, and subsequent newspaper coverage provided reports on their training and detailed both men’s respective physical merits.<sup>10</sup> Commentary also focused on the match’s legitimacy, with the Telegram stating:

This is the kind of sport that Winnipeggers want and for which they are prepared to give money to see. They will not stand for a fake or a second-class show, but when the men are on the square like the recent match between these two wrestlers, and are out to win there is no crowd that will be more quickly appreciative.<sup>11</sup>

Simon once more earned victory in a “fast scientific contest” and was immediately challenged by another wrestler, Leo Dezino.<sup>12</sup> Press reports, in this instance, also made several references to public wagering on the match.<sup>13</sup> As against Phillips, Simon was victorious.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 28 September 1901.

<sup>6</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 1 October 1901; 10 October 1901; Winnipeg Telegram, 1 October 1901; 8 October 1901.

<sup>7</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 17 October 1901.

<sup>8</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 17 October 1901.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 24 October 1901; 8 November 1901; 15 November 1901; 18 November 1901; and 20 November 1901.

<sup>11</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 21 November 1901.

<sup>12</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 23 November 1901; Winnipeg Telegram, 23 November 1901

<sup>13</sup> The Manitoba Free Press noted, on 20 December 1901 and 2 January 1902 respectively, that public odds were 10 to 7 in favour of Simon to win, and that even odds were also being taken for Simon to secure victory in straight falls.

Having proved his athletic superiority over both Phillips and Dezino, Simon then contracted to meet both men on the same night in a handicap contest in which Phillips, who was better versed in catch-as-catch-can wrestling, agreed to throw Simon three times in an hour. In the second match, Simon agreed to defeat Dezino five times in an hour under Graeco-Roman rules.<sup>15</sup> Owing perhaps to his decisive victories over both men on previous occasions, the event was poorly patronized by the Winnipeg public. Once again, Simon defeated both men according to the stipulated conditions.<sup>16</sup> With the available talent depleted and perhaps realizing that Winnipeg offered few future opportunities to display his abilities, Simon relocated to Fargo, North Dakota.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose in providing this rather extended narrative on amateur wrestling at the beginning of the twentieth century is to show how closely the sport's conventions paralleled those seen in the professional ranks during the same period. Each of the matches focused intensely on the individual contestants and their respective physical and athletic merits, and training updates helped build and maintain community interest. Public challenges were issued for future matches and handicap conditions were arranged to help ensure public support for future encounters between athletes who proved unequal in ability. Each of the wrestlers also appeared to have supporters within Winnipeg's sporting community who were willing to back their performances through wagering on the outcome. Additionally, assurances that the matches were 'on the level' were much in keeping with public perceptions surrounding professional sport's often "dirty" nature. Indeed, if not for the absence of discussions related to the wrestlers' purses or proposed side-bets and the explicit declaration that the matches were "amateur," there would be virtually nothing to distinguish this series of bouts from many of the professional contests staged in the province before World War I.

Amateur wrestling's pseudo-professional characteristics were attributable, in part, to the absence of any regulatory body to oversee its conduct. In Manitoba, as elsewhere in Canada, numerous self-

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<sup>14</sup> The contest was decided on a best three in five fall basis, Simon winning three straight falls. See the Manitoba Free Press, 21 January 1902.

<sup>15</sup> For a copy of the contract signed by all three men, see the Manitoba Free Press, 7 January 1902.

<sup>16</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 21 January 1902; Winnipeg Telegram, 21 January 1902.

<sup>17</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 1 May 1902.

declared amateur organizations existed, but there was no overarching body that governed athletes according to an established amateur code. At this time, the only umbrella organization for amateur sport in the country was the Canadian Amateur Athletic Union (CAAU), which despite its lofty title, had no representation outside of Ontario and Quebec.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it was well understood that the primary characteristic distinguishing amateurs from professionals was that they never received monetary compensation for athletic performances. The CAAU, which existed from 1884 to 1898 as the Amateur Athletic Association of Canada (AAAC), established during its founding year a definition for amateur which included, “one who has never competed for a money prize, or staked bet with or against any professional for any prize, or assisted in the practice of athletic exercises as a means of obtaining a livelihood, or has never entered into any competition under a name other than his own.”<sup>19</sup> Although the organization had no jurisdiction outside Ontario and Quebec, its influence extended to other parts of Canada. Most amateur sporting organizations in Manitoba followed the course set by the CAAU in determining what constituted an amateur.<sup>20</sup> However, no central authority existed in the province to dictate whether a wrestler qualified as an amateur, nor did any athletic body oversee amateur wrestling. As a result, matches such as those involving Simon, Phillips, and Dezino were promoted by commercial interests such as C.P. Walker and the Winnipeg Theatre, who had a direct financial stake in ensuring a profitable outcome, and they adhered to already-proven methods that were used in professional matches. Nevertheless, since all three athletes involved ostensibly met the basic amateur criterion (that is to say, they wrestled without pay), the public appeared to accept their amateur status.

For the next several years, as professional wrestling gained an increased foothold in the city, amateur wrestling developed at a more modest pace. By 1906, amateur wrestling was moving away from its pseudo-professional conventions and toward a format that was more in keeping with what would be seen in the sport during the subsequent quarter century. The institution most responsible for the shift was

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<sup>18</sup> Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 107.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>20</sup> Mott, “Manly Sports,” 250.



the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), which quickly emerged as one of the city's premiere athletic institutions following two decades of inactivity in the sporting realm.

### **The Winnipeg "Y" and the Growth of Amateur Wrestling**

As a continually operating organization, the Winnipeg YMCA dates to 16 May 1879.<sup>21</sup> Sir J.A.M. Aikins and R.D. Richardson, both immigrants to Manitoba from Ontario, provided the initial impetus for the YMCA's activities in the Western province. Aikins, a devout Methodist and temperance crusader who, among his many other distinctions, served as the organization's first president and later acted as the Manitoba Conservative Party leader and the province's Lieutenant-Governor, initially operated the institution out of his law office on the corner of Main Street and McDermott Avenue.<sup>22</sup> As noted in earlier chapters, many of the diversions offered to young men in Winnipeg were regarded with disdain by reform-minded members of the community. According to J.F. McIntyre, who succeeded Aikins as association president, the Winnipeg YMCA carried out its activities, "as a counter attraction to the tendency of young men to seek pleasure in things and pursuits not elevating to their nature."<sup>23</sup>

During its first two decades, the Winnipeg YMCA offered numerous educational programs aimed at both instilling Christian values in young men and inculcating practical skills, including Bible study, shorthand writing, vocal training, and Christian-based life counselling. Recreational diversions were also provided, including literary recitations, hymn singing, dinners for single men, and piano music.<sup>24</sup> Prominently absent from the list were distinctly athletic activities. Until the mid-1860s, athletic training

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<sup>21</sup> Winnipeg's first YMCA was formed on 17 October 1874 by Colonel W.N. Kennedy and A. Bowerman. The Association maintained a reading room and operated as late as January 1878. Few other records pertaining to the original Winnipeg YMCA exist. See the Manitoba Free Press, 21 December 1889.

<sup>22</sup> Archives of Manitoba, P 3818, Young Men's Christian Association, 1939 YMCA of Winnipeg Scrapbook, "The Winnipeg Y.M.C.A. News." For further biographical information on J.A.M. Aikins, see the Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, [http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=7886](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=7886) (accessed 2 March 2010). In addition to his legal and political career, Aikins also "held the somewhat unique position of being a millionaire lawyer," due to his successful involvement in land speculation during Winnipeg's boom period during the early 1880s. See also Artibise, "Winnipeg's Millionaires," in Gateway City, 119; and Artibise, Winnipeg A Social History, 46.

<sup>23</sup> J.F. McIntyre, at the 1886 YMCA general meeting. For detailed reports on the meeting's proceedings, see the Manitoba Free Press, 15 September 1886. McIntyre's pronouncement was directly in keeping with the institution's original goals. Concerning the circumstances surrounding the YMCA's founding in London, England, in 1844, see Mayer N. Zald, Organizational Change: The Political Economy of the YMCA (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 15 September 1886; 2 October 1886; 8 November 1889.

was not a part of the YMCA's organizational mandate, and a proposal by a representative from Brooklyn to build a gymnasium had, in fact, been rejected at the association's national convention in 1856.<sup>25</sup> In the ensuing decades, however, as Muscular Christianity gained greater resonance throughout the Anglo-Protestant world, the YMCA began to adapt its policies, embracing physical as well as intellectual and spiritual pursuits in an effort to produce well-rounded Christian citizens. The YMCA leader most generally associated with the shift toward integrating physical activity into the organization's existing educational and religious mandate was Luther Gulick. Gulick took charge of physical development for the YMCA International Committee in 1889, committed to the notion that manhood, in its ideal form, represented a combination of Hercules, Socrates, and Jesus.<sup>26</sup> However, it is clear that, by the time Gulick assumed his position, such ideas were already in wide circulation. Unquestionably, the importance of physical training was not lost on the Winnipeg YMCA's directorate. In an 1886 address to the association, Reverend D.M. Gordon of Winnipeg's Knox Presbyterian Church drew heavily on contemporary views concerning physical activity's importance in fostering appropriate Christian manliness. The Free Press, in reporting his speech, noted, "Physical culture was necessary for the higher culture intellectually and spiritual[ly] and it was ours to see that our bodies were what they were meant to be- temples of the Holy Ghost."<sup>27</sup> Gordon further stated that, "Manliness is needed in any association fitted to do good service in the community. Manly vigour strengthens, and we are entitled to seek this element from the young of the community."<sup>28</sup> Having listened to the annual reports made by YMCA officials earlier in the evening, Gordon also noted the scant attention paid to physical activities. The Free Press noted his remarks, stating "while the report said little of that matter, [Gordon] assumed it was because the various clubs in the city... filled that part and did or should do a good work."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Owen E. Pence, The YMCA and Social Need: A Study of Institutional Adaptation (New York: Association Press, 1939), 17.

<sup>26</sup> Murray G. Ross, The Y.M.C.A. in Canada: The Chronicle of a Century (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1951), 168-169.

<sup>27</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 15 September 1886.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. D.M. Gordon acted as minister at Knox Presbyterian Church from 1882 to 1887. In addition to his pastoral duties in Winnipeg, he also served as chaplain for the 90<sup>th</sup> regiment during the 1885 North-West Rebellion. See Hugh John Robertson, comp., The Story of Knox Church, Winnipeg: Seventy-Five Years, 1872-1947, University of Alberta Libraries, Peel's Prairie Provinces Online collection, Peel 6964, <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/bibliography/6964/21.html> (accessed 2 March 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 15 September 1886.

In reality, the absence of athletic programs had less to do with the confidence among YMCA leadership that other organizations were adequately meeting the existing need, and more to do with financial limitations; the Winnipeg YMCA lacked sufficient funds to secure the required space for athletic facilities. By 1896, the association was acutely aware that the problem was hampering their efforts in the city. YMCA officials recognized that without a new building, which included a gymnasium, “the association is like a farmer with a hoe, scythe and flail, in a land of steam plows, self-binders and steam threshing machines.”<sup>30</sup> Finally, after an aggressive fund-raising campaign, the Winnipeg “Y” secured its own facility on the corner of Portage Avenue and Smith Street, which opened on 17 January 1901.<sup>31</sup> Reflecting a heightened emphasis on athletics, the new building contained a fully-equipped gymnasium, swimming pool and running track.<sup>32</sup> Within the first year of its operation, it also maintained quarters suitable for wrestling.<sup>33</sup>

The scope of the YMCA’s earliest wrestling-related activities are unclear. However, a wrestling demonstration was included in an extensive public exhibition staged in the association’s gymnasium on 2 March 1905.<sup>34</sup> By the next year, efforts were being made to foster competitive wrestling among young boys as well as adults.<sup>35</sup> On 5 April 1906, a tournament was held in the headquarters gymnasium to decide the Association’s champion. Six athletes entered the competition, which was described by the Free Press to be of “a most gentlemanly character” and “run off in a very sportsmanlike manner.”<sup>36</sup> The winner, J. Hack, was presented with a gold medal at the annual YMCA physical department banquet eleven days later.<sup>37</sup> The YMCA association wrestling tournament represented a departure from previous amateur “championship” contests inasmuch as it lacked virtually all the promotional garnishments formerly associated with the sport. The event was not preceded by any challenges, contracts, or handicap

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<sup>30</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 February 1896.

<sup>31</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 January 1901.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Bert Phillips, in preparing for his handicap match with Dave Simon in January 1902, conducted his training out of the YMCA quarters. See the Manitoba Free Press, 16 January 1902.

<sup>34</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 3 March 1905.

<sup>35</sup> The Winnipeg Telegram noted on 27 March 1906 that, “The first wrestling club ever formed in Winnipeg for boys has been organized at the YMCA. The boys are very enthusiastic and purpose[sic] giving an exhibition on April 10, to which the public are invited.”

<sup>36</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 April 1906.

<sup>37</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 April 1906; 17 April 1906; Winnipeg Telegram, 6 April 1906.

conditions, nor was any effort made to ‘build up’ interest in the individual wrestlers involved in the tournament. Additionally, Dr. Fischer, YMCA athletic branch international secretary (and successor to Luther Gulick), who attended the local athletic banquet, was explicit in underscoring the ‘higher purpose’ attached to sporting activities undertaken by the association, including wrestling, stating, “When athletics become an end in themselves, when we must win at any price, we have prostituted the end and aim of athletics.”<sup>38</sup> Although the number of participants in the 1906 organization championship was very modest, membership in the YMCA’s wrestling program expanded rapidly in subsequent years due in part to its association with the province’s first broad-reaching amateur sporting body, the Manitoba Amateur Athletic Association.

### **The Manitoba Amateur Athletic Association and the Regulation of Amateur Wrestling**

The Manitoba Amateur Athletic Association (MAAA) was formed specifically because of concerns among many sporting organizations over rampant professionalism in the province. Although its inception dated from 1904, the MAAA was inactive for the first three years of its existence.<sup>39</sup> In 1907, amateur sport in Quebec and Ontario was in the midst of an internal crisis which initiated the MAAA’s re-formation. Generally known as Canada’s “Athletic War,” the conflict centred around the CAAU and the newly-formed Amateur Athletic Federation of Canada (AAFC). The CAAU, in response to growing concerns over professionalism, especially among popular teams sports such as hockey and lacrosse, became increasingly restrictive in its definition of “amateur,” altering the term’s meaning to deal with the various scenarios that athletes were using to ‘get around’ restrictions on monetary compensation. Many CAAU members recognized that amateur clubs were continuing to employ professionals, and therefore favoured a system that would allow both professionals and amateurs to play together, providing that the professionals on the team openly declared their status. The CAAU rejected the proposal, first brought forward in 1904, and three years later, as a result of persistent conflict over the issue, many sporting

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<sup>38</sup> Dr. Fischer, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 17 April 1906.

<sup>39</sup> Mott, “Manly Sports,” 251.

organizations and their supporters, primarily based in Quebec, broke away to form the Amateur Athletic Federation of Canada (AAFC).<sup>40</sup> In an attempt to consolidate its status, the CAAU encouraged the formation of affiliate provincial organizations. The Winnipeg YMCA proved central in the CAAU's efforts to preserve "pure" amateurism in Manitoba. On 15 March 1907, a meeting was held at "Y" headquarters in the interests of forming a provincial affiliate with the Toronto-based CAAU. The delegates present at the meeting, concerned that "the professional element [was] gaining ground in Manitoba," affirmed their commitment to "amateurism of the purest and highest type."<sup>41</sup> One month later, a second meeting was held at the YMCA with delegates from 19 different sporting organizations from across the province in attendance, the result of which was the re-formation of the MAAA. The MAAA adopted the CAAU's definition of amateur, which by 1907 read:

An amateur is a person who has not competed in any competition for a staked bet, moneys, private, public or gate receipts, or competed with or against a professional for a prize, who has never at any period of his life taught or assisted in the pursuit of any athletic exercise or sport as a means of livelihood, who has never directly or indirectly received any bonus, or a payment in lieu of loss of time while playing as a member of any club, or any money consideration whatever for any services rendered as an athlete, except his actual travelling and hotel expenses or who has never entered into any competition under a name other than his own.<sup>42</sup>

Affirming the YMCA's close affiliation with the MAAA, athletic director D.M. Duncan was appointed as the association's chairman.<sup>43</sup> In early May, 1908, the MAAA held its first annual meeting at the YMCA headquarters, and adopted a new constitution which re-affirmed its association with the CAAU.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> A number of historians have examined Canada's "Amateur War" in considerable detail. See, for example, Metcalfe, Canada Learns to Play, 111-117; Don Morrow, "A Case Study in Amateur Conflict: The Athletic War in Canada, 1906-1908," in Sports in Canada, 201-219; Morrow and Wamsley, Sport in Canada, 77-78; and Mott, "Manly Sports," 250-251.

<sup>41</sup> Although all present affirmed their strong commitment to amateur sport, concerns were also expressed, particularly by representatives of the Western Canadian Lacrosse Association and Manitoba Football Association, that strict adherence to CAAU rules would result in several teams being "professionalized" because athletes who competed in one sport as professionals would be declared professional in others, leading to entire teams being declared professional. See the Manitoba Free Press, 16 March 1907.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. By 1909, the MAAA continued to use similar wording in their definition of amateur, but had also added other restrictions including being found guilty of "selling or pledging prizes," and "compet[ing] against a professional, professional team, club or individual, when there is a gate or entrance fee charged." See Archives of Manitoba, MG10 D17, Amateur Athletic Union of Canada Manitoba Section, Constitution and By-Laws Manitoba Amateur Athletic Association 1909, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> For a copy of the MAAA constitution, see the Manitoba Free Press, 4 May 1908. See also May 1908, Archives of Manitoba, MG10 D17, Amateur Athletic Union of Canada Manitoba Section, Minutes of the MAAA 1908-1912.

## **Success and Challenges in the Growth of Competitive Amateur Wrestling**

The MAAA's creation proved to be a boon for amateur wrestling in the province. The YMCA, in particular, began to turn its attention toward the sport which, up to that point, had largely been associated with professionalism. In October 1907, the "Y" athletic department decided to commit greater resources to their wrestling program. A coach was hired specifically to instruct wrestling, and intensive thirty minute lessons were offered to members where they could work with another athlete directly under the instructor's guidance.<sup>45</sup> Efforts evidently paid off, as the following March, 19 athletes entered the annual YMCA championships, up from seven the year before.<sup>46</sup> In November 1908, amateur wrestling's status was placed on an even firmer footing when the inaugural Manitoba Amateur Wrestling Championships were staged at the YMCA under the MAAA's patronage. Participation far exceeded any wrestling competition staged in any of the Prairie provinces up to that time. Thirty-three athletes registered for the event, including one out-of-province entry from Maryfield, Saskatchewan.<sup>47</sup> At least 26 athletes ultimately competed in six separate weight classes in a two evening tournament.<sup>48</sup> The tournament proved successful from an attendance perspective as well, the YMCA gymnasium and gallery being filled with spectators.<sup>49</sup> Evidently, however, public interest was not entirely generated by an interest in 'pure' athletics alone. Prompting some of the enthusiasm around the event was the participation of Fred McLaglen, then in the midst of his high-profile court proceedings against J.W. Dafoe for defamatory libel.<sup>50</sup> No doubt betraying at least a hint of press partisanship, the attendant Free Press reporter noted, upon McLaglen's defeat by A.J. Mitchell, that, "The crowd nearly pulled the roof down with continuous

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<sup>45</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 14 October 1907.

<sup>46</sup> For reports of the participants and results of both tournaments, see the Manitoba Free Press, 14 March 1907; 28 March 1908.

<sup>47</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 24 November 1908.

<sup>48</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 November 1908; 30 November 1908.

<sup>49</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 November 1908.

<sup>50</sup> The Winnipeg Telegram, 28 November 1908, commenting on his notoriety at the time, mused that "[McLaglen's] name is perhaps more often seen in print these days than that of any municipal candidate."

rounds of applause.”<sup>51</sup> More important in the long-term, however, was the newspaper’s prediction that the championships would become an annual event.<sup>52</sup>

The following year, in an evident attempt to broaden the sport’s scope, the YMCA staged the Western Canadian Wrestling Championships in place of the Manitoba Championships.<sup>53</sup> Amateur wrestling was clearly expanding beyond the YMCA, as athletes from nine other organizations entered the event. However, Association athletes secured first place in all of the six weight divisions.<sup>54</sup> By that time, several athletes had established themselves as preeminent amateur competitors, among them McLagen’s conqueror A.J. Mitchell, 125-pound competitor Jack Macdonald, and the Akins brothers, Christie and George. All four wrestlers trained at the YMCA, although Macdonald also competed on behalf of the Winnipeg Rowing Club during 1909. The Free Press, in an extensive report on 16 June, stated that the previous year had been the most successful in the YMCA physical department’s history and that wrestling was the “noted activity” where the Association had devoted particular attention.<sup>55</sup> Juxtaposing the Association’s efforts against the ‘disreputable’ behaviour seen in the professional ranks, as well as previous efforts at promoting amateur wrestling in the province, the report commented:

The association has stood for a clean, manly competition in the sport, and has done a great deal to elevate the tone in contrast to the wrestling that had been conducted during the past two or three years. They are steadily forging ahead and have made possible the present splendid program in wrestling.<sup>56</sup>

Although the YMCA had a growing list of champions to its credit, officials maintained that commitment to ‘higher’ goals remained the central focus. During the annual meeting in 1909, the YMCA affirmed its obligation to religious education, and as a national movement, religious education remained the organization’s primary concern.<sup>57</sup> However, the ambitious expansion of athletic programs came to be understood as a part of a general mission which, even if it could not save souls, would nevertheless

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<sup>51</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 28 November 1908. Displaying considerably less hyperbole, the Winnipeg Tribune reports on 28 November nevertheless concurred that Mitchell’s victory, “seemed to be a popular win.”

<sup>52</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 26 November 1908.

<sup>53</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 22 April 1909; 23 April 1909; and 24 April 1909.

<sup>54</sup> See Appendix II.

<sup>55</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 12 June 1909.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ross, Y.M.C.A. in Canada, 171.

provide wholesome alternatives to urban vice.<sup>58</sup> Reflecting the growing importance of “rational” exercise as a means of social improvement, the YMCA’s 1909 Annual Report noted, concerning the physical department’s efforts:

It is not the aim of this department to produce star athletes. This may happen, but the endeavour is to give an opportunity to men and boys to get healthy exercise and to guide them while taking it... It is the object of this department that it should be conducted on a sane and sound scientific basis in the interest of efficient manhood, and the greatest good to the greatest number.<sup>59</sup>

Although officially regarded to be of secondary importance, the Winnipeg YMCA continued to add to its unsurpassed competitive record during 1910 and ambitiously pursued the right to host other high-profile amateur wrestling competitions. In March, after some “aggressive work,” the organization earned the recently-renamed Amateur Athletic Union of Canada’s (AAUC) sanction to conduct the 1910 Dominion Amateur Wrestling Championships.<sup>60</sup>

The Dominion Championships represented a significant step forward in Manitoba’s continuing integration into the larger Canadian amateur athletic movement, being the first event of its kind ever held west of Ontario.<sup>61</sup> However, the tournament also highlighted some of the ongoing problems facing amateur wrestling both in Manitoba and elsewhere in Canada. Owing to the anticipated attendance, the championships were staged at C.P. Walker’s Winnipeg Theatre. The YMCA made efforts to advertise the event throughout Canada, and several prominent athletes, including Aubert Côté, bronze medallist at the 1908 Olympic Games in London, were reported to express their interest in attending the meet.<sup>62</sup> Thirty-one athletes ultimately entered the Championships: a respectable number, consistent with previous large-scale amateur wrestling events staged during the previous two years in Manitoba. Yet, a closer examination of the competition roster reveals that wrestling, despite the growth of provincial governing

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>59</sup> Winnipeg YMCA 1909 Annual Report, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 12 June 1909. Such comments echoed those made by Dr. Fischer at the annual YMCA banquet a year earlier when he characterized the Association as “scientific in its organization and social in its methods.” See the Manitoba Free Press, 7 April 1908.

<sup>60</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 11 March 1910. The formation of the AAUC, which resulted in the re-integration of the CAAU and AAFC, marked the end of Canada’s Athletic War. The ‘new’ organization, however, remained steadfastly committed to CAAU’s definition of amateur.

<sup>61</sup> Leyshon, Of Mats and Men, 109.

<sup>62</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 2 April 1910; 7 April 1910.



bodies and their integration into the larger national amateur movement, was still not a truly 'national' sport. Of the thirty-one, only three, Montreal's R.F. Eagan, Oshawa's J. Miller, and Toronto's Bruce Sutherland, were from out-of-province. Côté, the Olympic medallist, did not attend. The remaining 28 competitors were from Winnipeg. The 'local boys' swept the competition, earning titles in each of the seven contested weight divisions, and once again, the YMCA proved itself the city's preeminent club, taking four of the seven first place titles.<sup>63</sup> To the Winnipeg wrestlers' credit, however, each of the three visiting wrestlers were themselves former national champions. Similar to the situation in 1910, the next National Amateur Championships held in Vancouver in 1912, saw members of the Vancouver Athletic Club take all titles.<sup>64</sup> Winnipeg, home to all reigning national champions, did not send any athletes to compete in the event.<sup>65</sup> Amateur wrestling therefore remained, during its early years, primarily a regionalized sport with national pretensions.

Part of the difficulty with engendering a truly national sport stemmed, of course, from the challenges associated with transportation. Although a national railway system was in place by the period, and Manitoba's railway infrastructure, due to ambitious branch line expansion under the Roblin government (1900-1915), was largely complete by 1909, considerable time nevertheless had to be invested in interprovincial travel.<sup>66</sup> Exacerbating the situation was the general disinclination for many amateur athletic organizations to cover their athletes' expenses. Although amateur regulations did not prohibit and athlete's travel expenses being covered, organizations were sometimes hesitant, or lacked the funds, to pay for train fare and accommodations. Olympian Aubert Côté, for example, had to mortgage his farm in order to procure the necessary funds to sail to England for the 1908 Games, and even after returning with a medal, had considerable difficulty in securing his expenses from the Canadian Olympic

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<sup>63</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 11 April 1910.

<sup>64</sup> Similarly, previous national championships which were held in the East, produced champions hailing from the region. In 1908, Canada's first national championship, staged by the rival AAFC, produced a roster of medalists hailing solely from Quebec. The following year, when the competition was held in Ottawa, athletes from Canada's capital city and Toronto shared the honours in all weight divisions. See Leyshon, *Of Mats and Men*, 109; and Glynn A. Leyshon, "Wrestling in Canada II, 1860-1914," *Journal of Manly Arts* (July 2001) [http://ejmas.com/jmanly/articles/2001/jmanlyart\\_leyshon2\\_0701.htm](http://ejmas.com/jmanly/articles/2001/jmanlyart_leyshon2_0701.htm) (accessed 9 March 2010).

<sup>65</sup> Of the twenty-one entries in the 1912 Dominion Championships, only one competitor, Toronto's J. Miller, hailed from outside the Pacific Northwest. For a complete list of all competitors, including results, see the Vancouver *Sun*, 30 April 1912.

<sup>66</sup> The final significant step in Manitoba railway building prior to the Hudson Bay Railway Line's construction in the 1920s, was the building of the transcontinental Grand Trunk across the province between 1905 and 1909. See Morton, *Manitoba*, 285.

Committee.<sup>67</sup> Due to both cost and distance, wrestling, like many other sports, therefore continued to function primarily on a regional basis, despite the development of 'national' championships.<sup>68</sup>

The 1910 National Championships also underscored the fact that, despite the AAUC, MAAA and YMCA's desire to foster pure amateur competition free from the corrupting influence of money, amateur wrestling was still, nevertheless, driven by economic imperatives. In securing the Winnipeg Theatre for the event, the YMCA and MAAA did so in anticipation of a larger attendance than could be accommodated by the Portage Avenue YMCA, which by 1910, was already proving too small to meet the space demands imposed by its various athletic programs.<sup>69</sup> Ticket prices ranged from \$0.25 to \$1, which was generally comparable to the rates being charged for professional cards.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately for the organizers, the tournament's first night attracted "one of the slimmest crowds on record."<sup>71</sup> As a result of the poor attendance, the MAAA accrued a large deficit, being unable to cover the costs of staging the event.<sup>72</sup> In discussing the MAAA's financial problems, the Free Press highlighted one of the great dilemmas endemic to wrestling, declaring:

Amateur competitions such as decided are clean and the competitors struggled to the best of their ability to win by fair and above-board methods... It is strange, indeed, to chronicle that a professional contest, about which one always has one's doubts of honesty, should draw a crowded house and perhaps a hundred enthusiasts should witness genuine contests such as were the amateur championships.<sup>73</sup>

The statement no doubt reflected, at least in part, the general bias that many Manitobans, particularly those in the middle class, had against professionalism in sport (a perspective that, as Morris Mott notes, occasionally led them to turn a blind eye to similar behaviour in the amateur ranks). Yet it was nevertheless true, as documented in Chapter II, that professional wrestling continued to attract spectators

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<sup>67</sup> Leyshon, Of Mats and Men, 86, 88. The Vancouver Sun noted on 29 April 1912 that the lack of outside entries in the 1912 Dominion Championships in Vancouver was "because the Eastern clubs could not see their way to spend a little coin."

<sup>68</sup> Kidd, The Struggle for Canadian Sport, 64-65. Sport's regional nature in Canada during the pre-World War I also extended to popular team games including hockey and baseball. See John Chi-Kit Wong, Lords of the Rinks: The Emergence of the National Hockey League, 1875-1936 (Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 1995), especially Chapter 5; and Howell, Northern Sandlots, 142-144.

<sup>69</sup> Archives of Manitoba, P 3818, Young Men's Christian Association, 1939 YMCA of Winnipeg Scrapbook.

<sup>70</sup> For a playbill advertising the Canadian Amateur Wrestling Championships, including ticket prices, see the Manitoba Free Press, 7 April 1910. Ticket prices for a number of professional wrestling cards staged during the first half of 1910 are provided in Appendix I.

<sup>71</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 9 April 1910.

<sup>72</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 12 April 1910.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

despite various offenses to public decency.<sup>74</sup> Purveyors of the amateur ideal persisted in making every attempt to distance themselves from the ‘sullied’ world of professional wrestling, praising the YMCA for having “done more to purify sport in America than any other organization.”<sup>75</sup> The YMCA was later congratulated for its efforts in staging the Dominion championships and its work to ‘clean up’ the sport by the Free Press, which declared, in direct reference to wrestling:

[W]hen the association takes hold of a competition, no matter how questionable its past career or reputation is, to know that the association is at the back of it is a sufficient guarantee that it will not only be square and above board but it will be clean and void of any objectionable features.<sup>76</sup>

The 1910 Dominion Amateur Championships represented a financial setback for the MAAA and a failure as a spectator event. Still, amateur wrestling continued to prosper as a participant sport in Winnipeg, as evidenced by the 1911 Provincial Championships, once more hosted by the Winnipeg YMCA, which attracted 22 entries.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, despite an AAUC decision against holding a National Amateur Wrestling Championship in 1911, the city was the site for the most important series of matches staged in Canada during the year, and certainly the most significant amateur wrestling event yet held in the province: an elimination tournament to determine who would represent Canada at the Festival of Empire Sports Championship.

The Festival of Empire, which opened on 12 May, was arranged in honour of George V’s coronation. Held at London’s Crystal Palace grounds, the Festival celebrated the British Empire’s historical development and various social and economic achievements. Exhibits included three-quarter size replicas of the various colonial Parliament buildings, a model railroad, amusement park rides, and a feature called, “London in the Year 2000,” which offered a glimpse into the city’s presumed future.<sup>78</sup> In addition to the various displays, the Festival hosted numerous celebratory events, including the Inter-

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<sup>74</sup> Mott, “Manly Sports,” 246-247.

<sup>75</sup> This particular accolade is attributed to James E. Sullivan, founder and then-president of the United States Amateur Athletic Union. See the Manitoba Free Press, 25 September 1909.

<sup>76</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 24 September 1910.

<sup>77</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 March 1911; and 20 March 1911.

<sup>78</sup> Photographs from the 1911 Festival of Empire and a brief descriptive overview of the exhibits are available at, “Festival of Empire Imperial Exhibition and Pageant of London Crystal Palace 1911,” <http://www.studygroup.org.uk/Exhibitions/Pages/1911%20Crystal.htm> (accessed 15 March 2010).

Empire Sports Championship, a precursor to the British Empire (later Commonwealth) Games. Athletes from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and Great Britain competed in running competitions (100 yards, 220 yards, 880 yards, 1 mile and 120 yard hurdles), swimming (1 mile and 100 yards), heavyweight boxing and middleweight wrestling.

In early May, the AAUC began the selection process to determine Canada's representatives at the event. N.H. Crowe, AAUC secretary and member of the selection committee, proposed the idea that George Akins, the Manitoba, Western Canadian, and Dominion middle and heavyweight champion, would face Vancouver's premiere middleweight grappler, George Walker, in Winnipeg. The winner would then travel to Toronto to meet Kingston's J.A. MacDonald, Canada's reigning inter-collegiate heavyweight wrestling champion.<sup>79</sup> As it happened, however, MacDonald, who had graduated from Queen's University in 1910, was already in the West, having accepted a teaching assignment at Coblenz, Saskatchewan. Although he was not previously aware that his name was even being considered, upon hearing of the event, MacDonald wrote the Free Press expressing his intent to participate.<sup>80</sup> By a confluence of circumstances, Winnipeg therefore became the site for both matches. The YMCA gymnasium, which had a seating capacity of 800, was "well filled" with a "large crowd" when Akins faced Walker on 31 May.<sup>81</sup> After 45 minutes of wrestling, the visiting grappler defeated the local champion, and the following night, he also proved victorious against the collegiate champion after 49 minutes on the mat.<sup>82</sup> On 10 June, Walker, along with eight other athletes sailed for England.<sup>83</sup> Walker ultimately placed second in the competition, losing in the finals to England's Stanley V. Bacon, 1908

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<sup>79</sup> Pratt's telegram, outlining the proposed elimination contests, was printed in the Winnipeg Tribune, 12 May 1911; and Winnipeg Telegram, 13 May 1911. George Walker, at the time, had won two successive British Columbia amateur wrestling titles in the middleweight and heavyweight divisions, in addition to the 1910 Pacific Northwest middleweight championship. See the Manitoba Free Press, 17 May 1911; and 19 May 1911.

<sup>80</sup> For MacDonald's letter, see the Manitoba Free Press, 26 May 1911.

<sup>81</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 1 June 1911.

<sup>82</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 1 June 1911; 3 June 1911; Winnipeg Telegram 1 June 1911; 3 June 1911; Winnipeg Tribune, 1 June 1911; 3 June 1911.

<sup>83</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 10 June 1911.

Olympic gold medalist and brother to Winnipeg resident and 1910 Dominion welterweight wrestling champion R.G. Bacon.<sup>84</sup>

The Festival of Empire wrestling elimination bouts generated more publicity than any amateur wrestling event staged in Manitoba before the Great War, and inasmuch as the middleweight title is concerned, can be considered Canada's first truly pan-national amateur wrestling championship. Additionally significant is the fact that it directly connected Canadian amateur wrestling to the larger world of international amateur sport. Thus, amateur wrestling on the regional, national, and international levels were finally linked together by the events that transpired in Winnipeg during May and June of 1911. A similar situation would not occur for another thirteen years, when Canada sent its next wrestling team to the Paris Olympics in 1924. That the bouts transpired at all, however, was not without uncertainty. Once more underscoring amateur athlete's precarious financial situation during the period, neither the MAAA nor the AAUC had available sufficient funds to cover all of the wrestlers' incidental costs in addition to travel fare.<sup>85</sup> Instead, J.D. Pratt, MAAA President, suggested that the proceeds from ticket sales could be directly handed over to the winner to cover his expenses.<sup>86</sup> The cost of renting one of the local theatres was considered by MAAA officials to be prohibitive and likely, given their experiences a year earlier, too risky a proposition.<sup>87</sup> Fortunately, the YMCA offered its gymnasium free of charge and attendance, as noted, was very high, thus averting a difficult financial situation such as that faced by Côté three years earlier.<sup>88</sup>

Naturally, the high-profile event also provided an opportunity to contrast professional wrestling's various antics to the more 'respectable' behaviour of amateur athletes. The Free Press cited Akins, Walker and MacDonald as exemplars for 'true' sportsmanship:

[During their time in Winnipeg a] friendship was cemented, for the trio are the best of pals [sic], chums in fact. While in the city they went about together, took in the theatres and anything else that was going on. They are out and out amateurs, being in the sport for sport sake and

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<sup>84</sup> Before losing to Bacon, Walker defeated Australian W. Smythe in the semi final. See the Manitoba Free Press, 6 July 1911; 13 July 1911; and 18 July 1911.

<sup>85</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 13 May 1911.

<sup>86</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 16 May 1911; Winnipeg Tribune, 12 May 1911.

<sup>87</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 16 May 1911

<sup>88</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 16 May 1911.

are made of the right stuff. How different to those other fellows who enter the roped arena as a means of livelihood: they come here with tales of hatred for their opponents, and while it is sometimes put on they often mean it. Then when the decision is not given in their favour they vow vengeance against the sporting editor: they would see the editor-in-chief and what not. It is all in the game for them, for a licking will mean that they will find difficulty in having other matches made for them.<sup>89</sup>

The MAAA devoted considerable energy to ensuring that young men would continue, like Akins, Walker and MacDonald, to exhibit “the right stuff,” by endeavouring to police the sports under their stewardship and keep them free of professionalism. Accordingly, tremendous energy was devoted to seeking out veiled professionals in the amateur ranks and applying punitive action against the offenders.<sup>90</sup> Policing amateur sport often proved an onerous task, and debates over mixing professionals and amateurs continued to find fertile ground both in Manitoba and elsewhere in Canada.<sup>91</sup> However, both the AAUC and by extension, its provincial affiliate, remained steadfastly opposed to the notion, fearing, as J.D. Pratt worried, that mixing professional and amateur athletes would be “the thin end of the wedge working in... [to] lower the standard of athletics.”<sup>92</sup>

Team sports such as hockey unquestionably drew the majority of the MAAA’s regulatory efforts, but wrestling was not exempt from scrutiny. In early January 1910, for example, the MAAA issued a warning to its athletes on account of reports that amateur wrestlers had recently appeared on a number of professional cards in the city.<sup>93</sup> It is unclear, in examining the results of known professional wrestling cards from the period, which athletes contravened the AAUC/MAAA’s policies. Competing under assumed names was not uncommon (hence its inclusion in the amateur definition adopted by the MAAA in 1907), however, so it is probable that the perpetrators did so to avoid detection and rescission of their amateur status.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 June 1911.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Manitoba Free Press, 7 January 1911; 13 January 1911.

<sup>91</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 22 February 1913; 22 October 1913; 13 December 1913.

<sup>92</sup> J.D. Pratt, quoted in Manitoba Free Press, 22 February 1913.

<sup>93</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 14 January 1910.

<sup>94</sup> Several names featured in preliminary wrestling bouts clearly bore the markings of a *nom de guerre* such as “Zbyszko” and “Americus,” who appeared at the Queen’s Theatre on 3 February 1913.

## The Professional's Role

As vociferously as amateur sporting organizations sought to free themselves from professional 'contamination,' a constant irony was that many of them nevertheless owed much of their success to professional skill and expertise. The seven years between the MAAA's founding and World War I represent organized amateur wrestling's infancy in the province. To develop their amateur wrestling programs, many clubs sought out the best coaches that they could find, and in a province with an already sizeable cohort of professional wrestlers, the requisite skill was to be found in the professional ranks. Of course, the YMCA was dominant among amateur wrestling clubs in Manitoba before 1914. Upon deciding to concentrate attention and resources on its wrestling program in the fall of 1907, it enlisted the services of Thomas Dickinson, who had appeared both as a competitor and official on several professional wrestling cards in Winnipeg during the previous two years.<sup>95</sup> Dickinson was hired with salary by the YMCA, and coached the club to their early championships.<sup>96</sup> Although employed by an explicitly amateur organization, Dickinson did not discontinue his professional activities while in the YMCA's employ. Most prominently, he wrestled world lightweight champion Eugene Tremblay in a handicap match on 2 May 1910.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, other professional wrestlers were acting in a similar capacity to Dickinson. In 1910, professional middleweight champion Charles Gustafson served as wrestling instructor for the newly-formed Winnipeg Athletic Club, which fielded athletes to the Manitoba Amateur Wrestling Championships, and George LePage, later decried for dealing professional wrestling its "death blow" in refusing to meet Gustafson at the Winnipeg Auditorium due to poor attendance, taught wrestling at the Agricultural College.<sup>98</sup> In a related capacity, professional wrestlers also served as workout partners for amateur competitors. For instance, in preparation for the Festival of Empire

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<sup>95</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>96</sup> It is unknown if Dickinson served as wrestling coach during 1907. However, it is certain that prior to the inaugural Manitoba Amateur Wrestling Championships in 1908, he was already employed in that capacity by the YMCA. During the September 1910 monthly meeting of the YMCA, it was noted that Dickinson was to be rehired for the months of October to May inclusive, at a rate of \$65 for the first three months and \$70 per month for the remaining five. See the Manitoba Free Press, 14 November 1908; and 12 September 1910, Archives of Manitoba, P 3798, Young Men's Christian Association, Minutes: YMCA Board of Directors 1910-1913.

<sup>97</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 3 May 1910; Winnipeg Tribune, 3 May 1910.

<sup>98</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 14 January 1910.

competition, Charles Gustafson helped train George Akins, the Swedish grappler pronouncing the local amateur “one of the best men in the middleweight division.”<sup>99</sup>

The MAAA’s definition of amateur did not allow an individual who “at any period of his life taught or assisted in the pursuit of any athletic exercise or sport as a means of livelihood received remuneration” to hold amateur status. Yet, amateur organizations were eager to hire professionals or professionalize individuals by hiring them with pay, to improve the calibre of athletics in the province. Although organizations such as the YMCA may have claimed character building as amateur sport’s central purpose, there is little doubt that achievement in competitive athletics was becoming increasingly important before World War I. Dedication to the three-fold vision of human improvement continued, but it was clear that physical development was slowly emerging as ‘first among equals’ in priority. Underscoring the increasing centrality of athletics in the organization’s mandate, J.H. Ashdown, head of the YMCA building committee, iterated in 1912 that “Association workers strive now to make a well-developed body the tenement of good mental capacity and moral nature.”<sup>100</sup> The YMCA may have indicated that its intention was not to produce “star athletes,” but it was nevertheless conscious to promote its various championship laurels in indoor baseball, basketball, tennis, track and field, and wrestling.<sup>101</sup> With a rapidly expanding membership base, due largely to athletic programs, the Winnipeg YMCA opened a second facility on Selkirk Avenue in the city’s north end in April 1912. Thomas Dickinson’s services were in even greater demand than before, and during the fall of the year, he was dividing his time equally between the two branches.<sup>102</sup> In 1913, a new six-storey facility on Vaughan Street replaced the YMCA’s Portage Avenue headquarters, which for several years had proven too small to meet the demands imposed by a growing membership, and by late 1913 Dickinson was once more active in his coaching capacity at both the Vaughan and north end facilities.<sup>103</sup> In 1914, Winnipeg again hosted the

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<sup>99</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 May 1911.

<sup>100</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 26 April 1912.

<sup>101</sup> See for example the Manitoba Free Press, 25 September 1909; 24 September 1910.

<sup>102</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 5 October 1912.

<sup>103</sup> Due to delays in construction, the Portage Avenue YMCA had to be vacated before the Vaughan Street facility was opened in May 1913. As a result, Dickinson’s wrestling classes were conducted solely out of the Selkirk Avenue YMCA from late January until May. Concerning delays in the opening of the Vaughan Street YMCA, see, Archives of Manitoba, P 3812, Young Men’s



Dominion Amateur Wrestling Championships, which, held in conjunction with the Provincial Amateur Boxing Championships, proved a better public drawing card than those staged four years earlier.<sup>104</sup> Once again, local competitors made up the majority of the entrants and claimed first place in all weight divisions. However, unlike during previous Provincial and National championships, the YMCA no longer monopolized the podium, only winning championship honours in two of the six contested categories. Three of the remaining titles went to the Winnipeg Boy's Club, coached by Canadian featherweight professional wrestling champion Alex Stewart.<sup>105</sup>

Amateur sporting organizations' willingness hire active professional wrestlers to bolster their athletic programs, while simultaneously imposing strict prohibitions on their athletes against remuneration for fear of money's corrupting influence, was clearly a contradiction. If money was the poison that amateur sport's leaders maintained it to be, how could young athletes' guidance and development be placed under the direct supervision of individuals who earned a portion of their living by the very means most despised in amateur sporting circles? How could amateur clubs consciously contrast the wholesome nature of their programs and the character of their wrestlers against the activities witnessed in the professional ranks? Winnipeg's most prominent wrestling coaches were, after all, not just men paid by their respective organizations for their services, but individuals with well documented records on professional mats. The policy was clearly one that served the interests of competitive sports at the expense of the character building nature allegedly endemic to 'simon pure' amateurism. Many in the general public recognized that the existing amateur code was problematic and primarily served the interests and values of those directing sport in the province: a small cadre of individuals, the vast majority

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Christian Association, YMCA- History Sketch and Material 1883-1935, "Y- One Hundred: A Winnipeg Commemorative Publication," 16. On YMCA wrestling classes during 1913 and 1914, see the Manitoba Free Press, 31 January 1913; 27 September 1913.

<sup>104</sup> The 1914 Dominion Wrestling and Manitoba Boxing Championships were staged at the Drill Hall on Broadway Avenue, and drew "a large attendance of spectators." See the Manitoba Free Press, 28 May 1914.

<sup>105</sup> Information related to the Winnipeg Boy's Club wrestling program is sparse. However, much like the YMCA, the Boy's Club sought to instil 'appropriate' amateur sporting values in its membership, and as such explicitly offered "clean methods in wrestling" at their headquarters on the corner of Sherbrook Street and Pacific Avenue. On 28 April 1913, they staged their first club championships. Stewart was assisted in his coaching duties by James McKinnon, who claimed the Dominion Amateur title in the 145 pound class in 1914. Photographs previously on display at the Winnipeg Arena included Patsy Picciano, Dominion Champion in the 115 pound class. Picciano represented the Winnipeg Boy's Club in the Championships, and the photograph notes that he was coached by Alex Stewart. See the Manitoba Free Press, 26 April 1913; and Archives of Manitoba, Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame Collection Photos, no. 260.

of whom were of urban (Winnipeg) middle and upper-middle class, Anglo-Canadian extraction. Regulations were carefully crafted and many cases, selectively enforced, to meet the desires of sport's ruling oligarchy, and sanctions were primarily imposed on those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>106</sup>

### **Participatory Base**

In wrestling's case, direct censure against amateur athletes did occur on rare occasion during the pre-war era, as when 1908 Provincial middleweight champion Les Moir, after winning a tournament the following spring, was subsequently disqualified for falsely claiming that he had never competed against a professional.<sup>107</sup> Although not altogether unknown, punitive measures were nonetheless more common in many other sports. However, competitive amateur wrestling also did not, on the whole, extend far beyond the urban Anglo-Canadian middle class in terms of participation. In examining the surnames of Manitoba's amateur wrestlers from the period, the vast majority were of British extraction, and it was not until 1914 that two individuals, Patsy Picciano and E. Abrahamson, broke the Anglo-Saxon monopoly held on championships in all weight divisions. Picciano turned professional shortly after winning the Dominion title, wrestling under the name Patsy Bachant.<sup>108</sup> The distinctly white and Anglo-Saxon character to amateur wrestling during this period also extended to Canada's involvement in the fledgling international amateur sports movement. When George Walker competed for the right to represent Canada at the Festival of Empire in 1911, he did so against fellow Anglo-Canadians. Once in Britain, he likewise faced opponents, as did other athletes, from the Anglo-Saxon domains. Notably absent, for example, were participants from India, Western and Northeast Africa, Southeast Asia and other regions of the Empire that had not been heavily settled by a white, English speaking population. Indeed, the event was

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<sup>106</sup> Mott, "Manly Sports," 255-257, 260. Middle class control of amateur sport was a feature that extended beyond Manitoba to all parts of the country. See Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*, 25; Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 13.

<sup>107</sup> *Winnipeg Telegram*, 11 March 1909.

<sup>108</sup> On 15 December 1914, Picciano issued a challenge in the Manitoba *Free Press* to meet any wrestler weighing between 115 and 125 pounds.

originally conceived of two decades earlier by J. Astley Cooper as an “Anglo-Saxon Olympiad.”<sup>109</sup> The Festival of Empire sports competition was therefore less an attempt to bring peoples of all backgrounds together to celebrate their common membership in a pan-global political, cultural, and economic enterprise, than an attempt to privilege the common sporting practices and achievements of the Anglo-Protestant settlers.

There were also strong class dimensions to amateur wrestling in Manitoba during this period. The YMCA, which produced the majority of high calibre amateur wrestlers in the province, remained a predominantly middle-class institution, whose membership only extended marginally into the semi-skilled and unskilled manual labour force. Statistics produced by the Winnipeg association in 1910, for example, provide a detailed breakdown of the local membership’s occupational composition. Out of 1,693 registered adult members, office workers (consisting of clerks, bookkeepers and stenographers) made up the single largest category (364), followed by college and business college students (174), and merchants, managers, and real estate men (162). Unspecified or general labourers were wholly absent from the list.<sup>110</sup> Although a complete occupation-based analysis of all wrestlers in the province is not available, a careful examination likewise indicates that competitive amateurs were drawn largely from ‘white-collar’ occupations and skilled trades.<sup>111</sup> Yet, as war loomed near on the horizon, there was evidence, as seen through the success of the Winnipeg Boy’s Club in 1914, that the sport was slowly reaching a broader cross section of the population. Self-described as “The Street Boy’s Y.M.C.A.,” the Boy’s Club drew much of its membership from poorer segments of the young male population, many of

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<sup>109</sup> Cleve Dheensaw, *The Commonwealth Games: The First 60 Years 1930-1990* (Victoria: OrcaBook Publishers, 1994), 8.

<sup>110</sup> Archives of Manitoba, P 3817, Young Men’s Christian Association, YMCA of Winnipeg Scrapbook, “Analysis of Membership of the Young Men’s Christian Association Winnipeg,” compiled in November 1910. Reinforcing these statistics are those presented in the YMCA’s annual yearbook, which indicate that labourers only comprised twenty percent of the institution’s total North American membership. See Zald, *Organizational Change*, 40.

<sup>111</sup> Given the custom of typically including only the first initial in reports pertaining to amateur wrestling, coupled with the common nature of some surnames, it is difficult to conclusively identify all amateur wrestlers in the city by occupation. However, in instances where it is possible, the evidence suggests that the overwhelming majority of amateur wrestlers were drawn from the ranks of clerical workers and skilled tradesmen. These include, from the 1910 Winnipeg *Henderson’s Directory*, H.C. Andrews (clerk), E. Barter (clerk), C. Boulton (clerk), R.M. Hillis (machinist), R.L.(Bert) McAdam (clerk), J. McEachern (machinist), A.J. Mitchell (clerk), and L.G. Ore (printer). In the 1911 Winnipeg *Henderson’s Directory*, listed wrestlers included E. Abrahamson (carpenter), R.G. Bacon (Western Canada Military Institute steward), P. Breen (telephone cable man), J. Cordy (typewriter expert), and W. E. Shane (clerk). The 1914 Winnipeg *Henderson’s Directory* includes G.W. Akins (carpentry foreman), and A.A. Broughton (bookkeeper).

whom had already run into legal difficulties.<sup>112</sup> However, by 1914, their success in competitive athletics was just beginning. Thus, while amateur wrestling experienced tremendous growth in the decade and a half before the Great War, being transformed from a sport with few competitors and no central administration into a well organized athletic undertaking with connections to national and international sporting movements, it had yet to become a sport that, like its professional counterpart, was truly accessible and relevant to broad sections of Manitoba society.

## **Conclusion**

Despite its limited infusion into broader segments of Manitoba society, between 1900 and 1914, amateur wrestling nevertheless underwent a remarkable transformation. Initially a sport whose conventions differed little from those seen in the professional ranks, by 1907 amateur wrestling was beginning to assume a very different form. Both the MAAA, the newly-created provincial governing body for amateur sport, and like-minded sporting organizations such as the YMCA sought to re-shape the ‘mat game’ according to a shared set of amateur values that stood in conscious opposition to the perceived threat posed by professionalism. Under its new stewards’ direction, amateur wrestling experienced tremendous growth in Manitoba, and the sport became increasingly connected (albeit often more in principle than practice), to the larger national and international amateur wrestling movement. However, despite efforts to detach amateur and professional wrestling from one another, a growing desire to provide first-class coaching and achieve competitive victory ensured that they were never completely divorced from one another during the pre-war era. Additionally, despite remarkable advances made during the period, amateur wrestling’s appeal as a competitive activity never extended far outside of the province’s middle-class Anglo-Canadian population whose members governed amateur sport. In the ensuing years, however, wartime conditions assured that wrestling would once more undergo a remarkable, albeit brief, metamorphosis, as ‘simon-pure’ amateurism disappeared, to be replaced for a

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<sup>112</sup> Archives of Manitoba, MG10 B15, Winnipeg Boy’s Club, The Winnipeg Boy’s Club Fifth Annual Report 1909, 7, 8.

time by a military sporting movement which altogether blurred the barriers that had been deliberately constructed to separate amateurism from professionalism.

## Chapter V Wrestling During the Great War

Winnipeg's Royal Canadian Rifles Battalion, known affectionately as the "Little Black Devils" encircled the banks of a wide ditch that formed a makeshift earthen arena. Hundreds of infantrymen sat on the impromptu grass bleachers that were its sides, many with their tunics removed and their shirt sleeves rolled to the elbows in an effort to gain respite from the warm June sun. Others, wishing a better purchase to view the proceedings, stood on the ditch's topmost edge, eyes fixed, like the servicemen seated below, on the scene being played out before them. Two soldiers, 'stripped to the waist' and clad in shorts and shoes, struggled 'manfully' on the grass as the battalion looked on, their muscles straining from exertion. Over them stood a higher ranking official, on guard to give instructions or to end the encounter when victory was achieved. In the course of their efforts, one of the men secured the always-advantageous top position and endeavoured to press his opponent's shoulders firmly to the earth below them. Nearing the point of defeat, the man on the bottom fought back from his perilous situation. Securing a tight grip on his adversary's head, he intertwined their legs together, seeking to throw the man up and to the side, and in doing so regain a more favourable angle from which to continue his own attack.<sup>1</sup>

The soldiers serving with Winnipeg's Little Black Devils, much like those throughout the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), enjoyed a hard-fought wrestling match. By the time the foregoing scene was captured for perpetuity by camera during the summer of 1918, wrestling, particularly contested according to catch-as-catch-can rules, was a well-established spectator and participatory sport in Manitoba at both the professional and amateur levels. Following Canada's entry into the Great War in August 1914, the 'mat game' played a notable, although largely unexamined, part in the Canadian war experience. As a popular sport, wrestling reinforced masculine militarist values and gender expectations that were widely held by Canadians during the period between 1914 and 1918. Simultaneously, however,

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<sup>1</sup> For a photograph of the scene, see "(Wrestling) Men of the Little Black Devils of Winnipeg watching two men of their Battalion wrestling. June, 1918," Library and Archives Canada, Box 54, Negative PA-040159.

it also proved to be “contested territory” in which middle-class beliefs concerning the inherent dangers of intermingling amateur and professional athletes were challenged. This occurred primarily because military-based sport came to replace civilian sport as an ideal site for demonstrating appropriate masculinity, and in this context, professional athletes repeatedly demonstrated their value to the Canadian war cause. Over the course of the war, wrestling therefore assumed a dual role of bolstering widely held ideas related to masculinity, while simultaneously confronting specific class-based prejudices concerning the ‘dirty’ professional athlete.

During an era when manhood was increasingly conceptualized in aggressive and militaristic terms, wrestling served as an ideal ‘maker of men’ that, in addition to inculcating desirable character traits, taught soldiers practical skills for warfare. On the home front, wrestling’s longstanding popularity immediately made it an excellent tool for publicizing the war effort and generating revenue for the Patriotic Fund, particularly in the first several months of the Great War when public enthusiasm for the cause was high. Shortly after the declaration of hostilities, various civilian sporting organizations began to foster a close relationship with the Canadian military. As the conflict in Europe dragged on into its second year, competitive wrestling, previously conducted primarily under civilian auspices, took on added importance both as a means of ensuring the maintenance of what was considered by authorities to be appropriate conduct within the homosocial environment of military camps and as an aid to recruiting. However, with the proliferation of military athletics after late 1915, ‘khaki’ athletic bodies came to threaten the long-held monopoly that the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (AAUC) and its provincial affiliates held as the self-appointed moral guardians for sport. By 1916, military athletics became a site for challenging existing views concerning the relationship between amateurs and professionals, which at its core, represented a philosophical divergence over sport’s “proper” purpose in Canadian society.

### **Historical Background**

Within the ever-expanding body of literature concerning sport and society in Canada, there is a tendency among historians providing a longitudinal study on the subject to give cursory treatment to the

period between 1914 and 1918.<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite their brief analyses, many works strongly affirm the war's importance in helping to re-shape sport, much as it did other elements in Canadian society.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, academic works dedicated to Canada's role in the Great War, both on the home front and in the operational theatre, have tended to ignore sport altogether or provide it with only a passing mention.<sup>4</sup>

The most significant work to date specifically dedicated to sport during the First World War is Andrew Horrall's examination of Canada's most popular summer game, baseball, in the CEF. Horrall's primary emphasis is on the sport's purpose, organization, and development overseas, and its eventual integration into official military practice.<sup>5</sup> Building on Horrall's seminal study, this chapter charts wrestling's evolution on the 'home front,' and most especially Manitoba, between 1914 and 1918. Bolstering an understanding of wartime wrestling in Manitoba are the numerous studies related to ideas surrounding masculinity, militarism, and class, which provide vital context for its significance during the 'War to End All Wars.'

### **Matmen, Manliness, and the Militia**

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Burstyn, *Rites of Men*; and Morrow and Wamsley's *Sport in Canada*, which is the most comprehensive general history of Canadian sport to date. Morrow and Wamsley makes four brief references to sport during the First World War. See pages 4, 81, 67, 228, and 229.

<sup>3</sup> As Bruce Kidd notes in *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*, 10, studies of early Canadian sport typically conclude their analysis in 1914. For example, Alan Metcalfe's seminal monograph on amateur sport, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1807-1914*, as the title implies, concludes its analysis at the beginning of the First World War, a date which Barbara Schrodtt, in "Problems of Periodization in Canadian Sports History," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* 21, 1 (May 1990), 72, contends provides a better division point than the more arbitrary dates used by early Canadian sport historians during the 1970s and early 1980s. In works covering a broader time frame, the war's importance is clearly evident, yet largely unexamined in its own right. In *Sport in Canadian Society*, for example, Ann Hall et. al. demarcate their analysis into the period preceding 1914 and following 1918. See pages 56, 62-66, and 71. Similarly Colin D. Howell's *Blood, Sweat and Cheers*, compares and contrasts the values held by sports' advocates before and after the Great War, but does not explore in any detail sport during the war period itself.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Thompson, *Harvests of War*; Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldiers During the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993); Briton C. Busch, ed., *Canada and the Great War: Western Front Association Papers* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); J.L. Granatstein, *Hell's Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada's Great War, 1914-1918* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2004); Robert Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); David Mackenzie, ed., *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005). More recently, Tim Cook's work on the first half of the war, *At The Sharp End: Canadians Fighting in the Great War 1914-1916* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 403, notes the role played by sport in helping to "humanize the war and rejuvenate men who had lived in squalor and experienced the unimaginable."

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Horrall, "'Keep-a-fighting! Play the game!' Baseball and the Canadian forces during the First World War," *Canadian Military History*, 10, 2 (Spring 2001), 27-40.



In Manitoba, wrestling had been practiced in various forms since before the province entered Confederation. In the decade prior to 1914, however, the sport, as contested under catch-as-catch-can rules, grew considerably in popularity. Professional wrestling matches were a regular feature at various public venues, including theatres, clubs, halls, and sports arenas, particularly in Winnipeg, the province's capital. Amateur wrestling proved slower to develop in the province, but by 1914, Provincial Championships had been held for six years, and in that period, the Dominion Championships had been staged in Winnipeg twice. Although wrestling appealed to members of the public for a variety of reasons, a key element in its widespread popularity, particularly within the middle-class amateur sports movement, was its perceived value as a tool for infusing an appropriate expression of manliness in young men.

Competitiveness and aggression were also closely equated with masculinity by the last decade of the nineteenth century, and sports promoting such behaviour were widely lauded as pathways to, and expressions of, proper manliness.<sup>6</sup> With a heightened emphasis on physicality, as Varda Burstyn asserts, "the aggressive male body [became] the site of provable masculinity for men."<sup>7</sup> Wrestling lent itself well to a worldview celebrating male qualities including strength, endurance, toughness, muscular development, and physical dominance. Victories on the mat were described in near-epic terms, adding weight to their significance as public spectacles and representations of male virtue.<sup>8</sup> Well-known public figures such as American president Theodore Roosevelt, whose popularity extended beyond his nation's borders, was a staunch advocate for aggressive sport's worth as a man-maker, and enthusiastically embraced wrestling for this reason, as did organizations such as the YMCA through its devotion to the

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<sup>6</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 5; and "Body and Soul: Changing Ideas of American Middle Class Manhood, 1770-1920," *Journal of Social History* 16 (1983), 30; Clyde Griffen, "Reconstructing Masculinity from the Evangelical Revival to the Waning of Progressivism: A Speculative Synthesis," in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, eds. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 200; Wanda Ellen Wakefield, *Playing to Win: Sports and the American Military, 1898-1945* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 8; Burstyn, *Rites of Men*, 72; Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 30; Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 5. An important component in football's popularity during the late nineteenth century stemmed from the belief that the aggressive displays of violence demonstrated on the field were considered expressions of ideal masculinity. Injuries were rampant and deaths were common, leading some to condemn its brutality. Yet, these criticisms aside, the sport remained popular. See Riess, "Sport and the Redefinition of American Middle-Class Masculinity," 18-19.

<sup>7</sup> Burstyn, *Rites of Men*, 68.

<sup>8</sup> Reports following a match between Montreal's Eugene Tremblay and Walter Miller in Winnipeg were typical of the time, the 7 May 1910 Winnipeg *Tribune* describing the contest as "A master of defence, artful, modelled on Samsonian lines in strength and speed, versus a perfect little whirlwind, an aggressive wrestler, tricky, clean and willing."

physically vigorous doctrine of Muscular Christianity.<sup>9</sup> The growing sporting goods industry also published courses teaching men how to wrestle. Instructional texts by well-known manufacturers including Spalding offered more than mere techniques, exalting wrestling's physicality as a moral enterprise in its own right. The Spalding Athletic Library's How to Wrestle (1912) promoted wrestling as a natural, manly endeavour while juxtaposing it against less 'respectable' versions of manhood that bred self indulgence or a sedentary existence, stating:

The fascination and rewards of wrestling are such that a man with virility and love of contest in his blood has but to taste of them in order to enlist among its votaries. The man or youth who wrestles feels his superiority over his associates who prefer to spend all of their spare moments in a billiard room, breathing tobacco laden air, or in kindred places... he does twice as much business as the men, narrow chested and weak kneed, who toil at their desk until dinner time, and then go home at odds with the world.<sup>10</sup>

Mail order courses in physical instruction also gained popularity after the turn-of-the century, promising to help young men fulfill widely-held gender expectations.<sup>11</sup> "Farmer" Burns, one of North America's most well-known wrestlers and physical trainers, offered his mail order course, Lessons in Wrestling and Physical Culture, "To REAL Men and Boys Everywhere," asserting, next to a photograph of two youths forcefully sparring for a takedown that, "Splendid Contests Like This Lay the Foundation for Future Health and Perfect Manhood."<sup>12</sup> Burns' lessons also provided males the means to gain masculine capital, equated explicitly with physical prowess, through their ability, "To be able to handle, throw, baffle and mystify opponents far bigger and stronger than [themselves]."<sup>13</sup> Such skills, Burns promised, would allow

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<sup>9</sup> Rader, American Sports, 100, 125; Riess, "Sport and the Redefinition of American Middle-Class Masculinity," 16-17; Lindaman, "Wrestling's Hold," 782.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick R. Toombs, How to Wrestle (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1912), 1-2. Toombs's comments also reflected pervasive fears during the period that the modern, sedentary life typical for middle class males during the industrial era was leading to widespread physical degeneracy. Competitive sport offered a tonic to the growing problem. See Howell, Northern Sandlots, 103-104; Putney, Muscular Christianity, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Physical fitness entrepreneur Earle E. Liederman, for example, employed 150 secretaries in his mail order business during the 1920s. Many other successful mail-order entrepreneurs, including Edmund Desbonnet, Eugen Sandow and Bernarr MacFadden preceded him. See Terry Todd, "Brief History of Resistance Exercise," in Getting Stronger: Weight Training for Men and Women, ed. Bill Pearl (Bollinas, CA: Shelter Publications, 1986), 401.

<sup>12</sup> Martin "Farmer" Burns, Physical Culture Wrestling (Omaha: Farmer Burns School of Wrestling, 1914?), 6, 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

them “[t]o be a man among men.”<sup>14</sup> All of this, and more, could be achieved for an enrolment fee of \$35.<sup>15</sup>

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, aggressive expressions of manhood in sport were intimately tied to imperialism. Canadians, the majority of whom were of British birth or heritage, valued the Dominion’s connection to the Empire. Nurtured by social Darwinist conceptions that placed Anglo-Protestant culture at the vanguard of human development, British customs and practices were necessarily held in the highest regard. The British ‘love of sport’ was heralded as one of the reasons for their ascent as a world power, and by fostering sport’s continued practice in Canada, the dominance of manly British values could, in part, be ensured.<sup>16</sup>

Militarist enthusiasm in Canada during the early twentieth century reinforced bonds between Empire, war and sport. Connections between sport and the military had existed in some form since ancient Greece (whose culture was widely admired by the late-Victorians), when athletes were known to compete in sporting events wearing their battle armour.<sup>17</sup> By the early 1900s, military and paramilitary organizations such as the Boy Scouts and Boys brigades flourished, their ranks swelled by boy’s alleged “natural love for militarism.”<sup>18</sup> Bolstering their purportedly innate enthusiasm, however, were financial endowments such as the Strathcona Trust, which provided funds for military drill training in Canadian schools. By 1911, all provinces in Canada had sanctioned the program and were implementing drill in public school physical education classes.<sup>19</sup> Sport, too, was directly equated with war, with conquest on

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>16</sup> Morris Mott, “The Anglo-Protestant Pioneers and the Establishment of Manly Sports in Manitoba, 1870-1886,” Proceedings, Fourth Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1979), 8-11; Brian Stoddart, “Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 30, 4, (October 1988), 651. Wrestling matches proved to be popular public spectacles in Great Britain during this time as well, and contests were staged at various public venues. A match between Alex Munro, who later wrestled in Winnipeg, and George Hackenschmidt at Glasgow’s Ibrox Park, for example, attracted 20,000 spectators. See Lloyd’s Weekly News, 29 October 1905.

<sup>17</sup> Allan Guttman, The Erotic in Sports (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 17; Nancy B. Reed, More Than Just a Game: The Military Nature of Greek Athletic Contests (Ares Publishers Inc., 1998), 9-21.

<sup>18</sup> Burstyn, Rites of Men, 68; Howell, Blood, Sweat and Cheers, 33.

<sup>19</sup> Frank Cosentino, A History of Physical Education (Toronto: Captus Press, 1988), 247-248; Desmond Morton, A Military History of Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2007), 122-123. Concerning the adoption of military drill in British schools, which before 1906, “remained an official component of the curriculum of physical education in elementary education and the criteria for receiving government grant,” see J.A. Mangan and Hamad S. Ndee, “Military Drill- Rather More than ‘Brief and Basic’: English Elementary Schools and English Militarism,” Militarism, Sport, Europe, 65-96.

the playing field being made analogous to military conflict.<sup>20</sup> Wrestling matches, as was the case with other sports, were commonly described as “battles,” their back-and-forth nature akin to swaying fortunes in the theatre of war.<sup>21</sup> Conversely, however, as both Wanda Wakefield and Andrew Horrall illustrate, the military also used sports metaphors as a means of conveying its own messages to soldiers in a widely intelligible fashion, further reinforcing the intimate conceptual alliance that had been forged between sport and militarism during the early twentieth century.<sup>22</sup>

Despite widespread militarism, Manitoba’s residents did not all share sentiments which made ready connections between male identity, sport, Empire, and war. Most prominently, the province’s Mennonites, who numbered approximately 15,000 by the beginning of World War I, were openly pacifist, and therefore rejected notions of military manliness outright. Mennonites, on the basis of their religious views, were exempt from military service.<sup>23</sup> However, members of groups which held similar sentiments were not granted military exemption. Canadians enlisted on a voluntary basis during the first three years of the war, but following the enactment of Conscription in 1917, dissenters faced even greater pressures to ‘don the khaki.’<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that such groups continued to exist, and resist, indicates that even in a period marked by massive pressure to conform to prevailing Anglo-Canadian norms, alternative interpretations of masculinity persisted. Yet, dissenting views did not gain broad currency, and in the decades before World War I, the link between militarism and sport became deeply-entrenched.

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<sup>20</sup> Burstyn, *Rites of Men*, 72; Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 56, 145; Baker, *Sports in the Western World*, 130.

<sup>21</sup> See for example the Manitoba *Free Press*, 2 April 1908; 5 May 1910; 25 November 1911; 17 April 1913; Winnipeg *Voice*, 28 November 1913; and Portage la Prairie *Weekly Review*, 10 December 1913.

<sup>22</sup> Wakefield, *Playing to Win*, 16, 17; Horrall, “Keep-a-fighting,” 37.

<sup>23</sup> Mennonite communities contributed heavily to war-related charities and Victory Bond drives, which helped to relieve some of the animosity felt by the Anglo-Canadian majority toward their pacifist beliefs. However, as the war’s casualty toll mounted, they faced increased discrimination. See Thompson, *Harvests of War*, 80-81.

<sup>24</sup> Although Mennonites were not required to engage in active military duty, other groups of conscientious objectors were not granted similar lenience. During the war’s later stages, after the implementation of conscription in 1917, Russelites (now commonly known as Jehovah’s Witnesses) faced legal difficulties in Manitoba for their unwillingness to acquiesce to enforced military service. At least three members of their community were allegedly assaulted by military police in Winnipeg. One individual, Robert Clegg, was sentenced to two years of hard labour in Stony Mountain Penitentiary. Although his sentence was suspended, Clegg was shipped overseas to the training grounds at Shorncliffe, England, under military guard. Other prominent religious leaders, among them Methodist minister and social activist J.S. Woodsworth, were relieved of their official duties due to dissenting views which included an advocacy of pacifism. After being denied reappointment as a missionary in Gibson’s Landing by the British Columbia Methodist Conference, Woodsworth resigned as a Methodist Minister. See Jim Blanchard, *Winnipeg’s Great War: A City Comes of Age* (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 223-232; Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), 82-87.

In Canada, militia units actively participated in sports events of all kinds. Widespread interest in sport helped forge solidarity within the militia's ranks between its working class and middle class membership.<sup>25</sup> Official military training manuals from the period advocated sports, including wrestling, as a complement to regular training in the belief that drill alone was not sufficient to elevate a soldier's fitness.<sup>26</sup> Sport's inherent value as a character building enterprise was additionally recognized, and unlike drill, athletic endeavours were considered an aid to addressing, "bad habits too often acquired before enlistment."<sup>27</sup> Yet, not all activities met with universal praise. For instance, competitive boxing conducted under military auspices came under public criticism in Ontario during 1901 for being unacceptably violent. Likely, however, as Mike O'Brien notes, prize fighting's long association with 'disreputable' working class elements in society probably contributed as much to competitive boxing's condemnation as its inherently violent nature.<sup>28</sup> In Manitoba, as elsewhere, wrestling never received the same level of censure accorded to boxing, and proved to be a popular activity closely associated with the province's militia units. In particular, wrestling on horseback served as a common event at various military Gymkhana that were staged in the province. In October 1892, a military sports programme staged at Winnipeg's Fort Osborne barracks included a mounted wrestling tournament, in which a Sergeant Young and Private Brown battled to a twenty minute draw in the finals.<sup>29</sup> Similar events were staged throughout the period prior to World War I.<sup>30</sup> As the results of the 1892 program betray, however, such spectacles served not only to test 'manly' prowess within the peculiarly military context of mounted combat, but also affirmed military hierarchy. Contests were reserved exclusively for the enlisted rank-and-file militia members and the non-commissioned officers corps. Officers were not generally active participants in the sport and certainly did not compete against their subordinates.<sup>31</sup> Evidently, however, even Canada's highest ranking military officials took an interest in wrestling, among them Sam Hughes,

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<sup>25</sup> O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth," 131.

<sup>26</sup> War Office, Manual of Physical Training (London: King's Printer, 1908), 8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth," 131.

<sup>29</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 4 October 1892.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, the Manitoba Free Press, 11 May 1898; 7 July 1903; 9 May 1905; 18 October 1909; 6 March 1914.

<sup>31</sup> In particular, see the Manitoba Free Press, 11 May 1898.

Minister of the Militia. During the spring of 1914, Hughes was rumoured to have engaged John Webster, the Member of Parliament for Brockville in an impromptu wrestling match in his office. When asked about the rumours during question period in the House, Hughes, clearly conversant with the conventions of catch-as-catch-can wrestling (and hyperbole), replied, "I didn't disable him completely. I just took two out of him and he took one out of me." Most of the House understood the joke as well, and Hughes' reply was greeted by roars of laughter.<sup>32</sup>

### **Mobilization and the Mat Game**

By the time Canada entered the Great War on 3 August 1914, sport was already well-integrated with ideas surrounding militarism, and formed an important part of militia life. However, the nature of recruiting undertaken during the CEF's initial mobilization during 1914 did not lend itself to fostering military-based athletics in Manitoba. As noted by Robert Craig Brown and Donald Loveridge, CEF recruiting passed through three distinct periods: the Militia Phase, lasting from August until October 1914, the Patriotic Phase, which began shortly thereafter and continued until 1917, and finally the Conscription Phase which began after 29 August 1917.<sup>33</sup> The changing character of recruiting, coupled with Canada's fortunes during the war, helped shape wrestling's relationship with the military during the war years in Manitoba.

During the Militia phase, Canada's volunteer army rapidly mobilised, with most of the 32,000 recruits converging haphazardly for training at Valcartier Quebec.<sup>34</sup> Only two months after the declaration of war, Canada's first contingent sailed for Great Britain.<sup>35</sup> Because of the extremely brisk timetable under which all of this occurred, fostering military athletics was not a priority for the CEF in Manitoba, their central concern being organizing and preparing the nation's army for immediate

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<sup>32</sup> Sam Hughes, in *The Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons on the Dominion of Canada Vol. 115* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1914), 2082. Concerning the House's reaction to his comment, as well as the context in which it was made, see the Manitoba *Free Press*, 27 March 1914.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Craig Brown and Donald Loveridge, "Unrequited Faith: Recruiting in the CEF 1914-1918," *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire* 54 (1982), 53-79.

<sup>34</sup> Concerning Canada's rapid mobilization for war and Valcartier's transformation into a training camp, see J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 56-57; and Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 35-37.

<sup>35</sup> Morton, *A Military History*, 130-131.

deployment overseas.<sup>36</sup> However, simultaneously, ambitious civilian fundraising efforts were undertaken to assist with the war effort. In Winnipeg, the city's Industrial Bureau began drafting plans for organizing fundraising campaigns within one week of the call to arms, and on 17 August, the Bureau, along with representatives from all welfare societies in the city endorsed the creation of a central committee, "for funds to supply assistance to the families of soldiers and of others that may be unfortunately affected by the war."<sup>37</sup> By 14 September, a province-wide Patriotic Fund had been established, divided into various auxiliary committees.<sup>38</sup> The first action undertaken by the Patriotic Fund's subordinate Manitoba Athletic Patriotic Committee (MAPC), whose executive took office on 13 October, was to arrange an amateur boxing and wrestling benefit with the assistance of the Manitoba Branch of the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (MAAUC), known until February 1912 as the Manitoba Amateur Athletic Association.<sup>39</sup> Joseph Fahey, president of the Winnipeg North End Amateur Athletic Club, estimated that similar events could add \$10,000 to the Patriotic Fund over the course of the season.<sup>40</sup> The MAPC's first fundraiser, staged on 27 and 28 October at the Winnipeg Industrial Bureau, was a tournament to decide the city boxing and wrestling champions. Although not a military event, from the start, there was an attempt to closely fuse civilian amateur sport with military patronage. Seven regiments lent their direct support to the programme, and the event's prime sponsor was none other than Colonel Sam Steele, commander of Military District 10 (Manitoba).<sup>41</sup> Following the tournament, which ultimately netted \$500 for the Patriotic Fund, Winnipeg's former mayor Richard Waugh's staunchly imperialist comments at the event's close elicited a cheer from the large audience when, quoting King George, he testified to the noble

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<sup>36</sup> On the lack of organized military sports during the war's earliest stages, see Horrall, "Keep-a-fighting," 30.

<sup>37</sup> From the official resolution passed at the 17 August meeting of the Winnipeg Industrial Bureau, quoted by D.M. Solant, "Manitoba," in The Canadian Patriotic Fund: A Record of its Activities from 1914 to 1919, ed. Phillip Morris (Ottawa: Canadian Patriotic Fund, 1919?), 107-108.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 109; Manitoba Free Press, 14 October 1914. On 6 November 1911, the MAAA Board of Governors passed a resolution concerning the name change, which was ratified at their annual meeting on 19 February 1912. See 6 November 1911, Archives of Manitoba, MG10 D17, Amateur Athletic Union of Canada Manitoba Section, Minutes of the MAAA 1908-1912; 19 February 1912, Archives of Manitoba, MG10 D17, Amateur Athletic Union of Canada Manitoba Section, Minutes of the MAAA 1908-1912.

<sup>40</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 14 October 1914. Typically, the amateur wrestling "season" lasted from fall until spring of the following year.

<sup>41</sup> For a complete list of all regiments patronizing the Patriotic Athletic Committee's 27 and 28 October boxing and wrestling tournament, see the Manitoba Free Press, 15 October 1914.

cause for which the war in Europe was being waged.<sup>42</sup> Throughout the winter, events featuring wrestling, along with other entertainments, continued to draw strong public support and net revenue for the Patriotic Fund.<sup>43</sup>

From its genesis, the MAPC remained closely allied with the MAAUC, which governed all amateur sport in Manitoba, including wrestling. Yet, in the war's early months, professional wrestling continued to be staged in Winnipeg, completely independent of the Patriotic Fund. During the first half of 1915, matches were conducted by local theatre owners, as they had been prior to August 1914, as for-profit entertainment.<sup>44</sup> With enthusiasm for the war high and expectations for a quick victory in Europe still abundant, civilian sports did not attract widespread criticism in Manitoba during this period. As had been the case before the war, professional wrestlers' conduct continued to elicit substantial controversy, but such admonitions were not on explicitly patriotic grounds.<sup>45</sup> However, after mid-1915, as Canada's casualty toll rose following such devastating battles as Second Ypres, public attitudes began to sour toward men who, still on the home front, continued to earn a living from their athletic skills.<sup>46</sup> After May 1915, professional wrestling disappeared in the province, not to return as a public entertainment until after the war.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, civilian organizations were finding it increasingly difficult to organize amateur wrestling competitions, patriotic or otherwise, because of high enlistment rates among their membership. Winnipeg's YMCA, for example, which had been the province's most ardent booster for amateur wrestling, found their membership numbers drop by over seventy percent, as 3,000 men "rallied to the

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<sup>42</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 19 October 1914.

<sup>43</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 December 1914.

<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, the Manitoba Free Press, and Winnipeg Tribune, 26 November 1914; 2 February 1915; 19 March 1915; 1 June 1915.

<sup>45</sup> A match between Jack Davis, a West Coast grappler, and Patsy Bachant on 18 March 1915, for example, proved to one ringside spectator, "An exhibition of just how yellow a man can be" when Davis stalled and repeatedly tried to make jokes with the spectators. Choruses of boos greeted his attempts at humour. See the Manitoba Free Press, 19 March 1915.

<sup>46</sup> The Second Battle of Ypres (Canadian involvement 22 April to April 24, 1915) was the CEF's first major foray into armed combat and produced 6,035 casualties. The staggering losses sobered the unbridled patriotic jingoism that was so apparent during the first eight months of the war. See Granatstein, Canada's Army, 71. For an examination of contemporary accounts concerning Canadians' growing understanding of the war's gravity, see Terry Copp and T.D. Tait, The Canadian Response to War, 1914-1917 (Vancouver: Copp Clark Pittman Publishing Company, 1971), 19-22. On public attitudes toward civilian sport during the period in Canada, see Horrall, "Keep-a-fighting," 29.

<sup>47</sup> In his memoirs, Moose Jaw's Clarence Eklund recalled the marked decrease in opportunities for wrestling in the West, stating, "I was booking some more towns figuring I would soon have a fortune, when Canada joined England in the First World War with Germany, in 1914. There was no more wrestling. Everyone went to fight the Kaiser." Eklund attempted to enlist but was rejected because of his poor eyesight. See Forty Years of Wrestling, 18.



colours.<sup>48</sup> Among them was Thomas Dickinson, the club's longstanding wrestling coach, who enlisted with the No. 10 Field Ambulance Corps.<sup>49</sup> In June 1915, the Manitoba Provincial Championships, traditionally hosted by the YMCA, were discontinued due to lack of entries, and other events such as the Winnipeg City Championships were likewise dropped from the annual sporting calendar.<sup>50</sup> Winnipeg's recently-constructed Vaughan Street facility, purged of most members, became the unofficial headquarters for Military District 10.<sup>51</sup>

By mid-1915, the war had clearly impacted both amateur and professional wrestling. Yet, as noted by Andrew Horrall, public disdain over civilian sport in war time was not as vociferous in Canada as it was in either Great Britain or Australia. Canadians, on the whole, maintained a somewhat more ambiguous stance on the matter, due in large measure to their close proximity to the American sports market.<sup>52</sup> Until their entry into the War in 1917, sport in the United States, including professional wrestling, continued on as it had before hostilities began in Europe.<sup>53</sup> Thus, while civilian-based wrestling declined in the Manitoba and criticism of non-enlisted athletes grew, the public was kept abreast of the latest happenings in professional wrestling south of the border with reports that were devoid of similar moralizing.<sup>54</sup>

### **Coming to Grips with Long-Term War**

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<sup>48</sup>In 1914, the Winnipeg YMCA had a total membership of 4,200. By 1918, numbers had decreased to 1,600. It was estimated that 3,000 YMCA members joined the CEF. See Archives of Manitoba, P 3812, Young Men's Christian Association, YMCA-History Sketch and Material 1883-1935, "Y- One Hundred: A Winnipeg Commemorative Publication," 17.

<sup>49</sup> See Thomas Dickinson's Attestation Paper, and Casualty Form, Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2513 – 10.

<sup>50</sup> Concerning the 1915 Manitoba Amateur Wrestling Championships, see the Manitoba Free Press, 4 June 1915. One of the few amateur wrestling competitions known to have been staged in Winnipeg after June 1915 occurred on 4 February 1916, when the YMCA hosted an exhibition boxing and wrestling event in the Vaughan Street gymnasium featuring former Dominion Middleweight (158 pound) Champion George Akins. See the Manitoba Free Press, 4 February 1916.

<sup>51</sup> Archives of Manitoba, P 3812, Young Men's Christian Association, YMCA- History Sketch and Material 1883-1935, "Y- One Hundred: A Winnipeg Commemorative Publication," 17.

<sup>52</sup> Horrall, "Keep-a-fighting," 29.

<sup>53</sup> As Wakefield demonstrates in Playing to Win, 19-20, however, once the United States entered the War, similar debates over the efficacy of civilian sport during wartime ensued.

<sup>54</sup> Wrestling aficionados in Manitoba, for example, were kept regularly informed of the exploits of rising heavyweight wrestling star Joe Stecher, who became the heir to Frank Gotch's legacy as the top professional heavyweight wrestler in the United States. Speculation of a match between Stecher and Gotch was regular fodder for newspaper columnists, although Gotch's premature death in December 1917 prevented any such contest from taking place. With America's entry into the war in 1917, the nation's top heavyweight wrestlers including Joe Stecher, Earl Caddock and Ed "Strangler" Lewis all enlisted in the military. See the Manitoba Free Press, 5 February 1916; 25 May 1916; 5 July 1916; 23 February 1917; 17 December 1917; 18 September 1918.

As civilian wrestling events were becoming increasingly scarce in Manitoba, military authorities were taking a heightened interest in the sport. After the rapid enlistment and deployment of the CEF's first division in October 1914, recruitment and training began to unfold in a more organized and less hurried fashion. Instead of marshalling all troops at Valcartier, militia units in each military district took direct control of their own recruiting and training.<sup>55</sup> During the winter of 1914-1915, with troops quartered in Winnipeg for the season, battalion commanders began to direct more attention toward athletics. Within the Canadian 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, which consisted of the 28<sup>th</sup> (North-West), 27<sup>th</sup> (Winnipeg), 29<sup>th</sup> (Vancouver), and 31<sup>st</sup> (Alberta) Battalions, time was spent conducting mock trench raids in the Happyland amusement park, target shooting at the Main Street Armoury rifle range and hiking along Portage Avenue.<sup>56</sup> However, the six months stationed in the city created idle time and a need for recreational diversions apart from training. The CEF, during this period, faced growing discipline problems among the troops still stationed on the home front.<sup>57</sup> Sport provided a means for maintaining interest among the troops and fostering *esprit de corps*.<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion commanders Colonel J.R. Snider and Colonel J.F.L. Embury, respectively, encouraged wrestling and boxing training in the winter, and sponsored a large inter-battalion meet in January 1915 that provided, "sport of the kind to delight the soldiers' hearts."<sup>59</sup> Here again, however, such competitions reaffirmed the importance of maintaining hierarchical distinctions between the enlisted and officer classes. All

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<sup>55</sup> Brown and Loveridge, "Unrequited Faith," 57.

<sup>56</sup> G.E. Hewitt, The Story of the Twenty-Eight (North-West) Battalion, 1914-1917 (London: Canada War Records Office, 1918?), 2-3.

<sup>57</sup> Desmond Morton, When Your Number's Up, 79. As Craig Leslie Mantle notes in "Loyal Mutineers: An Examination of the Connection between Leadership and Disobedience in the Canadian Army since 1885," in The Unwilling and the Reluctant: Theoretical Perspectives on Disobedience in the Military, ed. Craig Leslie Mantle (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2006), 43-45, discipline problems within the CEF were consistently linked to soldiers' perceptions concerning their leaders' command competence and fairness. Failure on behalf of leadership to provide sufficient amusement for soldiers was recognized during the First World War as one cause for inappropriate behaviour and poor morale.

<sup>58</sup> On 1 May 1916, for example, the "New Church" Times noted concerning *esprit de corps*, "Though the division may be separately all that can be desired, yet perhaps it would be of immense advantage if units knew each other better... Not only will it give us greater confidence in each other in circumstances which will most certainly arrive one day, but it would make the work much smoother if one were doing the job with... friends rather than chance acquaintances." See also Wakefield's observations concerning the development of sporting competitions among troops stationed in non-combat settings in Playing to Win, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Evidently, several of the participating soldiers were, by that time, well versed in the sport, as the winners in each weight division earned victories with well-defined wrestling holds such as the body scissors, and half nelson and crotch. See the Manitoba Free Press, 12 January 1915.

entries were drawn exclusively from the non-commissioned ranks.<sup>60</sup> It must be noted that as formal sporting competitions continued to develop within the military, similar distinctions did not extend into the other athletic pursuits enjoyed by soldiers in the CEF. Competition between officers and men was, in the context of other sports, considered to help foster good relations between them and bolster, as opposed to overthrow, discipline.<sup>61</sup> However, in boxing as well as wrestling, the sports' explicitly combative nature created concern that enlisted men might use the opportunity provided by competition as a licence to take revenge on an officer against whom they had a grudge. By the spring of 1916, the informal rule against matches between officers and non-commissioned members received formal sanction in at least one military district.<sup>62</sup> Yet, to deny officers the opportunity to participate in the wrestling was not only detrimental to the further cultivation of manly traits, it also prevented them from learning skills that had direct battlefield application in hand-to-hand combat and self defence. As a result, following a special request on their behalf, the Winnipeg YMCA began conducting classes twice per week for officers in training, teaching the student the requisite skills to "take care of himself in any form of encounter he may run up against."<sup>63</sup> Special officers' classes for horseback wrestling were also later included in sports programmes.<sup>64</sup>

By mid-1915, growing casualty lists and the ongoing trench warfare stalemate that had developed on the Western Front dimmed patriotic enthusiasm for military service in Canada. Yet, Prime Minister Borden's summer trip to England underscored the necessity for radically increased enlistment. Subsequently, the government announced its intent to put 250,000 Canadians into uniform, and by January 1916, the number rose to a half million.<sup>65</sup> In early 1916, the MAAUC's president J. Coates Brown reported that, "The enlistment of such an overwhelming majority of our young men, interested in all branches of sport, has had the result of practically eliminating all hope of continuing senior activities

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Toronto Evening Telegram, 30 March 1916; 15 March 1916, Library and Archives Canada, RG24, Vol. 4365, 34-7-23-19, vol. 1

<sup>62</sup> 28 March 1916; Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, Vol. 4365, 34-7-23-19, vol. 1.

<sup>63</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 31 December 1915.

<sup>64</sup> 24 June 1917, Library and Archives Canada, RG9, Vol. 4135, folder 22, file 9.

<sup>65</sup> Brown and Loveridge, "Unrequited Faith," 60.

during the duration of the war.”<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, Brown advocated maintaining existing athletic clubs through “catering to the young lads who in the next few years will form the backbone of our senior athletics.”<sup>67</sup> Conversely, with a massive increase in the number of men under arms, military sport expanded dramatically. By spring of 1916, competitions were being arranged on a grand scale at the Winnipeg Garrison, as wrestlers, boxers and bayonet fighters competed first in inter-battalion meets, with the winners earning the right to represent their battalion in a city-wide military competition.<sup>68</sup> By the beginning of April, the various meets seemed to be occupying most of the attention of the soldiers stationed in Winnipeg.<sup>69</sup> Nearly a dozen battalions participated, and the finals, staged at Winnipeg’s Amphitheatre Rink, was attended by over 3,000 persons. The multi-day inter and intra-battalion meet was the largest wrestling tournament ever staged in Manitoba to that time, far eclipsing any event held prior to the war. Spectators were not confined to those in uniform, the Winnipeg Telegram noting that, “The poor, the rich- all classes of society were drawn together by the love of contests, the daring and courage of the khaki boys who competed for athletic supremacy.”<sup>70</sup> By 1916 then, military sport was providing unprecedented opportunity for participation in wrestling and represented the primary venue for spectators from all walks of life wishing to indulge their interest in the manly sport.

Military-based wrestling was not just confined to the battalions stationed at the Winnipeg garrison. In 1915, the CEF abandoned its plans for training all troops centrally at Valcartier, and Camp Sewell (later renamed Camp Hughes) located west of Carberry, Manitoba, became the largest training grounds for soldiers in the Canadian West. A peak summer population of approximately 27,500 in 1916 temporarily made it the second largest population centre in Manitoba after Winnipeg.<sup>71</sup> The makeshift city, consisting primarily of tents, offered a variety of conveniences to the soldiers stationed there,

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<sup>66</sup> J. Coates Brown, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 29 April 1916.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* The MAAUC’s commitment to junior sports was reaffirmed at their annual meetings in 1917, when the Association secretary was urged to write a letter to the local school board asking that better use be made of school buildings for organizing sports. See the MAAUC’s annual report in the Manitoba Free Press, 28 April 1917.

<sup>68</sup> See the Manitoba Free Press, 24 March 1916; 25 March 1916; 31 March 1916; and 1 April 1916; Winnipeg Telegram, 1 April 1916; 3 April 1916; 4 April 1916; and Winnipeg Tribune, 1 April 1916; 4 April 1916.

<sup>69</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 1 April 1916.

<sup>70</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 8 April 1916.

<sup>71</sup> Martha McCarthy, Camp Hughes, A Summary Report (Winnipeg: Historic Resources Branch, 1989), 7.

including a number of movie theatres, one of which, the Strand, seated at least one thousand people.<sup>72</sup>

Most conspicuous to the visitor, however, were the ubiquitous symbols of sport at Camp Hughes. The Winnipeg Tribune noted:

What strikes a visitor very strongly on his first walk through the tented streets is the number of athletic grounds. Goal posts are much more numerous than trees. Tennis courts are here, there, and everywhere. Baseball diamonds are marked out. Cricket pitches are carefully prepared and practice nets erected. Lacrosse fields, quoiting grounds and sprint tracks are there. In fact every outdoor exercise has its devotees.<sup>73</sup>

A ninety minute film entitled “A Trip to Camp Sewell,” filmed in 1915 also testified to the importance of sport at the camp, which in addition to depicting the work underway there, showed bayonet practice, wrestling, wrestling on horseback, and boxing.<sup>74</sup>

Early in the war, military sports were organized at the battalion level, with individual battalions likewise providing the patronage for large garrison-wide meets such as the one staged at the Winnipeg during April 1916.<sup>75</sup> Yet, as the war continued, military authorities became “more firmly convinced that athletics should occupy a larger place than [had] previously been considered proper.”<sup>76</sup> To coordinate such a large number of activities, the CEF relied heavily on non-military organizations. The YMCA, in particular, was not only involved with the military sports on the local level, but wherever troops were stationed both on the home front and overseas.<sup>77</sup> The YMCA Military Department operated separately from the local YMCAs, but naturally drew upon their manpower and expertise.<sup>78</sup> So heavily was the “Y”

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<sup>72</sup> Morton, Manitoba, 340; Manitoba Free Press, 14 August 1916.

<sup>73</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 19 August 1916.

<sup>74</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 16 August 1915.

<sup>75</sup> The 90<sup>th</sup> (Winnipeg Rifles) Battalion staged the April 1916 Winnipeg Garrison meet. See the Manitoba Free Press, 8 April 1916.

<sup>76</sup> Captain Thomas Flanagan, quoted in March 1916, Library and Archives Canada, RG24, Vol. 4365, 34-7-23-19, vol. 1.

<sup>77</sup> During the Great War’s early stages, the YMCA’s relationship with the CEF overseas was tenuous, its numbers small, and its efforts modest. However, as the war progressed, its activities became more numerous and its relationship with the military authorities became formalized. By the last year of the conflict, YMCA officials held official staff postings on the Brigade, Division and Corps levels. The Canadian YMCA operated 76 centres in England, and by 1917, 133 secretaries working overseas had honorary CEF commissions, the majority of whom (73) received their pay from the Canadian government. YMCA physical education authority Fred J. Smith was enlisted to devise athletic programs for troops overseas during the summer of 1916. See H. Burstaff, ed., Canada in the Great World War (Toronto: United Publishers of Canada Limited, 1921), 137-138, 146; J. Castell Hopkins, Canada at War: A Record of Heroism and Achievement, 1914-1918 (Toronto: The Canadian Annual Review Limited, 1919), 254-255; Charles W. Bishop, The Canadian YMCA in the Great War: The Official Record of the Activities of the Canadian YMCA In Connection With the Great War of 1914-1918 (Canada: The Canadian National Council YMCA, 1924), 89.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Duncan Patton, General Secretary for the Winnipeg YMCA became the YMCA Area Supervisor for Military Work in Military Districts 10 and 11 (Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Northwest Ontario) in 1915. Herbert R. Hadcock, Winnipeg YMCA

integrated into the Canadian military's sporting activities that, "The net result... was that the YMCA was given the opportunity of providing either directly or indirectly for the great part of the sports in the Canadian army."<sup>79</sup> Although the "Y" reported directly to the military authorities, its heavy involvement in athletics reflected the Department of the Militia's desire to have sport conducted according to the Association's moral precepts.<sup>80</sup> Wrestling, therefore, was not only a tool to build manly physical and mental qualities (which the YMCA likewise espoused through its adherence to the doctrine of Muscular Christianity), but also a means by which young men's minds could be diverted from various inappropriate activities.

By 1914, many within Canadian military circles viewed Canada's professional army in unflattering terms. Sam Hughes, Canada's Minister of the Militia and an ardent temperance advocate, categorized the permanent forces as no more than "bar room loafers," with a penchant for alcohol.<sup>81</sup> During World War I, military camps prohibited the possession or distribution of alcohol, but soldiers at Camp Hughes were still left with considerable time to fill. The YMCA, which was a political advocate for temperance, promoted athletic programs, "As a means to keep the men sober and clean [so as to] make them fit for Military service."<sup>82</sup> Sport also represented a bulwark against more carnal activities. During the early twentieth century, parents and moral leaders, concerned with young men's sexual purity, viewed athletic activity as a natural outlet for countering physical temptations. Wrestling instructors from the period, including Martin "Farmer" Burns, in promoting his lessons specifically to parents, advised that, through his guidance, "Many a student has thereby been saved from the vicious effects of a secret vice."<sup>83</sup> Military sport under the YMCA's guidance at the almost exclusively male Camp Hughes, therefore, was considered to be, "the most wholesome way in which the repressions and monotonies of military life

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Physical Director likewise resigned his position with the local "Y" to work with the Military Department, as did W.H. Moor, Boy's Work Secretary. See 2 April 1917, Library and Archives Canada, RG24, Vol. 4289, file 34-1-45; and Archives of Manitoba, P 3812, Young Men's Christian Association, YMCA- History Sketch and Material 1883-1935, "Y- One Hundred: A Winnipeg Commemorative Publication," 17.

<sup>79</sup> Bishop, *The Canadian YMCA*, 161-162.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>81</sup> Ronald G. Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1853-1916* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 146.

<sup>82</sup> 2 April 1917, Library and Archives Canada, RG24, Vol. 4289, file 34-1-45.

<sup>83</sup> Burns, *Physical Culture Wrestling*, 16.

could be relieved.”<sup>84</sup> Whether or not the sport actually achieved all of the moralistic goals ascribed to it is uncertain. Certainly, however, military officials increasingly came to believe that sport provided such benefits for the men in uniform, and it was on the basis of reports from both Canada and Great Britain that the American Commissions on Training Camp Activities advocated the implementation of athletic training programs in their own armed forces.<sup>85</sup>

### **Wrestling with Recruitment**

Although wrestling was perceived to provide multiple benefits both for the military establishment and the individual soldier, one of its most appreciated features, at least by senior authorities, was as an aid to recruiting. Such was particularly the case by late 1915 and early 1916, with Canada’s expanded military commitment to the war effort. In the fall of 1915, the Militia Department granted patriotic citizens and communities the right to raise battalions and conduct their own recruiting. Although initially successful in its goal of attracting new enlistments, the scheme also created aggressive competition among battalions for men.<sup>86</sup> In this context, battalion-based sports became even more important. Opportunities for participation in sport naturally attracted athletes into military life, and battalions with successful competition records used their achievements in an attempt to draw more recruits. The 196<sup>th</sup> Western Universities Battalion, formed in February 1914, drew membership from students in all military districts west of Ontario. Its historical records, written during the war, note the importance that the battalion attached to its sporting acumen, proclaiming, “In the Realm of Sport, if [the 196<sup>th</sup>] does not lead it is at least the Battalion to beat.”<sup>87</sup> Their official promotional literature gave heavy emphasis to the many “clean and manly” sporting competitions they participated in, including a camp-wide boxing and wrestling meet at Camp Hughes where wrestler Pte. Ralph Lyons Corey and several boxers, “showed

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<sup>84</sup> Bishop, *The Canadian YMCA*, 168. See also Steven Pope, “An Army of Athletes: Playing Fields, Battlefields, and the American Military Sporting Experience, 1890-1920,” *Journal of Military History* 59, 3 (July 1995), 442.

<sup>85</sup> Wakefield, *Playing to Win*, 13.

<sup>86</sup> In some instances, aggressive street recruiting tactics led to harassment not only toward civilians but toward other units deemed ‘unmanly.’ For example, in December 1915, the Canadian Army Medical Corps complained that its men were being verbally accosted in the streets and asked, “Why don’t you join a men’s battalion?” The Medical Corps expressed concern that their members were being confused with the Red Cross and that such remarks could lead to transfers from the unit. See 9 December 1915, Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, Vol. 4594, file MD10-20-10I.

<sup>87</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG24, Vol. 4602, File MD10-20-10-54W.

class and gameness, and were easily the favourites with the large crowds.”<sup>88</sup> In typically allegorical fashion linking sport to war, the 196<sup>th</sup> promotional material concluded that, “It now remains for us to show our efficiency in probably the greatest game we will ever play, namely the ‘196<sup>th</sup> versus the Hun.’”<sup>89</sup>

Well-known sportsmen also aided in attracting men into khaki. Newspapers, enthusiastic to aid the war cause, regularly reported on their enlistment and participation in military-sponsored meets. The Manitoba Free Press commenting on the 184<sup>th</sup> Battalion’s many skilled athletes, noted prior to the April 1916 garrison tournament in Winnipeg that, “Joseph Lemieux, the strong man and champion wrestler of the Mariapolis district, is now with the battalion in the city and will make his first appearance on the mat in Winnipeg at this tournament.”<sup>90</sup> Famous professional wrestlers were also held up as examples to their fellow citizens which served to simultaneously inspire and pressure them into enlisting. Artie Edmunds, the “Pocket Hercules,” who appeared prominently in Winnipeg as a professional wrestler prior to the war, enlisted with the 204<sup>th</sup> Beaver Battalion in Toronto, after being rejected several times for his poor eyesight.<sup>91</sup> The 204<sup>th</sup>’s Captain Joseph Lawson, certainly realizing the attention that could be garnered from having such a high profile enlistee, took an active interest in Edmund’s case and convened a special board of examiners to oversee his petition. Once more facing rejection, Edmunds stated to the board:

You know, I have been around here a good many times bothering you by trying to recruit. Now, you go out and pick out four men from any battalion you want to, put me in a room, tell your four men that I’m a nuisance around here and that you want me beat up. If they beat me up I’ll stay away, but if I come out of the room and leave the four behind, then I want to be taken on.<sup>92</sup>

Edmund’s declaration of manly courage and aggression apparently convinced the examination board, and he was taken into the 204<sup>th</sup> on 3 May 1916.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, his testimonial served notice to the men not yet in uniform but physically capable of active service.

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<sup>88</sup> WUB: Western Universities Battalion, 196<sup>th</sup>, 1, 1 (21 October 1916), 12.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 25 March 1916.

<sup>91</sup> Toronto Evening Telegram, 6 May 1916. Edmunds ongoing problems with his vision were documented in the Manitoba press prior to 1914. The Manitoba Free Press noted on 5 April 1910 that his right eye, which had been harmed in New York in 1907, was further damaged, along with his left eye, in an effort to make weight for a wrestling match in Winnipeg.

<sup>92</sup> Artie Edmunds, quoted in the Toronto Evening Telegram, 6 May 1916.



The showmanship characteristic to professional wrestling also provided unique opportunities to secure enlistments that were not possible with all other sports. The custom of challenging members of the audience to matches was common practice during the period, particularly with various travelling carnival Athletic Shows. Three weeks after enrolling with the 204th, Edmunds, then promoted to the rank of sergeant, attended a wrestling performance where a Greek matman named George Sparta had agreed to defeat any soldier who took the stage. The “Pocket Hercules” once more showed his flair for displays of manly virtue, and as the Toronto Evening Telegram reported, although “ordered by his doctor to quit wrestling for a time, he felt the itch of battle... when it grew too strong for him to resist.”<sup>94</sup> Edmunds proposed that if Sparta could not defeat him in ten minutes, he was to enlist with the 204<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Noting his opponent’s diminutive status, Sparta agreed that if he did not win within the allotted period, his whole company would enlist with the Beavers. Edmunds first wrestled a smaller man in the troupe, Detoille, and after lasting the limit, repeated the feat with Sparta. In addition to securing several new recruits, Edmunds’ matches earned him \$40, which he donated to the Red Cross.<sup>95</sup> Although it is impossible to ascertain whether the event was orchestrated beforehand, the showmanship emblematic to professional wrestling nevertheless generated positive publicity for the battalion during a period characterized by highly competitive recruiting.

The Canadian government’s decision to allow patriotic civilians to raise battalions according to various affinities, including ethnicity, provided another opportunity for professional wrestling to prove its merit in wartime. Nativist sentiment, which was already present among Anglo-Canadian citizens in Western Canada since the influx of many non-English speaking immigrants began in the late 1890s, became heightened following the declaration of war in 1914.<sup>96</sup> A common perception that ‘foreigners’ were not contributing sufficiently to the war effort fed the distrust and resentment prevalent on the

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<sup>93</sup> Edmund’s enlistment records, predictably, neglect to mention his poor eyesight, although a medical examination did note his slightly deformed, ‘cauliflower’ ear. See Edmund’s Attestation Paper, Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2827 – 45.

<sup>94</sup> Toronto Evening Telegram, 26 May 1916.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Thompson, Harvests of War, 74; Donald Avery, “Ethnic and Class Relations in Western Canada during the First World War: A Case Study of European Immigrants and Anglo-Canadian Nativism,” Canada and the First World War, 288.

Prairies. Anglo-Canadian attitudes during the period were not uniformly opposed to all of the region's 'foreign' residents. In particular, peoples originating from 'enemy' nations such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany and Bulgaria faced more intense discrimination.<sup>97</sup> Because of widely-held racial theories, Scandinavians were typically considered to be close cultural cousins to the English-speaking majority, and as a result, did not accrue the same hostility as either their Central and Eastern European counterparts, or the once-favoured German immigrants.<sup>98</sup> Yet, even among 'favoured' groups, pressures to assimilate to the norms of the Anglo-Canadian majority were strong.<sup>99</sup> During the First World War, the Scandinavian countries remained officially neutral, which created potential problems for immigrants living in a warring nation. In this context, the 197<sup>th</sup> Scandinavian Overseas Battalion (colloquially known as the Vikings of Canada), which was founded in February 1916, recruited among the Norwegian, Icelandic, Swedish, and Danish populations on the Prairies to demonstrate the Scandinavian population's "desire to help the British empire in its glorious fight for the freedom of all nations and the protection of small states."<sup>100</sup>

Professional wrestling had widespread appeal among many non Anglo-Protestant immigrant groups in Western Canada, and the presence of their best known wrestlers in khaki served to encourage men of similar ethnic descent into uniform while simultaneously providing a tangible public symbol of immigrant loyalty. In the persons of Charles Gustafson and Ernie Sundberg, Manitoba's Swedish population could boast the two most accomplished and well-known wrestlers in the entire province. The 197<sup>th</sup>'s commanding officer, A.G. Fonesca, was acutely concerned with affirming Scandinavian-Canadian loyalty, and company records, although brief, make note of enlistments drawn from his community's

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<sup>97</sup> Thompson, *Harvests of War*, 74-81; Avery, "Ethnic and Class Relations," 272.

<sup>98</sup> Artibise, *Winnipeg*, 165; Donald Avery, "Dangerous Foreigners:" *European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979); 14, John Herd Thomson, *Forging the Prairie West* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 77. Scholars looking at Western Canadian immigration history typically assert that an informal racial hierarchy existed in the region, with ethnically-British people occupying the top stratum. Various other peoples were judged by their ability to assimilate to the Anglo-Canadian norm, with Northern Europeans being the most desirable in this regard, followed by Central and Eastern Europeans. Orientals, Blacks, and Middle Easterners were commonly deemed unassimilable and therefore wholly undesirable. See Howard and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta: A New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1990), 76-78; Thompson, *Forging*, 76-77.

<sup>99</sup> Gulbrand Loken, *From Fjord to Frontier: A History of the Norwegians in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980), 187, 189.

<sup>100</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG24 Vol. 4602, file MD10-20-10-54X.

more prominent ranks. Both Gustafson and Sundberg receive special mention for their accomplishments on the mat, and both were quickly promoted in rank to lieutenant and sergeant, respectively, within the Vikings of Canada.<sup>101</sup> With Camp Hughes re-opening in the summer of 1916, the Swedish grapplers were able to resume their wrestling careers, and their participation in a “Monster Athletic Meet” in mid-August netted both them and the Vikings of Canada a disproportionate volume of the press surrounding the event. Gustafson and Sundberg, the best professionals in Manitoba, easily won first place in their respective divisions, generating publicity for their battalion while simultaneously affirming Scandinavian-Canadian’s presence in the Canadian military and their commitment to the cause of Dominion and Empire.<sup>102</sup>

### **Contesting Visions**

During the Great War, wrestling served as a means for affirming prevailing notions of militarist masculinity, ensuring military conformity, encouraging enlistment, and publicizing immigrant support for Canada’s military commitments. Yet, despite its role in reinforcing values cherished by members of the Anglo-Canadian society, wrestling also proved to be a site for challenging specific beliefs held by many members of the middle class. Most notable in this respect were ideas concerning the inherent dangers associated with professional sports and professional athletes. By 1916, military sport had largely superseded civilian-based amateur sport in Manitoba, and competitions were becoming increasingly well-organized. Civilian-based amateur sport withered during this period, but the MAAUC, as the self-appointed guardians for amateur sporting values, nevertheless sought to extend its previously uncontested authority into the military realm. Of primary concern were the intermingling of amateur and professional athletes and the presence of cash prizes in military sporting events. At the root of both issues, however,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> See the Manitoba Free Press, 12 August 1916; 15 August 1916; 16 August 1916; Winnipeg Telegram, 15 August 1916; 17 August 1916; 18 August 1916; Winnipeg Tribune, 16 August 1916, 18 August 1916. Although Gustafson and Sundberg brought the 197<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and by extension, Scandinavian-Canadians, positive press, it is evident that their fame did not inspire substantial enlistment. The Battalion was never able to recruit to full strength, likely owing in part to the availability of high paying jobs in the agricultural sector after 1915. See Brown and Loveridge, “Unrequited Faith,” 61

was the inherent assumption that money corrupted athletes and was anathema to sport's character building purpose.

Among many members of the middle class during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, widespread sentiment held that professionalism in sport was synonymous with low moral standing, and amateur organizations maintained strict rules to ensure that those who chose to 'play for pay' were excluded from sanctioned events.<sup>103</sup> By the spring of 1916, however, problems began to arise between the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada's provincial affiliates and military authorities over professional and amateur athletes mingling with one another in battalion-sponsored sporting competitions. The issue initially came to the public's attention in Toronto during mid-March of 1916 when the Ontario branch of the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (OAAUC) sought to stop a boxing card staged by the 170<sup>th</sup> Battalion because amateur fighters were competing with professionals.<sup>104</sup>

Secretary, W.J. Smith, on behalf of the Union, declared that:

The impression apparently exists... that an athlete, once he dons the King's uniform, is not subject to the laws of the union, and that he can compete against professionals for prizes, etc. at unsanctioned affairs. While the union has done and is doing all in their power to assist the work of recruiting and providing[sic] recreation for the soldiers, at the same time the stand taken by the delegates at the annual meeting of the branch was quite emphatic that no competitions would be permitted between amateurs and professionals for affairs run under the guise of 'for patriotic purposes.'<sup>105</sup>

The OAAUC immediately attracted criticism for its actions, which were deemed to be "ill timed" due to strong drive for recruiting underway during that period.<sup>106</sup> Toronto Telegram sports columnist and military sports booster Tom Flanagan, chastised the Union stating:

The action of the Athletic Union in putting spokes in the recruiting shows of the various battalions was a badly timed one. There is no profit of any kind to anybody except in that these events help materially in securing recruits. There has to date been no violation of the amateur laws either. The Athletic Union should be able to see beyond its own nose and let things alone as long as recruiting and patriotic purposes demand it.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Frank Cosentino, "A History of the Concept of Professionalism," 134, 169.

<sup>104</sup> Toronto Telegram, 17 March 1916; Winnipeg Telegram, 27 March 1916.

<sup>105</sup> W.J. Smith, quoted in the Toronto Telegram, 17 March 1916.

<sup>106</sup> Toronto Telegram, 17 March 1916.

<sup>107</sup> Tom Flanagan, quoted in the Toronto Telegram, 18 March 1916.

Shortly thereafter, Brigadier General W.A. Legie authorized the creation of a province-wide athletic association to oversee all military sport in Ontario (Military District 2), with Tom Flanagan as secretary.<sup>108</sup> Flanagan, who emphasized that khaki athletes received no financial compensation for their efforts, declared, “We will run our own show. There are no amateurs or professionals in the army, at least in war times, and we will make our own rules.”<sup>109</sup>

In Manitoba, similar problems arose shortly thereafter in connection with the large inter-battalion tournament staged at the Winnipeg Garrison in early April. However, the MAAUC’s concerns involved not only the mingling of professionals and amateurs, but also the clear exchange of money. Athletes who were victorious in each weight class were offered cash prizes for their performance by military officials: a decision that alarmed the MAAUC. With mounting tensions between amateur and military authorities in the East, both sides sought to resolve the matter without a similar vitriolic escalation. On 2 April, representatives from the MAAUC and military met to discuss the matter. The latter declared the tournament to be a “closed event” over which the Union had no jurisdiction to dictate whether professional and amateur athletes could participate together. As a concession, however, all cash prizes were withdrawn.<sup>110</sup> The Winnipeg Telegram reported that, “The military officials were well pleased with the turn of affairs and so were the officials of the Manitoba branch of the Amateur Union.”<sup>111</sup> As a goodwill gesture, the MAAUC’s president J. Coates Brown and secretary Arthur R. Morrison acted as timekeepers for the tournament.<sup>112</sup>

By the spring of 1916, amateur officials in Manitoba clearly realized that, with most its members in uniform, their once-unassailable authority over all athletes in the province had been broken. Both parties, however, recognized that ongoing cooperation was essential. During their annual meeting at the end of April, the MAAUC elected as President, Lieutenant A.E.H. (Abby) Coe of the 184<sup>th</sup> Battalion, with J. Coates Brown retaining an advisory role as Honorary President. Brown stated to his fellow board

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<sup>108</sup> March 1916, Library and Archives Canada, RG24, Vol. 4365, file 34-7-23-19, vol. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Tom Flanagan, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 27 March 1916; Winnipeg Tribune, 27 March 1916; and Winnipeg Telegram, 27 March 1916.

<sup>110</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 3 April 1916; Winnipeg Tribune, 4 April 1916.

<sup>111</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 4 April 1916.

<sup>112</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 3 April 1916

members that attempting to retain control over enlisted athletes in military-sponsored events would, “not only antagonize those whose interest we wish to retain, but possibly defeat the primary object of this Union.”<sup>113</sup> Six weeks later, an athletic association was founded at Camp Hughes to coordinate the myriad events being staged at the tent city.<sup>114</sup> Although a Military District-wide organization, as had been created in Ontario, did not follow until December, with most of the province’s soldiers in camp during the summer of 1916, it certainly oversaw the majority of khaki athletic activities. Significantly, the MAAUC’s Abby Coe was also named as the Camp Hughes Athletic Association’s president.<sup>115</sup>

The elimination of cash prizes in military sporting meets and continued affiliation between amateur and military sporting officials affirmed a middle-class definition that favoured “sport for sport’s sake,” and thus reinforced the view against mixing money and sports. Yet, the challenge posed by military athletics to the AAUC’s sovereignty also created an important distinction for athletes. Although taking money for performances was not acceptable, it did not necessarily follow that he who had done so in the past was questionable in character, nor did it mean that his presence would sully the values of those around him. Quite to the contrary, professional wrestlers repeatedly demonstrated that they were an asset to recruiting and that they were willing to compete, without pay, in sporting events to bolster *esprit de corps*. Thus, the evidence openly refuted arguments that professionals were purely in it for the money and were of dubious moral standing.

Throughout the course of the war, professional wrestlers also demonstrated their courage in the face of the enemy.<sup>116</sup> Additionally, in several instances, wrestlers who had appeared in Manitoba were injured or killed in battle, including Benjamin Sutton of the 79<sup>th</sup> Cameron Highlanders who wrestled before the public as Billy Marsh.<sup>117</sup> Most notable in this respect, however, was Fred C. McLaglen, older brother to Victor McLaglen, who was one of Winnipeg’s most well known grapplers prior to the war.

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<sup>113</sup> J. Coates Brown, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 29 April 1916. On 26 May, the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada unanimously affirmed the right of enlisted amateurs and professionals throughout the Canadian Forces to compete together in military-sanctioned events. For a copy of the amended resolution, see the Winnipeg Telegram, 26 May 1916.

<sup>114</sup> Manitoba Free Press 14 June 1916.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> French wrestler Salvador Chevalier, for example, earned the Croix de Guerre and military medals from both France and England for heroic deeds under heavy artillery fire. See the Winnipeg Tribune 18 March 1920.

<sup>117</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 May 1915.

Through his involvement in local politics and sporting events, McLaglen had earned considerable notoriety in Manitoba. Yet his death in battle as a member of the Lancashire Fusiliers underscored the fact that an inherent incongruity did not necessarily exist between controversy in professional sports and capacity for valour in battle.<sup>118</sup> In this context, public ideas surrounding professionalism were re-shaped, and negative views toward professional wrestling were softened in the post-war period. Simultaneously, definitions of proper manliness underwent revision, as sport within the military context was privileged as a maker of manhood over sport within a civilian context. The later war period saw strong public censure being placed on athletes who had not yet enlisted. Tom Flanagan was vocal in his condemnation, stating that, save for military activities, “sport should be a dead letter, the sporting page go unread” during the duration of the conflict.<sup>119</sup> The absence of professional wrestling events in Manitoba in the later years of the war, the inability to stage major amateur wrestling competitions, and a dramatic reduction of coverage for non-khaki events in the sports pages, suggests that there was broad public support, albeit never full complicity, for his position.<sup>120</sup> As Wanda Wakefield asserts, “the manliness of sport was clearly subordinate to the manliness of war.”<sup>121</sup>

### **The War’s Later Years**

After Canada’s third contingent commenced disembarking in the late summer of 1916, competitive wrestling continued within military ranks in Manitoba.<sup>122</sup> The relationship forged early in the war between the YMCA Military Department and military officials continued after the District Military Athletic Association’s formation in late 1916, with the Association’s secretary working out of the YMCA

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<sup>118</sup> Records concerning McLaglen’s death are available through the Commonwealth Graves Commission at [http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty\\_details.aspx?casualty=383974](http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty_details.aspx?casualty=383974) (accessed 11 September 2010).

<sup>119</sup> Tom Flanagan, quoted in the Toronto *Telegram*, 23 May 1916.

<sup>120</sup> During the MAAUC’s annual meeting in 1918, for example, a reduction in amateur sporting activity during the past year was in strong evidence, with reports from various committees being “necessarily brief owing to the small number of events conducted during the past year.” See the MAAUC’s annual report in the Manitoba *Free Press*, 28 April 1917.

<sup>121</sup> Wakefield, *Playing to Win*, 21.

<sup>122</sup> For example, catch-as-catch-can wrestling competitions were staged at Winnipeg’s Minto Barracks during the winter months. See the Manitoba *Free Press*, 20 January 1917.

offices in Winnipeg to arrange competitions for the soldiers on the home front.<sup>123</sup> However, by this time, the sport failed to generate significant public attention. The MAAUC and MAPC were again forced to cancel the Provincial Championships in December 1917, as they had during the previous two years, although a few wrestling matches were contested free of charge at the Industrial Bureau before a small attendance.<sup>124</sup> Many of the province's well-known wrestlers were already in uniform, so lack of local talent may have contributed to the situation. However, wrestling's decline in Manitoba during the latter part of the war must be directly contrasted with its growth in popularity overseas with the CEF, where athletic competitions took on additional significance as a respite from the immediate horrors of war and as a reminder of life back in Canada.<sup>125</sup> Sporting events were regularly organized for soldiers, and wrestling, including on horseback, formed an important element in the programmes.<sup>126</sup> Although athletic meets were conducted at the battalion and inter-battalion level, the Canadian Forces did not grant official sanction to sport during the first three years of the conflict in Europe. In late December 1917, however, the Canadian General Staff proposed the formation of a Canadian Military Athletic Association (CMAA) to "encourage and facilitate military and athletic sports and competitions between the various Canadian Units in Great Britain."<sup>127</sup> In January, the Canadian General Staff authored A Guide to Military Sports and Recreational Training, which endorsed military-based sport and created an organizational structure consisting of battalion, regimental, area, and inter-area competitions, culminating in a CEF championship.<sup>128</sup> The Guide

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<sup>123</sup> 5 January 1917, Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, Vol. 2604, file 20-10-80, vol. 1; 8 January 1918, RG 24, Vol. 2604, file 20-10-80, vol. 1. It should be noted, however, that as close a relationship as the YMCA enjoyed with the CEF, it nevertheless remained acutely sensitive about guarding its reputation against criticism. Numerous testimonials and positive reviews concerning the YMCA's work both at home and overseas were forwarded to District 10 command to reinforce its favoured status with the CEF. See, for example, "Re: The YMCA in France," RG 24, Vol. 4604, file 20-10-80 vol. 1; 27 September 1917, RG 24, Vol. 4604, file 20-10-80 vol. 1; 18 October 1917, RG 24, Vol. 4604, file 20-10-80 vol. 1;

<sup>124</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 13 December 1917.

<sup>125</sup> Horrall, "Keep-a-fighting," 34.

<sup>126</sup> Wrestling matches, along with boxing, were held before 4,000 people at Pond Hill in Shorncliffe during the summer of 1916. Embankments formed a natural theatre for spectators. 5 March 1917, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-B-1, Vol. 816, file S-1-2. Concerning horseback wrestling, see for example, "Canadian Cavalry Depot Gymkhana Programme, 29 July 1916," Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-D-4, Vol. 5081, Sports Programmes file; "Canadian Engineers' Training Depot Military Athletic Sports, 2 September 1916," Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-D-4, Vol. 5081, Sports Programmes file; "Canadian Field Artillery Reserve Brigade Sports Programme, 16 September 1916," Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-D-4, Vol. 5081, Sports Programmes file; "Canadian Reserve Cavalry Regiment Grand Military Display, 6 August 1917," Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-B-1, Vol. 816, file S-1-2. See also "Action Front!," May 1917, 25-26.

<sup>127</sup> 27 December 1917, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-B-1, Vol. 612, file C-75-2.

<sup>128</sup> A Guide to Military Sports and Recreational Training, December 1917, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-B-1, Vol. 612, file S-75-2. Under the CMAA, six Areas were designated for sporting competition: Shorncliffe, Bramshott, Seaford, 5<sup>th</sup>



formally recognized sport's value as an aid to military training, and provided official rules for conducting wrestling matches under military auspices.<sup>129</sup> The first CMAA Wrestling Championships were held on 24 April 1918 at Bramshott following a series of elimination events.<sup>130</sup> Nine weeks later, on Canada Day, 1918, Canadian wrestlers competed at the Canadian Corps Championships in France before 30,000 spectators, including Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden and Canadian Corps commander Arthur Currie.<sup>131</sup> Among the first place winners were prominent Winnipeg professional wrestlers Alex Stewart (lightweight), and Tom Johnstone (heavyweight).<sup>132</sup> The event, as Andrew Horrall notes, symbolized, "the four year evolution of sport within the Canadian forces and the final acknowledgement of its importance by military leaders."<sup>133</sup> The process by which this occurred was not a straightforward one, nor did wrestling survive the Great War in precisely the way that it entered.

## Conclusion

The changing fortunes of the war heavily shaped wrestling's role in Manitoba society. By the time two Little Black Devils came to grips in the summer of 1918, wrestling, already widely valued for decades as an activity that helped inculcate proper 'manly' virtues, had become heavily integrated into the

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Canadian Division, Bexhill, and London, which also included troops not stationed in any of the other five. 4 January 1918, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-B-1, Vol. 612, file S-75-2.

<sup>129</sup> While making no distinctions between amateurs and professionals in military ranks, the Guide nevertheless prohibited money prizes, instead advocating trophies and medals. Wrestling matches were arranged in five weight classes, from featherweight (126 lbs.) to heavyweight (over 175lbs.). The official rules advocated a stand-up form of wrestling that only allowed holds to be taken from the waist up. No ground wrestling was permitted and a match ended when any part of a contestant's body, other than his feet, touched the ground. It does not appear that the rules were followed, as future competitions were conducted according to the more familiar catch-as-catch-can method. See pages 2, 10. For a further discussion concerning the Guide, see Horrall, "Keep-a-fighting," 34.

<sup>130</sup> Eliminations matches preceded the finals during the weeks beforehand, and the Championships were conducted under catch-as-catch-can rules. 2 March 1918, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-B-1, Vol. 612, file S-75-2; 19 March 1918, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-B-1, Vol. 612, file S-75-2; 22 March 1918, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-B-1, Vol. 612, file S-75-2.

<sup>131</sup> In total, approximately 70,000 athletes in all sports participated in preliminary meets, with 750 earning the right to compete in the finals. As had been the case with military sporting competition throughout the war, the YMCA played a significant role in the Canadian Corps Championships, and following the event, Corps commander Arthur Currie offered his appreciation for their work in helping to facilitate, "what was perhaps one of the largest meetings of the kind which has been held in France." See "Canadian Corps Championships," Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-D-4, Vol. 5081, Sports Programmes file; 15 July 1918, RG9 III-B-1, Vol. 1017, file S-20-3, vol. 1.

<sup>132</sup> Canadian Corps Championships," Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-D-4, Vol. 5081, Sports Programmes file. To be expected, not all military personnel were able to attend the Canadian Corps Championships on 1 July 1918. Smaller scale events, such as the gymkhana staged in Shevevingen, Holland, also featured wrestling in their festivities. See "Official Programme of Gymkhana, 1 July 1918," Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-D-4, Vol. 5081, Sports Programmes file.

<sup>133</sup> Horrall, "Keep-a-fighting," 36.

Canadian military structure owing to the combined efforts of civilian athletic organizations, patriotic associations, religious movements, and Canadian Forces officers. Over the course of four years, wrestling was transformed from a largely-civilian based enterprise that assisted with patriotic fundraising, to a military-based sport that helped maintain troop morale, ensure discipline, and prevent moral impropriety. As wrestling grew under military auspices, it subsequently faded within the civilian realm, as mounting casualties and pressures to enlist made senior sport outside of the CEF increasingly unpalatable to the public. Within this context, a hierarchy was thus established which privileged athletes in uniform over those who did not ‘don the khaki.’ This same process, however, helped to reorient attitudes toward professional athletes. By permitting professionals to compete openly with amateurs, military sport challenged many of the negative stereotypes which had been attached to professionalism. Professional wrestlers who enlisted in the CEF proved a valuable asset to the war effort. Because of their well-known status, their presence reinforced the connection between military service and masculine virtue and helped bolster recruiting. Additionally, since professional wrestlers demonstrated heroism in battle, and in some instances were injured or even killed in the line of duty, negative public attitudes softened toward their vocation, and criticism subsequently diminished during the post-war period. Thus, the Great War served to further entrench the idea that wrestling was a valuable masculine enterprise while granting its professional athletes a level of legitimacy that they did not enjoy prior to 1914.

## Chapter VI The 'Golden Age': Professional Wrestling, 1919-1929

Ten days after the Armistice was signed, the Toronto Globe's sporting editor acclaimed the pivotal role played by Canadian athletes during the Great War. Praising both their efforts in bolstering Canada's international reputation and in furthering the war effort itself, he declared, "[Athletes] have caused the name of Canada and Canadian sport to ring around the world. They 'played the game' in war as in peace. Sport and the sporting spirit have been eloquently justified in the war which has resulted in the smashing of the unspeakable Hun."<sup>1</sup> Not lost in the editorial was the tremendous toll taken by the nation's young athletes who "Numbered among the heroic dead, ...contributed their all to the end that the world might be safe, and [left] an example to be emulated by the generations of sportsmen to come."<sup>2</sup> Echoing the collective sense of reprieve felt across the country after four years of catastrophic war, he concluded, in symbolic exhalation, "Having done their glorious bit for freedom, truth and justice, Canada's tens of thousands of valorous sportsmen overseas will shortly return to their play."<sup>3</sup> The Free Press, in a similar fashion, declared on 'Victory Christmas' that "Sportdom ha[d] done its bit nobly in the great struggle for liberty," by sending "the flower of the nation's manhood to the battlefields of Europe... In the next few months, in which the period of reconstruction will get underway, a grand revival will be brought about in all branches of sport."<sup>4</sup>

The months following November 1918 were predicted to be a renaissance for sport in Manitoba after years of doing battle with "the bloody fist of Prussian militarism."<sup>5</sup> In wrestling's case, however, resurgence was not immediately forthcoming. Professional wrestling remained dormant after the war, and it was not until 1920 that grapplers again began to grace Manitoba's mats. During the next two years, wrestling gained considerable popularity in several other centres including Melita and Brandon, where, for a time, cards were staged with greater frequency than in the province's capital. Although wrestling

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<sup>1</sup> Toronto Globe, 21 November 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 25 December 1918.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid; Manitoba Free Press, 12 November 1918.

made inroads into new markets, in many respects, it replicated the practices that were in place before World War I. However, subtle differences were already beginning to appear that differentiated the sport from its pre-war counterpart both in terms of how it was presented to, and received by, the public. Between August 1922 and June 1924, as North America entered into what was later termed sports' 'golden age,' Winnipeg experienced its own 'golden age' for heavyweight wrestling, and the popularity was synonymous with a single name: Jack Taylor.<sup>6</sup> This 'golden age' saw the establishment of regular heavyweight wrestling programs in the city whose success was predicated on pitting the Canadian "local boy" Taylor, against various high-profile wrestlers on his march to a title match with world's heavyweight champion Ed "Strangler" Lewis. Stripped of most of the pre-war sermonizing over professional wrestling's respectability, much of the popularity around these matches stemmed from promoters' keen ability to present wrestling as a 'rough' spectacle and capitalize on specific ethnic stereotypes, keen anti-foreigner sentiments and the growing sense of regionalism that was prevalent in the West during the period.

By mid-1924, largely due to the sport's commercial success, Winnipeg became integrated into a North American heavyweight wrestling network controlled by a small handful of eastern American promoters. Local talent became replaced by high profile and infrequent appearances from well-known heavyweight American mat stars. Simultaneously, however, professional wrestling continued to thrive in other centres such as Brandon, as it had previously in Winnipeg, on the basis of local talent. Although public attitudes about the sport had altered remarkably by this period, even by the late 1920s, some of the longstanding concerns about professional wrestling's legitimacy were still in evidence.

### **A Slow Return**

After the end of the Great War, few of the professional wrestlers who were active in Manitoba prior to the European conflict appeared to be either available or capable of resuming their mat careers.

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<sup>6</sup> Shortly after the decade ended, the 1920s were being referred to as a "golden" age for sport. See for example, Alison and Peter Brandwein, Sport's Golden Age: A Close-Up of the Fabulous Twenties (New York: Harper Brothers, 1948).

During late 1918 and throughout 1919, no matches were staged in Winnipeg, or evidently, anywhere else in the province. Professional wrestling's complete disappearance was a localized phenomenon, since elsewhere, the sport flourished during the immediate post-war period. At the Lakehead, for example, at least eleven cards were staged in either Fort William or Port Arthur during 1919 alone.<sup>7</sup> Winnipeg's "pride," Charles Gustafson, although certainly not beyond his wrestling years, had evidently let his physical conditioning lapse to such a degree following his victories at Camp Hughes, that he found it difficult to obtain matches. On 24 January 1919, Gustafson was booked to appear in Saskatoon in a match against local wrestler Walter Anderson, but before the engagement could commence, the police intervened on the grounds that the once-athletic middleweight champion would be no match for the Saskatchewan grappler in a competitive bout.<sup>8</sup> In early 1920, Gustafson issued a challenge in the Fort William Daily Times-Journal to meet either Ernie Arthur, the Lakehead middleweight, or George Walker, the former amateur standout and Festival of Empire competitor, who had turned professional in October, 1912.<sup>9</sup> Arthur, weighing at or below the middleweight limit of 158 pounds, expressed his hesitancy on the basis of seeing Gustafson's photo, in which he appeared to "tip the beam at one hundred and eighty."<sup>10</sup> No match with either Arthur or Walker was arranged.

In March 1920, Gustafson decided to "revive the mat game" in Winnipeg, promoting a match for the heavyweight wrestling championship of Manitoba against Winnipeg City Police constable Tom Johnstone, a native of Gilbert Plains who had won the Canadian Corps championship in France.<sup>11</sup> In their bout at the Board of Trade building, held on 25 March, the Winnipeg policeman proved the superior of

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<sup>7</sup> Hatton, "Headlocks at the Lakehead," 158-161.

<sup>8</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 25 January 1919.

<sup>9</sup> Fort William Daily Times-Journal, 10 January 1920. Concerning Walker's professional debut, in which he defeated grappler Peter Bazukos in Vancouver, see the Vancouver Sun, 10 October 1912; and 11 October 1912.

<sup>10</sup> Fort William Daily Times-Journal, 12 January 1920.

<sup>11</sup> Born in 1888, Johnstone joined the city police in March 1909 and wrestled professionally in Manitoba prior to the war. Enlisting in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces in 1915, Johnstone served overseas with the 79<sup>th</sup> Battalion and continued to pursue his interest in wrestling, competing in numerous contests. While at Shorncliffe in England during August 1916, Johnstone, claiming to be "champion heavyweight wrestler of Manitoba and Saskatchewan," issued a public challenge to all comers for wrestling bouts. Johnstone's most prominent wrestling match before World War I was against Clarence Eklund, Moose Jaw's "Mysterious Homesteader," in Winnipeg on 19 December 1910. Concerning Johnstone's enlistment with the Winnipeg police and place of birth, see the Winnipeg Police Museum Police Commission Books. Concerning his military enlistment and activities, see his Attestation Paper, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4903-33. See also Manitoba Free Press, 20 December 1910; 5 August 1916; 23 March 1920; Winnipeg Tribune, 23 March 1920; 24 March 1920.

his veteran Swedish opponent. Succumbing primarily due to “[I]ack of condition,” Gustafson yielded the second and final falls to the Johnstone, who some ringside spectators also viewed as his superior in “strength and science.”<sup>12</sup> Although attended by a “somewhat small circle of mat enthusiasts,” Winnipeg’s first post-war professional wrestling bout brought Johnstone’s talent to the public’s attention and helped stimulate a revival in the sport.<sup>13</sup>

Now Winnipeg’s preeminent professional grappler, Johnstone continued to wrestle in the city periodically throughout 1920 and 1921. A match against John Albrecht of Minneapolis, Minnesota for the “police championship of America,” during the summer of 1920 attracted approximately 2,000 spectators to Winnipeg’s Riverside Park baseball grounds, a number that rivalled the attendance figures for some of the more prominent wrestling matches staged in the city between 1910 and 1914.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Johnstone made significant forays into other Manitoba communities, including Dauphin, where, hailed as “practically a local man,” he defeated Texan J. Sanders at the 1921 Northern Manitoba Fair before the largest crowd ever assembled in the community.<sup>15</sup>

Although Johnstone provided the impetus for re-igniting the Winnipeg public’s interest in professional wrestling, matches were held only sporadically compared to the pre-war era. By late 1920, enthusiasm for the sport in other communities was, for the first time, surpassing that seen in Manitoba’s capital. In Brandon, where matches had been staged intermittently for decades, local businessman Harry Willis began to hold regular cards during September, 1920 at his eponymously-named theatre. By that time, numerous professional middleweight and light-heavyweight wrestlers were appearing in towns throughout the Prairies and in Northwestern Ontario, and Willis took advantage of the available talent.<sup>16</sup> Ethnicity continued to play an important role in promoting some of the matches, as when Harry McDonald, “holder of the middle-weight championship belt of Scotland,” and deemed, “The Pride of

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<sup>12</sup>Manitoba Free Press, 26 March 1920; Winnipeg Tribune, 26 March 1920.

<sup>13</sup> Concerning attendance, see the Winnipeg Tribune, 26 March 1920.

<sup>14</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 7 August 1920. See Appendix I for available attendance figures.

<sup>15</sup> Dauphin Herald, 30 June 1921; 14 July 1921.

<sup>16</sup> Wrestlers appearing at the Willis Theatre during late 1920 and early 1921 included Ernie Arthur, Young Gotch, Charles Olson, Lorne C. Curtis, Nels Moe, Harry McDonald, and the well-known Hollywood motion picture ‘heavy’ Bull Montana.

Scotland,” faced “Swedish grappler” Charles Olson in February 1921.<sup>17</sup> Similar to before the war, the presence of side-bets periodically featured in the publicity surrounding the bouts, and public wagers were still being placed on their outcome.<sup>18</sup> However, discussion concerning the propriety of either the contestants or the matches themselves was far more muted both in Winnipeg and Brandon than in previous decades. In general, the wrestling bouts which were staged before the Brandon public and covered with meticulous detail by the local press, represented ‘clean’ exhibitions, and the wrestlers only “rough[ed] it” according to “the perfectly proper fashion accorded under rules which test the stamina, speed, and strength of a man.”<sup>19</sup> Injuries were still frequent, and included torn neck ligaments, strained arms, and in one instance, a broken collar bone that resulted in Harry McDonald cancelling subsequent engagements.<sup>20</sup> Although the majority of wrestling bouts constituted ‘clean’ (albeit vigorous), athletic displays, during one bout between Swedish grappler Charles Olson and Yorkton’s Nels Moe, new methods were also being introduced to the Brandon public. The Sun noted:

Both wrestlers mixed it up freely, and the match was about as tame as an Indian massacre. In all previous matches staged here, the wrestlers have kept strictly to wrestling. Moe commenced the tactics which later led to the introduction of many new phases of the game which local fans had not seen before. They consisted of short arm jabs, grinding each other’s faces into the mat, head butting and in fact just about everything but biting in the clinches.<sup>21</sup>

Notably absent from the commentary was any condemnation of the methods used by the wrestlers. Such tactics which, during the pre-war period, elicited reproach from both the press and the attendant public, drew no evident censure. To the contrary, the bout, which also included substantial technical wrestling, was heralded as “really the best match of the season.”<sup>22</sup> Lack of criticism may have stemmed, in part, from the fact that both men were reciprocal in their aggression, so it was not a case of one man cheating while the other adhered to the rules. Nevertheless, excessively rough wrestling such as

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<sup>17</sup> These and several other explicit ethnic references were included in the newspaper coverage prior to their bout. See the Brandon Sun, 5 February 1921; 12 February 1921.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the Brandon Sun, 4 November 1920; 15 November 1920; 7 December 1920; 9 December 1920; 13 December 1920; 7 January 1921.

<sup>19</sup> Brandon Sun, 2 September 1920.

<sup>20</sup> Brandon Sun, 4 November 1920; 8 December 1920; 17 February 1921.

<sup>21</sup> Brandon Sun, 30 December 1920.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

described had never been deemed altogether acceptable prior to the war, and the Olson-Moe contest foreshadowed changes that were soon to occur in the sport.

As Harry Willis' regular wrestling cards were gaining popularity in the Wheat City, residents in other Manitoba communities were also developing a heightened interest in professional wrestling. In Melita, in particular, the sport proved an attractive form of public entertainment when, during late 1920 and early 1921, Charles Gustafson 'homesteaded' the community, conducting his training out of the local Great War Veterans Association headquarters.<sup>23</sup> Touted as Melita's "local wonder," and "celebrated local mat artist," Gustafson, who had evidently regained some of his old conditioning, wrestled several matches at the Melita Theatre, adhering as always to "clean and gentlemanly" methods, even when confronted by an opponent such as fellow-Swedish grappler Charles Olson, whose choice of techniques were "without any overflow of scruple."<sup>24</sup> Here again, however, strong indignation to his behaviour was not in evidence. Even though the roughing was one-sided, it drew only muted scorn. When their bout terminated in a draw, both men offered to put up side bets of \$500 for a rematch.<sup>25</sup> Although no such contest transpired on local mats, fans were assured that the next and final match of the season at the Melita Theatre would be similarly competitive when Gustafson wrestled Lorne C. Curtis, billed as "Olson's best opponent in Brandon this season."<sup>26</sup>

Attendance numbers at bouts in Brandon and Melita during late 1920 and early 1921 did not approach those seen at high profile matches in Winnipeg, yet both communities were staging cards with greater regularity than in the province's capital during the period. During the first half of 1922, the Winnipeg public demonstrated a lukewarm interest in professional wrestling, the only significant event in the city being a match on 5 May between Charles Gustafson and the 1921 Manitoba Amateur Heavyweight Champion, Leo L'Heureux, who was making his professional debut. The bout, which attracted a "fair crowd, but... deserved better attendance," lasted three hours without a single fall, and was

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<sup>23</sup> Melita New Era and Napinka Herald, 24 February 1921.

<sup>24</sup> Melita New Era and Napinka Herald, 3 February 1921; 10 March 1921.

<sup>25</sup> Melita New Era and Napinka Herald, 10 March 1921.

<sup>26</sup> Melita New Era and Napinka Herald, 24 March 1921.



described as one that “[would] live in the memories of all those who witnessed it,” and as “one of the hardest fought matches in Canada.”<sup>27</sup> After a fifteen-year career, it also proved to be Gustafson’s last appearance as a wrestler in the province, although he remained a Winnipeg resident until his death on 31 October 1956.<sup>28</sup> Two months after his retirement from local mats, professional wrestling entered a new phase in its local evolution, which, foreshadowed by earlier events occurring in Brandon and Melita, was nevertheless distinct in many respects from what had preceded it. Although new to Manitoba audiences, the changes witnessed in professional wrestling were symptomatic of a general shift in public attitudes concerning sport during the period.

### **Wrestling Reappraised**

By 1922, sport’s purpose was being re-imagined throughout North America, and as a popular public spectacle, professional wrestling was a beneficiary. Continued improvements in transportation and communication technology, and the mass production of goods, aided in the shift from a production to a consumer-oriented society in both Canada and the United States. Although the process was underway by the time Manitoba had entered Confederation in 1870 and had long played a vital role in facilitating public support for professional wrestling, it was largely complete by the 1920s.<sup>29</sup> Previously understood by reformers as a tool for imparting a host of values, sport increasingly came to be viewed by large segments of society as purely a form of entertainment.<sup>30</sup> The widespread reappraisal of long-held notions concerning sport’s “proper” purpose also assisted in its transformation during the 1920s. Four years of horrific conflict had called into question the ability of reformers to positively reshape society, and many in the post-World War I period were disillusioned with the idealism that had permeated public discourse over sport prior to and during the war.<sup>31</sup> The scrutiny and criticism directed specifically toward professional sport also dissipated following the First World War because many professional athletes had

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<sup>27</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 May 1922.

<sup>28</sup> For Gustafson’s obituary, see the Winnipeg Free Press, 2 November 1956.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Dyreson, “The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sports in the 1920s,” Journal of Sports History 16, 3 (Winter, 1989), 271-272; Howell, Blood, Sweat and Cheers, 91.

<sup>30</sup> Dyreson, “The Emergence,” 261.

<sup>31</sup> Putney, Muscular Christianity, 200; Dyreson, “The Emergence,” 269.

served their country with distinction, making it difficult to credibly brand professional sports as inherently corrupting.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, many of the most influential figures associated with reform movements such as Muscular Christianity were dead by the 1920s, and few individuals emerged to replace them.<sup>33</sup>

Although not everybody abandoned the older, pre-war ideals (particularly those most actively associated with amateur sport), by the 1920s the reformers' fervour was largely spent, and professional wrestling became less subject to moralistic condemnation.

In Manitoba, other developments aided in quelling public concerns surrounding professional wrestling. Following the Great War, professional wrestling lost its association with the rowdy, masculine sporting culture that often brought its practitioners into conflict with legal authorities. Wrestlers' names no longer appeared on dockets in police court as they frequently had prior to 1914. Government regulation also added to the sport's credibility and provided a bulwark against individuals who sought to unscrupulously benefit from public interest in mat contests. On 5 May 1921, the Manitoba legislature passed "An Act to Regulate and Control Boxing and Wrestling Exhibitions," giving the provincial government strict control over the sport. Whereas the only stipulation previously placed on professional wrestling matches in the province had been the payment of licensing fees in certain municipal jurisdictions, promoters were now required to obtain a license directly from a provincial government-appointed Board of Supervisors of Boxing and Wrestling.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, wrestlers themselves were required to participate in a medical examination by a Board-appointed physician no more than 24 hours prior to a match and to submit their medical certificate to the local chief of police. Failure to comply with regulations could result in a fine of up to \$250 or a maximum of three months in jail. Further, within Winnipeg, a minimum two week interval was required between professional wrestling cards, and the Act reserved commission members the right to refund admission to the public if matches were not deemed to

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<sup>32</sup> Cosentino, "A History of the Concept of Professionalism," 252-253.

<sup>33</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 199.

<sup>34</sup> "An Act to Regulate and Control Boxing and Wrestling Exhibitions," *Statutes of Manitoba 1921* (Winnipeg: King's Printer, 1921), 7.

be fairly and openly contested.<sup>35</sup> The new legislation made it difficult for professional wrestlers and promoters to engage in some of the activities that had previously tarnished the sport's reputation, such as organized gambling-driven barnstorming tours, half-hearted performances, and refusing to participate in scheduled matches. On the rare occasion when professional wrestlers did find themselves in contravention of regulations, the Commission proved willing to exercise its powers to bring punitive measures against the perpetrator.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, a dimming in reformist fervour was also accompanied by a decline in many of the activities against which it had previously been directed prior to the war.

Evolving public perceptions surrounding professional wrestling were already apparent in Manitoba by 1922, as evidenced by the lack of public moralizing concerning overtly rough tactics in matches at both Brandon and Melita. Not until the summer of 1922, however, did promoters begin to capitalize heavily on Manitoban's changing tastes. Curiously, the first visual symbol of this change was one already vaguely familiar to many Manitobans. On 26 July 1922, Winnipeg residents were met with a sight reminiscent of two decades earlier, when Mouradoulah, the "Terrible Turk," strolled the city's thoroughfares. Adorned in "his Indian turban and many-coloured robes," Jatrintra Gobar (born Jatindra Charan Guha), originally a practitioner of the traditional Indian pehlwani wrestling style, "caused no small amount of excitement around the streets" during a similar walkabout.<sup>37</sup> The "giant Hindu" was in Winnipeg, purportedly at a Rajah's expense, as part of an extended campaign to gain a credible claim to the "championship of the British Empire."<sup>38</sup> His opponent on this occasion was the wrestler who would prove pivotal in elevating professional wrestling to unprecedented levels of popularity in Winnipeg: Jack Taylor.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>36</sup> In November 1923, for instance, the Commission levied a fine against Wladek Zbyszko for his actions during a match in Winnipeg. After winning the first fall, the Pole refused to continue, complaining of a boil on his knee. When the Commission forced him to do so, he lost the second fall because he kicked his opponent, Jack Taylor, in the face, resulting in a bloodied nose. During the third period, after being forced to return to the ring a second time, Zbyszko surrendered after Taylor grabbed his injured limb. The incident generated considerable public uproar, and as a result of his actions, Zbyszko was forced to pay \$250. See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 November 1923; 8 November 1923; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 6 November 1923; 8 November 1923.

<sup>37</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 27 July 1922; 29 July 1922; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 27 July 1929. Pehlwani is a folk wrestling style practiced in present-day Pakistan and India.

<sup>38</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 29 July 1922; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 1 August 1922.

## Jack Taylor and Wrestling's 'Golden Age' in Winnipeg

Born on 6 January 1887, and raised on a farm near Chepstow, in Bruce County, Ontario, Taylor spent his early adulthood in various jobs, including as a lumberjack for the Pigeon River Timber Company in Northern Ontario and later, as a policeman with the Lethbridge police force.<sup>39</sup> Taylor began his mat career in Alberta in early 1912, training as a professional wrestler under the tutelage of Moose Jaw's "Mysterious Homesteader" Clarence Eklund, and later honing his skills under the supervision of Frank Gotch's trainer, Martin "Farmer" Burns.<sup>40</sup> Prior to arriving in Winnipeg in 1922, he had spent most of the previous seven years in the United States, including several years ranching in Wyoming's Nine Mile country where he wrestled frequently in nearby Casper, in addition to making occasional forays to major centres on both coasts such as San Francisco and New York.<sup>41</sup> Although he had spent many years in the United States, Taylor held the rather rare distinction of being a Canadian-born heavyweight wrestler, a point that received enthusiastic, and repeated, emphasis following his arrival in Winnipeg. Preceding his August 1922 match with Gobar, press reports frequently noted his domestic origins, describing him, in contrast to his "Hindu" opponent, as "a native born westerner and a real Canadian."<sup>42</sup> On 1 August, the two men met in a "lively" 50 minute battle, made even more intense by the extreme summer heat.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, the Canadian boy, through a combination of superior technical cunning and physical conditioning, proved victorious over his "Hindu" opponent first by forcing him into submission and then by pinning his shoulders to the mat.<sup>44</sup> Taylor's victory over Gobar was the first in a long series of engagements that would see him pitted against 'foreign' heavyweight wrestlers from around the globe.

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<sup>39</sup> For census data concerning Taylor and his family, see Canadian Census 1901, Ontario, District 48 East Bruce, Sub-District 4, Polling Sub-Division 5, Greenock township, Page 2. Concerning Taylor's employment with the Pigeon River Timber Company see the Fort William Daily Times-Journal, 2 November 1923. References to Taylor as an "ex-cop" were numerous during his early career. See for example the Lethbridge Herald, 12 April 1912; Medicine Hat Daily News, 4 January 1913; and 9 January 1913.

<sup>40</sup> Eklund-Odegard, Wyoming's Wrestling Rancher, 13. See the Lethbridge Herald, 25 March 1912 concerning Taylor's first match against Jack Ellison in Raymond, Alberta. As early as 1913, Jack Taylor also received wrestling instruction from "Farmer" Burns. See the Medicine Hat Daily News, 21 February 1913.

<sup>41</sup> Eklund-Odegard, Wyoming's Wrestling Rancher, 13-14; Casper Tribune, 21 December 1920; 1 March 1921; 1 November 1921; 15 December 1921; New York Times; 9 May 1919; and Oakland Tribune, 10 March 1920.

<sup>42</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 July 1922.

<sup>43</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 2 August 1922.

<sup>44</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 2 August 1922.

Invariably, the Canadian grappler emerged victorious in these bouts, both in the competitive sense and, perhaps more significantly, in terms of public sentiment.

Taylor's "inaugural" match in Winnipeg against Jatrinda Gobar proved to be an inauspicious beginning to what would ultimately be a 'golden age' for wrestling in the Prairie city. Professional wrestling, as noted, had attracted little public interest in Winnipeg during the previous year. Consistent with prevailing disinterest in the sport, only three hundred spectators attended the event, providing a gate which "hardly paid for the expense of the show."<sup>45</sup> However, under the management of Emil Klank, who had previously guided world heavyweight wrestling champion Frank Gotch's career, and local promoter D'Arcy McIlroy, a variety of strategies were initiated to cultivate public interest in Taylor's wrestling career. Collectively, they represented the first intensive campaign to 'build-up' a wrestling star in the province's history, and in doing so create a sports hero for Western Canada.

Since the 1880s, several professional wrestlers had earned considerable fame in Manitoba for their athletic accomplishments, and were well known to the province's public during their careers. However, in the 1920s, with a growing consumer culture, individual athletes became highly marketable commodities. In the United States, such figures as baseball player Herman "Babe" Ruth, and pugilist Jack Dempsey achieved unprecedented fame as a result of careful management and increased coverage granted to sports in newspapers.<sup>46</sup> As Benjamin Rader notes, the growing appeal of the sports hero also owed much to a widespread feeling of powerlessness in an increasingly regulated and bureaucratized society. Sports heroes, with their natural talents, represented the ability to transcend the impersonal and seemingly-impassable barriers to success and security that confronted most people.<sup>47</sup> In promoting Jack Taylor to the public, McIlroy and Klank, aided considerably by local sports reporters, created the image of an individual capable of overcoming virtually all of the daunting barriers that were placed in his path. First, Taylor was presented as an up-and-coming contender for the world's heavyweight championship.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Howell, *Blood, Sweat and Cheers*, 91-92; Beekman, *Ringside*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> Rader, *American Sports*, 133, 134.

In an October 1922 interview with the Free Press, manager Emil Klank stated that “I have managed and trained the two greatest wrestling champions that ever lived- ‘Farmer’ Burns and Frank Gotch- and in[sic] Jack T[a]yl[o]r I believe that I have a third world’s champion in the making.”<sup>48</sup> Part of the image cultivated for Taylor also portrayed him as a young talent on the ascent. Descriptions in newspaper reports during 1922 touted him as “Young Taylor,” and a wrestler with “youth and plenty of confidence on his side.”<sup>49</sup> In actuality, at 35 years of age, Taylor was well into his wrestling prime by 1922 and hardly a “young” athlete. Further, for many years he had been a prominent heavyweight wrestler, and for long-time fans of the sport in Winnipeg, he was already a familiar face.<sup>50</sup> However, during his campaign in Winnipeg during the 1920s, reports were notably silent concerning his earlier forays onto local mats since they did little to affirm the image of a young star on the climb.

Jack Taylor’s portrayal as an up-and-coming heavyweight championship prospect helped generate public interest in his matches, but the most compelling element associated with his success in Winnipeg was the careful selection- and depiction- of his opponents. By frequently pitting him against “foreign” wrestlers, promoters overtly juxtaposed the acceptably domestic, represented by Taylor, against threatening alien adversaries who sought to derail his march to the championship. Clearly, by 1922, ethnicity’s appeal in professional wrestling was already well established. Wrestlers of various nationalities had been pitted against one another in Manitoba for decades. Although monikers such as the “Terrible Turk” effectively played upon anti-foreigner sentiments in the pre-war era, it was rare for advertisements and newspaper reports to ascribe specific (and typically unfavourable) attributes to wrestlers purely based upon their birthplace. After 1922, however, promoters adopted a hard sell approach that clearly delineated non-Anglo Canadian wrestlers as the undesirable “other.”

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<sup>48</sup> Emik Klank, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 3 October 1922.

<sup>49</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 October 1922; 10 October 1922.

<sup>50</sup> In November 1914, during his second appearance in the city, Taylor wrestled before 1,600 spectators at the Walker Theatre in a match against Charles Cutler, who claimed the world’s heavyweight title following one of several “retirements” by champion Frank Gotch. The Canadian won the match due to a controversial decision by referee Alex Stewart to disqualify Cutler for using an illegal stranglehold. For a brief period after the contest, Taylor asserted his right to the world’s heavyweight championship, although the claim went completely unrecognized. For a detailed account of Taylor’s match with Cutler as well as an earlier encounter between the two in Saskatoon, see Hewitt, Catch Wrestling Round Two, 79-84.

## Foreign Menaces

Overt attempts to capitalize on Canadian nationalism became apparent prior to Taylor's second match in the city against Stanislaus Zbyszko who had recently claimed the world's heavyweight title before losing to Ed "Strangler" Lewis.<sup>51</sup> It was announced on 18 September 1922 that, after two months of negotiating, Darcy McIlroy was close to securing former champion Zbyszko, "greatest of all wrestlers" for a match in Winnipeg.<sup>52</sup> Five days later McIlroy obtained Zbyszko's contract, and although an opponent had apparently not been chosen, several well-known American wrestlers were suggested to fill the role.<sup>53</sup> The prospect of bringing in an American challenger elicited a "howl of protest" from Taylor's manager Emil Klank that was distinctly nationalist in its character. Klank queried, in an interview with the Free Press, "Why send to New York or Chicago to get a man when they can get Taylor, a real Canadian and a real champion?"<sup>54</sup> He further asserted, "Just put him on with Zbyszko and let me show the fans that a made-in-Canada product is just as good as any foreign importations."<sup>55</sup> On 6 October, Taylor signed to meet the "Polish idol" at Winnipeg's Board of Trade Building two weeks hence.<sup>56</sup>

In the lead up to their match, press reports concerning Stanislaus Zbyszko portrayed him in a very different fashion than those preceding his match against "German Oak" Paul Sigfried ten years earlier. Although still touted in one report for his "wonderful strength and perfect physique," the Polish grappler,

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<sup>51</sup> As was widely the case, the Great War had curtailed Zbyszko's sporting activities, and the Pole was first detained by the Russian Czar and later imprisoned following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Having lost much of his money during the war, Zbyszko returned to North America in February 1920 aboard the Danish steamer *Oscar II* to resume his mat career. His fame once more renewed with the public, Manitobans were kept frequently abreast of his wrestling exploits, which culminated in winning the world's heavyweight wrestling title from Ed "Strangler" Lewis on 6 May 1921 at New York's Madison Square Garden. Although Lewis regained his title on 3 March 1922, Zbyszko's recent turn as champion made him, next to Lewis himself, the most recognized wrestler on the continent. On Zbyszko's activities overseas during the war period, see Graham Noble, "The Lion of the Punjab" – Part IV: Aftermath," InYo: Journal of Alternative Perspectives (August 2002), <http://ejmas.com/jalt/jaltframe.htm> (accessed 12 April 2010); and Thomas Van Vleck, "Zbyszko: Passing the Baton," Milo: Journal for Serious Strength Athletes 8, 3 (December 2000), 93. For reports on Zbyszko's wrestling activities between his arrival in North America and his winning the world's heavyweight championship, see, for example, the Manitoba Free Press, 25 February 1920; 27 February 1920; 1 March 1920; 13 April 1920; 20 April 1920; 31 May 1920; 10 July 1920; 15 October 1920; 10 December 1920; 9 February 1921; 15 March 1921; and 7 May 1921. Record of his title reign is available in Duncan and Will, Wrestling Title Histories, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Regarding both the announcement and use of the term, "greatest of all wrestlers" in reference to Zbyszko, see the Manitoba Free Press, 20 September 1922.

<sup>53</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 23 September 1922.

<sup>54</sup> Emil Klank, quoted in the Manitoba Free Press, 3 October 1922.

<sup>55</sup> Emil Klank, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 October 1922.

then over forty years old and the veteran of over a thousand wrestling matches, was also described as “one of the most brutal looking men in the game,” with ears that were “twisted and out of shape,” and a “huge neck, which measure[d] 22 inches, connect[ed] to a head that [was] perfectly hairless.”<sup>57</sup> Matching his visage was a simian-like body, purportedly “covered with long black hairs, giving him more the appearance of a huge gorilla than a man.”<sup>58</sup> The Polish grappler’s tactics were alleged to mirror his frightening countenance, and it was reported that “In action Zbyszko is absolutely heartless and has never been known to spare an opponent.” It was further surmised that “Perhaps this is the reason he always wins.”<sup>59</sup> Although wrestling had long been appreciated as a rough display of athletic manhood, for the first time, promoters, aided enthusiastically by the press, were overtly using the promise of a rough spectacle as way of attracting spectators: a tactic that would have been inimical during the pre-war reformist era, when “science” was the sport’s principal selling-point. Once he arrived in the city, reports softened somewhat, and the Free Press, still ever-cognizant of Zbyszko’s foreign origins, admitted that he was “a most genial chap and talks fairly good English with an accent to his voice.”<sup>60</sup>

Enthusiastic efforts at promoting the match between Stanislaus Zbyszko and Jack Taylor proved fruitful, and close to 3,000 spectators attended the event. The clearly nationalistic overtones that the contest evoked in pitting Canada’s champion grappler against the Pole evidently played on many people’s sentiments, and “By far the majority of the crowd was with Taylor.”<sup>61</sup> Yet, despite his domestic origins, support within the audience for Taylor was not universal, suggesting that Manitobans, not all of whom were of Anglo-Canadian stock, considered more than a wrestler’s Canadian birth in deciding who to cheer for.<sup>62</sup>

In an attempt to ensure a fast-paced exhibition and to avoid the drawn-out endurance contests that frequently characterized the sport prior to World War I, wrestling was conducted in ten minute rounds, an

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<sup>57</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 October 1922; 10 October 1922.

<sup>58</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 10 October 1922.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 October 1922.

<sup>61</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 20 October 1922.

<sup>62</sup> The Winnipeg Tribune 20 October 1922 stated of the contest that “Both grapplers had large followings.” As noted in Chapter III, Winnipeg’s local Polish population has supported Zbyszko in the past during his appearances in the city, so it is likely that a contingent of his fellow ‘countrymen’ had likewise turned out again to see him.



innovation that had already been introduced to New York audiences with positive results.<sup>63</sup> The changes were also evidently well received in Winnipeg, and the Free Press, generally accustomed to reporting on local matches staged among men in lighter weight divisions, conceded that, “Though heavyweight wrestling is generally slow, last night[‘s] contest was full of action, and the crowd was on its toes on many occasions.”<sup>64</sup> Although presented as an underdog against his more famous opponent, the Canadian performed better than expected, and when the master of ceremonies announced the match’s result as a draw, “the crowd cheered him to the echo.”<sup>65</sup> On the strength of public support, Jack Taylor wired his wife, still living in the United States, to join him in Winnipeg.<sup>66</sup> Already in public favour for his status as a “real Canadian,” Taylor was thereafter able to garner additional support in Manitoba’s capital through the well-established practice of homesteading.<sup>67</sup> From his new home base, the Canadian champion launched himself into an aggressive wrestling schedule, appearing in virtually all major Prairie centres over the next three years, including Brandon, Saskatoon, Regina, Swift Current, Yorkton, Edmonton, and Lethbridge, as well as smaller communities such as Radville, Saskatchewan and Morris, Manitoba.<sup>68</sup>

Taylor’s match with Zbyszko ended professional wrestling’s nadir in Winnipeg, and thereafter, heavyweight professional wrestling cards staged at the Board of Trade building under the auspices of Darcy McIlroy’s Empire Athletic Club regularly attracted between 1,500 and 4,000 spectators.<sup>69</sup> The Empire Athletic Club programmes produced the largest attendance figures recorded for professional wrestling on the Prairies during the period, although interest in the sport was widespread. Wrestling’s success had much to do with the fact that McIlroy promoted his cards using messages that deeply

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<sup>63</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 October 1922; 19 October 1922.

<sup>64</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 20 October 1922.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 24 October 1922. Hazel Eklund-Odegard provides brief commentary on Taylor’s relocation to Winnipeg during 1922. She noted in Wyoming’s Wrestling Rancher, 14, that “When the Taylor’s left, it was just a ‘walk out’ deal. There were dishes still on the table, food in the cupboards and clothes in the closet.”

<sup>67</sup> During his residency in Winnipeg, Taylor lived at 200 Smith Street in downtown Winnipeg. The 1923 Henderson’s Directory lists him at the address under the occupation “champion wrestler.”

<sup>68</sup> See respectively the Brandon Sun, 23 January 1923; Saskatoon Phoenix, 31 March 1923; Regina Leader, 28 February 1923; Swift Current Sun, 4 March 1924; Saskatoon Star, 31 January 1924; Edmonton Bulletin, 5 March 1924; Lethbridge Herald, 26 February 1924; Saskatoon Star, 10 July 1923. Notably absent from Taylor’s touring schedule was Calgary which may have been due, in part, to the poor impression that Taylor left with fans in October, 1915, when he knocked out longstanding rival Charles Cutler with a punch to the jaw. It was Taylor’s last match in Canada before relocating to the United States.

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix I.

resonated with large segments of the population during the period. Press reports and advertisements for his matches, in particular, mirrored the growing anti-immigrant sentiment that was developing throughout Western Canadian during the post-World War I period. Although nativist attitudes, fed by notions of British exceptionalism and imperialism, had existed toward non Anglo-Canadian peoples prior to the war, by the 1920s, begrudging disdain was giving way to far more overt hostility.<sup>70</sup> Part of the heightened antipathy toward non Anglo-Canadians evidenced in the early inter-war period stemmed from economic considerations.

Manitoba's economy experienced what W.L. Morton termed a "great boom" prior to 1912, spurred on largely by European demand for Western Canadian grain, heightened British investment in the Canadian economy, and declining transportation costs for Western products.<sup>71</sup> However, mounting political instability in Europe during 1912 and 1913 resulted in decreased investment in Western Canadian markets.<sup>72</sup> Economic recovery, brought about by wartime demand for Manitoba wheat and livestock, was short-lived, and by 1920, the region entered a sustained economic depression.<sup>73</sup> Wheat prices fell to pre-war levels while freight rates rose dramatically, precipitating a decline in many other Western industries.<sup>74</sup> Although considerable animosity was directed toward Central Canada, which many Manitobans perceived as the primary beneficiary of wartime industrial production and Western Canadian war efforts, non-British immigrant groups living in the region also came to be viewed with heightened hostility. Prosperous economic conditions, which had helped to temper nativist resentment during the pre-war years, evaporated in the wake of traumatic wartime experiences and Manitoba's subsequent economic downturn. During the Great War, many immigrant farmers thrived due to increased demand for agricultural staples. Generally speaking, European-Canadian farmers solidified their economic base during wartime because they planted a variety of crops and were less inclined to price speculation that frequently gripped their English-Canadian counterparts. Additionally, the sons of non-English speaking

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<sup>70</sup> Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A History* (Calgary: Fifth House Limited, 2005), 240, 244.

<sup>71</sup> Morton, *Manitoba*, 273, 296; Bellan, *Winnipeg First Century*, 94-95;

<sup>72</sup> Coates and McGuinness, *Manitoba*, 83.

<sup>73</sup> Morton, *Manitoba*, 356.

<sup>74</sup> Bellan, *Winnipeg First Century*, 145; Thompson, *Forging*, 111; Coates and McGuinness, *Manitoba*, 100.

immigrants were less likely to enlist, and remained on the family farm, precluding the necessity of hiring farm hands. Western Anglo-Canadian resentment toward immigrant farmers grew as a result of their prosperity, as many in the dominant group believed that the ‘foreigners’ were reaping the war’s benefits but not making a correspondingly sufficient sacrifice. Public demand grew for the conscription of farm labourers. Such views were particularly directed at immigrants, by then termed ‘enemy aliens,’ who originated from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, irrespective of the fact that many possessed a sense of nationality directly at odds with their former imperial overseer’s aspirations.<sup>75</sup> Labour unrest, culminating in the Winnipeg General Strike during the spring of 1919, also exacerbated nativist hostility. Ironically, during a period marked by an acute schism between labour and capital, both factions agreed that ‘enemy aliens’ were at the root of Winnipeg’s problems.<sup>76</sup>

Changes in Canada’s immigration policy in 1919 reflected growing public concern among the Anglo-Canadian majority over various immigrant groups’ acceptability as prospective Canadian citizens. Prior to the war, economic imperatives, central among them the expansion and development of the Western agrarian economy, had dictated the adoption of a liberal approach to immigration. However, after the war, the federal government became primarily concerned with attracting immigrants deemed to be culturally suitable. Many peoples from Northern and Central Europe who were officially encouraged to emigrate to Canada prior to the war, were faced with entrance restrictions or outright prohibitions after 1919.<sup>77</sup> Anglo-Saxon immigrants from either Britain or the United States were instead given priority.<sup>78</sup> Jack Taylor’s arrival in Winnipeg thus occurred during a period when suspicion and outright derision characterized the sentiments among many within the Anglo-Canadian majority toward ‘foreigners,’ and the publicity surrounding his matches reflected this unguarded nativist sentiment. Although a general sense of antipathy existed toward non-Anglo-Canadians during the period, it would be erroneous to

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<sup>75</sup> Thompson, *Harvests*, 85-86; Burnet and Palmer, *Coming Canadians*, 33.

<sup>76</sup> Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 354; Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, 186.

<sup>77</sup> Avery, *Reluctant Host*, 82.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* Even Clifford Sifton, who was frequently criticized during his tenure as Minister of the Interior for his ‘open’ immigration policy, became more restrictive in his views. In 1920 he stated that, “Canada should bar her door against the German, the Austrian, the Turk and the Bulgarian, and no person of any of these nationalities should be admitted to Canadian citizenship.” See Clifford Sifton, quoted in Hall, *Clifford Sifton Volume Two*, 295.

suggest that all ‘foreigners’ were viewed in precisely the same fashion by Manitoba’s cultural majority. However, prejudice was undeniably widespread, and examination of extant records surrounding Jack Taylor’s matches suggests layered- but firmly racist- views on the part of many Manitobans toward various ethnic groups. Although such views certainly were not universally held, an analysis of Taylor’s matches with Turkish wrestler Yussif Hussane, Japanese jiu-jitsu practitioner Taro Miyake, and Ethiopian wrestler Reginald Siki, serve to illustrate the complex perceptions, and often fears, surrounding “foreigners” that existed during the 1920s and how they were exploited for commercial success.

### **The Terrible Turk**

During the first half of 1923, Jack Taylor twice faced Yussif Hussane, dubbed the “Terrible Turk” much like Ismael Yousouf and Mouradoulah before him. As noted in Chapter III, Turkish peoples were already widely regarded with suspicion in Manitoba prior to World War I. Although the Ottoman Empire was in the process of dissolution when Taylor met Hussane on Winnipeg mats, the once-prominent empire’s status as an adversary of the Allies during the Great War was still fresh in Manitoban minds, intensifying distrust toward a people who already, according to J.S. Woodsworth, “[did] not compare favourably even with the Chinese.”<sup>79</sup> Between 1914 and 1918, frequent reports detailing the battlefield encounters between Turkish and Allied forces provided a regular reminder of the former’s belligerent status.<sup>80</sup> Particularly distressing, however, were the accounts circulated in newspapers pertaining to the systematic persecution of ethnic Armenians in the event now commonly termed the Armenian Genocide. Deemed in one instance, “Horror Unequaled in [a] Thousand Years,” regular reports told of the numerous atrocities committed against non-combatants forced to yield to the “eternal ferocity of the Turk.”<sup>81</sup> Condemned at the outset of the war as an Empire, “whose hands have dripped for

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<sup>79</sup> Woodsworth, *Strangers*, 169.

<sup>80</sup> See for example, the *Manitoba Free Press*, 14 July 1915; 2 September 1915; 16 December 1915; 21 December 1915; 26 August 1915; 21 April 1916; 22 April 1916; 27 June 1916; 8 August 1916.

<sup>81</sup> Concerning the headline, “Horror Unequaled in [a] Thousand Years,” see the *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 October 1915. For other reports in Manitoba newspapers concerning what is now commonly termed the Armenian Genocide, see the *Manitoba Free Press*, 24 February 1915; 29 May 1915; 12 August 1915; 18 September 1915; 17 December 1915; 19 January 1918; *Minnedosa Tribune*, 7 January 1915; 9 August 1915; *Portage La Prairie Weekly Review*, 2 June 1915.

centuries with the blood of her subjugated races,” the Free Press opined three years later that, “German efficiency has simply organized the natural brutality of the Turk and made it many times more effective than before.”<sup>82</sup> Criticism toward Turkey was not confined simply to newspaper editorializing. The public attended lectures related to Turkey and Armenia and also demonstrated a willingness to offer written commentary on the subject.<sup>83</sup> Such remarks often betrayed theistic, in addition to nationalistic, concerns. One Winnipeg resident T.M. Thomas remarked, “Shame on Germany and the so-called Christian Kaiser who encourages the bloody Turk through his spies and mandates to massacre the helpless Armenian men, women, and children.”<sup>84</sup> Harriet A. Walker, wife of Winnipeg theatre impresario and wrestling promoter C.P. Walker, likewise alluded to theistic concerns through her war-time poetry. In “Behind the Throne - A Dream of the Kaisers,” she wrote:

Yes, Gott, your King supreme am I!  
I rule the earth, the sea the sky!  
I’ve beaten Satan out as well  
By making earth a living Hell!

We are not partners any more.  
You are my prisoner of war.  
I’ve planned for you a lot of work!  
To beat the Christian with the Turk!<sup>85</sup>

Images of unrestrained brutality resonated in the reports pertaining to Hussane’s upcoming match with Jack Taylor in January 1923, and the “Terrible Turk” was regularly described as a particularly rough wrestler.<sup>86</sup> Deemed in one instance a “man killer,” and in another, “The Bad Man of Wrestling,” it was alleged that Hussane had “crippled more men than any three in the business.”<sup>87</sup> As specific evidence of his tendencies, reports cited a previous match against well-known heavyweight wrestler Marin Plestina in Chicago, in which Hussane’s methods almost resulted in the sport’s prohibition in the city.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 30 December 1914; 1 January 1918.

<sup>83</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 12 February 1916.

<sup>84</sup> T.M. Thomas, in the Manitoba Free Press, 16 August 1915.

<sup>85</sup> Harriet A. Walker, “Behind the Throne - A Dream of the Kaiser’s,” in the Manitoba Free Press, 31 August 1915.

<sup>86</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 8 January 1923; 18 January 1923; Winnipeg Tribune, 4 January 1923; 9 January 1923; 13 January 1923; 19 January 1923.

<sup>87</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 12 January 1923; 15 January 1923.

<sup>88</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 8 January 1923. On 8 January, the Free Press, likely referring to the same contest, stated that Plestina “received the beating of his life” at Hussane’s hands.

Significantly, Hussane's tactics were not deemed to be the result of his own unique temperament and personality, but were instead considered the innate product of his cultural heritage. The Tribune informed the public, that, "Hussane is not an intentionally dirty wrestler, but simply... the wrestling game in Turkey is different to what it is in America. In the land of the Sultan, wrestling is a test of strength and brutality and the men that can take and give the most punishment is hailed as a hero."<sup>89</sup> Therefore, "like all Turkish wrestlers, [Hussane] depends on his great strength and rough tactics to wear an opponent down before he throws him."<sup>90</sup> Upon arriving in Winnipeg, Hussane's reportedly gruff disposition further reinforced his "terrible" image.<sup>91</sup> Although the wrestler from the land of the "star and crescent" was purported to present a menacing proposition for Taylor, fans were nevertheless assured that the manly Canadian was "no pink tea performer," and thus would not go down to defeat easily.<sup>92</sup>

Following weeks of publicity, the Winnipeg public responded keenly to the match, and approximately 3,000 spectators were in attendance.<sup>93</sup> Despite considerable efforts to create an image that corresponded to widely-held stereotypes concerning peoples of Turkish descent, Hussane's performance against Taylor defied the ascriptive qualities which had been assigned to him. His methods, although occasionally described as "aggressive" and "punishing," were not viewed as particularly violent by the either the crowd or newspaper reporters.<sup>94</sup> Overall, Hussane made a positive impression with Winnipeg spectators for his physical speed and wrestling knowledge, and was only disadvantaged in the match because of his lighter weight.<sup>95</sup> During their second bout, staged three months later, Hussane actually gained the crowd's temporary sympathy when Taylor was awarded a controversial pinfall by referee Alex Stewart. Nevertheless, when Hussane righted the matter by winning the second fall in their best-two-of-three fall contest, fans were once more on Taylor's side. The Free Press noted that "Though the apparent injustice to the Turk in the first fall aroused the fans they veritably went wild when Taylor ultimately

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<sup>89</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 9 January 1923.

<sup>90</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 4 January 1923.

<sup>91</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 18 January 1923.

<sup>92</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 8 January 1923; 11 January 1923.

<sup>93</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 20 January 1923.

<sup>94</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 20 January 1923.

<sup>95</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 20 January 1923; Winnipeg Tribune, 20 January 1923. The Free Press reported Taylor's weight as 214 pounds and Hussane's as 193.

won.”<sup>96</sup> Once more, aside from an accidental scratch which caused blood to “flow quite freely into Jack’s eye,” Hussane again demonstrated none of his reputedly brutal tactics.

The obvious disparity between how “foreign” wrestlers such as Hussane were reported to behave and their actual conduct once before the public, demonstrates that professional wrestlers were yet capable of challenging the ethnic stereotypes that existed about them. Although wrestlers did not necessarily control the publicity surrounding their matches, it is apparent that they still exhibited a large measure of control over the matches themselves. Thus, during the early 1920s, wrestling itself had not yet descended into caricature and melodrama, even if the advertising and complicit newspaper reporting associated with it was moving in that direction. Crowd reaction during both matches likewise suggests that wrestlers were not only capable of defying ethnic stereotypes, but were at least marginally able to sway public opinion to their favour. Wrestling fans, even if generally supportive of the Anglo-Canadian wrestler, were not so blinded by ethnic bias that they were entirely oblivious to matters of sportsmanship. As a result, wrestlers such as Hussane were able to temporarily suspend negative public perceptions, if only until an acute injustice committed against them had been deemed rectified by the public.

### **The Deadly and Mysterious Art of Japanese Jiu-Jitsu**

Wrestler’s ability to defy stereotypes did little to diminish their application in professional wrestling. Jack Taylor’s Japanese opponent, Taro Miyake, whom he wrestled in May and June of 1923, posed a different threat to the Anglo-Canadian’s ascendancy. Unlike the Turk, whose cultural heritage had bred in him unrestrained brutality, Miyake’s danger stemmed from the deadly efficiency and mystery granted to him by his knowledge of jiu-jitsu. A fascination with Japanese culture in general, and jiu-jitsu in particular, developed in the English-speaking world during the first decade of the twentieth century, spurred on in 1904 and 1905 by Japanese military success in the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>97</sup> Propaganda campaigns by Japanese authorities helped disseminate the notion that their nation’s seemingly-improbable

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<sup>96</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 19 April 1923.

<sup>97</sup> David Sulz, “Transnational Relations: Japanese Immigration and the Suian Maru Affair, 1900-1911,” in Contradictory Impulses: Canada and Japan in the Twentieth Century, eds. Greg Donaghy and Patricia E. Roy (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 56.

victory was attributable to jiu-jitsu, and by 1905, the art had become “the latest craze among the public” in North America.<sup>98</sup> Well-known publishers and sporting goods manufacturers such as Richard K. Fox and Spalding produced instructional books on jiu-jitsu, and educational institutions, including the United States Naval Academy and the University of Minnesota, hired instructors to offer classes to their students.<sup>99</sup> American president Theodore Roosevelt, a firm believer in the value of “rough manly sports,” displayed a particularly keen interest in the subject, receiving personal instruction from Naval Academy instructor Yoshiaki Yamashita and entertaining exhibitions of the Japanese art at the White House.<sup>100</sup>

Fascination with jiu-jitsu stemmed, in part, from a belief that the art was both highly efficient and extremely dangerous.<sup>101</sup> The relatively diminutive size of the Japanese compared to their European counterparts helped popularize the idea that jiu-jitsu’s mastery nullified the advantages normally garnered from superior size and strength. It was on precisely these grounds that Hume Duval, during his engagement at Happyland in 1907, offered jiu-jitsu lessons to women, “showing them how, by the tricks of the Japanese wrestlers, they might easily throw a man who molests them.”<sup>102</sup> Duval, was not, of course, Japanese, nor was Leopold McLaglen, brother of Fred and Victor, who used his dubious credentials to capitalize on public interest in jiu-jitsu, staging public matches and publishing treatises on the art.<sup>103</sup> Winnipeg’s theatre-going public, however, was also occasionally entertained by jiu-jitsu practitioners hailing from Japan, as when one Professor Tamita demonstrated the “science of the ‘little

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<sup>98</sup> Joseph Svinth, “Professor Yamashita Goes to Washington,” in *Aikido Journal* 114 (1998), <http://www.aikidojournal.com/article?articleID=43> (accessed 20 April 2010); Mark Hewitt, *Catch Wrestling*, 49; Portage la Prairie *Semi-Weekly News*, 17 January 1905.

<sup>99</sup> K. Koyama and A. Minami, *Spalding’s Athletic Library No. 233- Jiu Jitsu* (New York: American Sports Publishing Co., 1904); K. Saito, *Jiu-Jitsu Tricks* (New York: Richard K. Fox Publishing Company, 1912); Svinth, “Professor Yamashita.” On 9 April 1907, the *Winnipeg Telegram* noted that M. Matsuo, recently from Tokyo, had joined the University of Minnesota’s staff as a “professor of jiu-jitsu.”

<sup>100</sup> Svinth, “Professor Yamashita.”

<sup>101</sup> Statements by Annapolis Naval Academy Commander James H. Sands which appeared in Winnipeg during the “jiu-jitsu craze” reinforced the art’s apparent danger, as did occasional reports of near-fatal injuries sustained during jiu-jitsu bouts. See the *Winnipeg Telegram* on 17 March 1906, and 9 March 1905, respectively. Curiously, none of the reports cited, by way of comparison, the physical damage incurred in catch-as-catch-can wrestling matches during the same period.

<sup>102</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 June 1907.

<sup>103</sup> For a general examination of self-styled “World Jiu-Jitsu Champion,” Leopold McLaglen’s career, see Graham Noble, “Early Ju-Jutsu: The Challenges Part II,” *Dragon Times* 6 (Date Unknown), <http://seinenkai.com/articles/noble/noble-jujutsu2.html> (accessed 26 April 2010). The *Manitoba Free Press*, reported McLaglen’s victory over Yagamata in a jiu-jitsu match in Minneapolis on 13 April 1906. See also Leopold McLaglen, *Police Jiu-Jitsu* (London: The Police Review Publishing Company, 1918).



brown men,”” at the Dominion Theatre in late March and early April 1910.<sup>104</sup> In November 1914, shortly after Japanese forces gained victory over the German garrison at Tsing Tau, an appearance by Mikado’s Own Jiu-Jitsu Troupe at Winnipeg’s Pantages Theatre purported to “explain to the western mind why it is that the little brown people of Nippon are such valiant allies and such dreaded enemies.”<sup>105</sup>

Amicable relations between Japan and the British Empire, strengthened by the 1902 Anglo-Japanese alliance and later by Japan’s status as an ally during the Great War, helped dampen general Canadian dislike toward the Asian nation. However, Canadian perceptions of Japan were rather more ambiguous during the period than a longstanding alliance would suggest. Fierce anti-Japanese sentiment often accompanied periods of heightened immigration, particularly in British Columbia, where their settlement was most frequent and numerically significant.<sup>106</sup> The Canadian federal government, primarily concerned with doing its part to maintain good British Empire-Japan relations, repeatedly thwarted attempts by members of the Anglo-Canadian majority to place restrictions on Japanese immigration through provincial legislation in the West Coast province.<sup>107</sup> At no time were anti-Japanese sentiments as strong in Manitoba as they were in British Columbia, a point probably attributable to the tiny number of Japanese residents living in the province.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, alleged “racial” differences between Asians and Europeans also led to editorialists and prominent social reformers in Manitoba declaring that Japanese people were incapable of assimilation.<sup>109</sup> Thus, elements of Japanese culture were held in high regard by Manitobans, but at the same time, large-scale Japanese immigration was considered wholly undesirable to the Anglo-Canadian majority.

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<sup>104</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 30 March 1910.

<sup>105</sup> Winnipeg Voice, 13 November 1914.

<sup>106</sup> Sulz, “Transnational Relations,” 47. For a detailed examination of Anglo-Canadian attitudes toward Oriental immigration in British Columbia, see Peter W. Ward, White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990).

<sup>107</sup> Sulz, “Transnational Relations,” 47; Ward, White Canada Forever, 55.

<sup>108</sup> Manitoba’s first known settler of Japanese descent did not arrive in the province until 1906, and as late as 1921, only 53 Japanese people were known to live in the province. The situation in Manitoba can be contrasted against British Columbia, where thousands of Japanese immigrants lived. Substantial numbers allowed traditional Japanese sport to gain a purchase on the West Coast. For instance, 500 Japanese spectators witnessed a sumo tournament featuring 32 visiting athletes at Vancouver’s Horse Show Building during September 1915. See Manitoba Japanese Canadian Citizens’ Association, The History of Japanese Canadians in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Japanese Canadian Citizens’ Association, 1996), 1; Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Sixth Census of Canada, 1921 Volume I: Population (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1924), 355; and Vancouver Sun, 16 September 1915.

<sup>109</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 May 1914; Minnedosa Tribune, 30 January 1908; Winnipeg Telegram, 30 April 1907; Woodsworth, Strangers, 189.

Press reports concerning Taro Miyake during 1923, unlike those related to Yussif Hussane, did not suggest an intrinsic, culturally-derived proclivity for brutality. Instead, it was Miyake's mastery of the dangerous art of jiu-jitsu that made him a particularly fearsome opponent. Unlike most wrestling bouts staged in the city during the previous two decades, the first Taylor-Miyake encounter, held on 18 May 1923, was a "mixed style" contest. The men would first compete under jiu-jitsu rules wearing a *gi*, in which only a submission could earn a victory, and then under catch-as-catch-can rules. The third fall was to be decided by the athlete who won the preceding falls in the quickest fashion.<sup>110</sup> As had commonly been the case, Taylor was cast in the role of the underdog, and longstanding public perceptions concerning jiu-jitsu's efficacy were utilized to good effect. The Tribune warned, following the match being announced, that:

Taylor is going against the advice of his friends in meeting the man that [former world's heavyweight champion Joe] Stecher and [current champion] Lewis have refused to have anything to do with... it looks like very poor judgement on the part of the local boy to sign up for this match and take a chance of having a bone broken by the grappler from the land of the rising sun.<sup>111</sup>

Jiu-Jitsu was likewise described as "wrestling in its most brutal form," and "the most brutal sport ever fostered on the Anglo Saxon sporting public."<sup>112</sup> Predictions of a particularly "rough" match proved a consistent theme throughout press reports leading up to the event.<sup>113</sup> Although Taylor was considerably larger and stronger than his Japanese opponent, jiu-jitsu's deadly efficiency nullified such advantages. Manitobans were reminded that, "the Japanese can bring any opponent, no matter how strong he is, to his knees simply by twisting the wrist."<sup>114</sup> Additionally, a notion of Oriental mystery permeated discussions related to the bout. The public was informed of the dangers posed by jiu-jitsu's "secret death blows" and that, despite the instructional materials and courses then available to the general populace, "There are some jiu-jitsu manoeuvres that have never been explained to Europeans and Americans and

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<sup>110</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 19 May 1923.

<sup>111</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 5 May 1923.

<sup>112</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 5 May 1923; 17 May 1923.

<sup>113</sup> See for example, the Manitoba Free Press, 14 May 1923; 16 May 1923; 18 May 1923; Winnipeg Tribune, 5 May 1923; 18 May 1923.

<sup>114</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 10 May 1923.

probably never will be.”<sup>115</sup> The Taylor-Miyake match also represented a clash between cultural forms, in which the domestic catch-as-catch-can system’s combat efficacy was being measured against that of its Japanese counterpart.<sup>116</sup> The North American and Western European public had long been fascinated with this subject, and dozens of “mixed style” bouts had been held in Canada, the United States and Great Britain since jiu-jitsu’s introduction to Western society.<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, this was a novel event for Manitoba audiences. The Empire Athletic Club’s wrestling programmes generally offered an undercard made up of several boxing matches preceding the main event. Prior to the match between Taylor and Miyake, spectators were also offered the opportunity to witness another mixed match, pitting jiu-jitsu against the English-speaking world’s other preeminent unarmed combat system, boxing.

Jack Taylor’s match with Taro Miyake once again proved to be an intriguing and attractive event for the Empire Athletic Club. The spectacle, which drew an attendance of 3,000, was evidently far less brutal than anticipated by news reports, but nevertheless “a thriller from start to finish,” and “the best balanced card yet presented by the Empire Athletic Club since Jack Taylor started on his triumphant march.”<sup>118</sup> The jiu-jitsu match, which lasted sixty minutes, did not result in debilitating injury for the Canadian, who proved effective at countering his Japanese opponent’s attacks. Miyake was awarded the win under jiu-jitsu rules, dubiously, on “points,” but proved no match for Taylor at catch-as-catch-can.<sup>119</sup> One month later, Taylor and Miyake met again in a jiu-jitsu only match, the announcement of which prompted a Free Press report to conclude that “Taylor has proven to the fans that he is a game wrestler but trying to beat the Jap at his own brutal game is carrying gameness too far... [he should] leave the jiu-jitsu

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<sup>115</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 12 May 1923. Although there were many *ryu*, or schools, of jiu-jitsu, most of the Japanese wrestlers operating in North America were judo practitioners. As historians Allan Guttman and Lee Thompson indicate in Japanese Sports: A History (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 100-101, judo developed during the Meiji period (1868-1912), and its founder, Jigoro Kano, drew heavily on his Western education in formulating the system. Additionally, many other Japanese instructors, including Taro Miyake, whose primary training was in the *Horzum-ryu*, offered practical written lessons to the English-speaking public with no apparent attempt to perpetuate the notion of ‘Oriental mystery.’ See Taro Miyake and Yukio Tani, The Game of Ju-Jitsu for the Use of Schools and Colleges (London: Hazell, Watson and Viney Ltd., 1906).

<sup>116</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 14 May 1923.

<sup>117</sup> For a compendium of known wrestler versus jiu-jitsu contests, see Mark Hewitt, Catch Wrestling, 257-275; and Hewitt, Catch Wrestling Round Two, 399-404.

<sup>118</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 19 May 1923; Manitoba Free Press, 19 May 1923.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

to the Japanese and stick to the game he knows, catch-as-catch-can.”<sup>120</sup> In this instance, however, Taylor’s previous performance had diminished his underdog status, and Free Press reporter Billy Anderson predicted a win for the Canadian.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, “Taylor proved to be master of Taro Miyake at his own game,” and after 64 minutes the Japanese grappler succumbed to exhaustion and the deleterious effects of being repeatedly thrown to the mat.<sup>122</sup> Although widely held public perceptions cast jiu-jitsu as a deadly efficient and mysterious art, by 1923, many wrestlers were themselves already of the opinion that skilled catch-as-catch can wrestlers, with their own knowledge of submission holds, were fully capable of competing against their “foreign” opponents. New York Athletic Club wrestling instructor Hugh Leonard expressed such a view near the “jiu-jitsu craze’s” outset, stating in a May 1905 interview with The Cosmopolitan that, “I say with emphasis and without qualification that I have been unable to find anything in jujitsu which is not known to Western wrestling. So far as I can see, jujitsu is nothing more than an Oriental form of wrestling.”<sup>123</sup> Other wrestling experts, including former American heavyweight catch-as-catch-can champion Tom Jenkins, and Martin “Farmer” Burns, trainer to both Frank Gotch and Jack Taylor, later offered similar pronouncements.<sup>124</sup> However, not all catch-as-catch-can wrestlers, including “Pocket Hercules” Artie Edmunds, were so dismissive of the Japanese art.<sup>125</sup>

An analysis of mixed-style contests pitting wrestlers against jiu-jitsu practitioners under various rule conditions reveals that, out of 65 known matches staged before May of 1923, wrestlers won on 34

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<sup>120</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 12 June 1923.

<sup>121</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 15 June 1923.

<sup>122</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 16 June 1923.

<sup>123</sup> Hugh Leonard, quoted in The Cosmopolitan, May 1905. A copy of the article, with annotations, is available in the Journal of Combative Sport (2002), <http://www.ejmas.com/jcs/jcsframe.htm> (accessed 28 April 2010).

<sup>124</sup> After investigating jiu-jitsu and meeting with a prominent instructor in the art, Tom Jenkins commented in December 1904 that, “There isn’t a hold in the entire category they use and teach that hasn’t been used in English schools by students for hundreds of years.” See the Montreal Star, 20 December 1904. Similarly, in Lessons in Wrestling and Physical Culture, Book No. 6, 4, “Farmer” Burns stated, “In my opinion there is very little in the so-called Jiu-Jitsu teaching that is not included in a full and complete knowledge of catch-as-catch-can wrestling... I have personally wrestled with the greatest Japanese experts, permitting them to use any and all holds that they wished, not even barring their so-called deadly throttle and strangle holds. In these contests I have invariably won.”

<sup>125</sup> In a private letter, later printed in the Manitoba Free Press on 11 December 1906, Edmunds described a private no-holds-barred match against Japanese jiu-jitsu practitioner Katzi Karikucki in New York, which lasted over four hours. Although the “Pocket Hercules” managed to eventually defeat his opponent, the trauma he underwent in the process, vividly described in his correspondence, led him to concede that jiu-jitsu was “an awful game to go up against.” Nevertheless, Edmunds was not universal in his praise for all jiu-jitsu practitioners, noting, “This Jap says he is the only man in America who knows the real bone-breaking, strangling methods of Japan. I believe him now. These other jiu-jitsu wrestlers are all fakes. I have offered to wrestle any three in New York in one night, but none of them will take me.”

occasions and jiu-jitsuka on 27, so neither *system* was intrinsically dominant, although certain *individuals* certainly performed better than others.<sup>126</sup> Additionally, Jack Taylor himself was by no means unfamiliar with jiu-jitsu prior to May of 1923. In the preceding five years, he had participated in seven public matches against jiu-jitsu exponents, including five against Miyake. Although the Tribune conceded in one instance that “Taylor is not altogether a stranger to jiu-jitsu as the big fellow has made quite a study of the Japanese style of wrestling,” mention of his past record was absent, and would have done little to perpetuate jiu-jitsu’s widely-held public mystique or the danger posed by his ‘foreign’ adversary.

### **Winnipeg’s First Black Wrestler**

By the end of 1923, Jack Taylor’s repeated victories before Winnipeg’s sport-going public were making it difficult to depict him as an underdog prior to his matches. However, the appeal of seeing a Canadian-born heavyweight wrestler face off against an ethnically-diverse array of opponents had not yet diminished. Of all Taylor’s opponents during this period, in no instance were images of cultural superiority, and more specifically, racial hierarchy, more starkly visible than when Jack Taylor met African-born Reginald Siki on New Year’s Day, 1924. Siki’s appearance in Winnipeg marked the first time that a black wrestler appeared in the city. However, by 1924, ideas about black peoples’ supposed evolutionary backwardness and ‘innate’ physical prowess in combat were pervasive in Manitoba and became central to the rich and profoundly racist commentary surrounding his match with Jack Taylor.

Although no black wrestlers appeared in Winnipeg prior to 1924, Manitoba had hosted many black boxers earlier in the century, particularly after Jack Johnson became the first non-white heavyweight boxing champion of the world in 1910. Press coverage was commonly racist or emphasized inter-racial rivalries. Two days after a local boxing card featuring African-American boxer Albert “Kid” Ashe, a comic depicting him with a sloping brow and pronounced lips stated that, “The Irish coon’s whistling was better than his fighting.”<sup>127</sup> Several months later, an article on an upcoming boxing match

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<sup>126</sup> Based upon an examination of the matches provided in Hewitt’s Catch Wrestling and Catch Wrestling Round Two.

<sup>127</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 17 September 1910.

between British-born Arthur McLaglen (brother to Fred, Victor and Leopold) and African–American fighter Charles Robertson described the contest as, “Black and White in Ten Round Go.”<sup>128</sup>

In addition to being depicted in explicitly derogatory terms by the popular media, black fighters were also occasionally enlisted to participate in demeaning spectacles for the gratification of all-white audiences. Once such exhibition was the “battle royal,” which involved several boxers simultaneously facing off against one another and fighting until one individual was left standing. Prior to the second match between Eugene Tremblay and Walter Miller on 15 December 1913, Walker Theatre manager Walter Deering announced that he had “secured four husky darky boys” for such a purpose.<sup>129</sup> Noting that the battle royal had proven popular in the United States, Deering likewise promised “barrels of fun,” and “barrels of laughter” for Winnipeggers.<sup>130</sup> However, plans did not come to fruition when two of the fighters failed to make an appearance.<sup>131</sup>

Although black boxers were not a complete rarity to Manitoba audiences, during the early twentieth century, peoples of African descent made up a very small percentage of Western Canada’s population. Nevertheless, fear of their increased presence was widespread. Many newspapers in Canada took editorial stands against allowing black immigration into the West.”<sup>132</sup> In the face of actual immigration, local authorities were willing to act to prevent settlement in the country. In March 1911, a group of 200 black settlers sought entry to Manitoba from North Dakota. Although all were in excellent health and good financial standing, the Winnipeg Board of Trade demanded the institution of a head tax.<sup>133</sup> In subsequent months, repeated efforts were undertaken by authorities in Winnipeg to ban black immigrants from entry into the country on the grounds of their “undesirable” nature as settlers.<sup>134</sup> Federal government policy reinforced their position, and both Clifford Sifton and his successor as Minister of the

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<sup>128</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 17 October 1910.

<sup>129</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 12 December 1913.

<sup>130</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 12 December 1913; 15 December 1913.

<sup>131</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 16 December 1913.

<sup>132</sup> John Boyko, *Last Step to Freedom: The Evolution of Canadian Racism* (Winnipeg: J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing, 1998), 163.

<sup>133</sup> Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 308-309.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 311-312.

Interior, Frank Oliver, actively discouraged black immigration.<sup>135</sup> The actions undertaken by the Laurier government, Winnipeg city officials, and other municipal authorities across the Prairies, were representative of the widely-held belief amongst the Anglo-Canadian majority that people of African descent were not merely a ‘foreign’ people with undesirable customs, but were innately uncivilized and thus unassimilable. This placed them at the bottom of Canada’s informal immigration hierarchy.<sup>136</sup>

The notion that black people were inherently unassimilable was based in part on racist interpretations of evolution, which placed blacks at a less advanced stage on the evolutionary continuum than whites. However, their alleged ‘primitive’ nature gave them certain ‘natural’ physical advantages in the combative sports. Following African-American boxer Jack Johnston’s victory in the prize ring over world heavyweight champion James Jeffries, the local Free Press reprinted an anthropologist’s statement that:

The civilized white man to-day is the result of evolution through countless centuries. The coloured man has not “evolved” to the same extent. With civilization has come a certain falling off in the battling propensities of the male... no matter how much we might like to see the white man win, the laws of evolution were against him.<sup>137</sup>

Such ideas were still being exploited for commercial gain more than a decade later. In Reginald Siki’s case, he was not purported to possess the innate cunning and violent nature of the Turk, nor did he possess the deadly and dangerous skills accorded to him through mastery of the mysterious and (for Caucasians) unknowable mysteries of jiu-jitsu. Instead, his natural, primitive capacities were what allegedly made him a formidable adversary.

Repeatedly dubbed “the gorilla man” in the press, Siki had allegedly been discovered by a reporter named Jack Stanley on a trip to Abyssinia.<sup>138</sup> His great strength allowed him to kill animals bare-

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<sup>135</sup> Boyko, Last Steps to Freedom, 165.

<sup>136</sup> Avery, Reluctant Host, 8; Boyko, Last Steps to Freedom, 164. In 1921 there were only 491 blacks living in Manitoba. See Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Sixth Census of Canada, 1921 Volume I: Population, 355.

<sup>137</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 5 July 1910.

handed, including a Leopard, which he was said to have choked to death. Recognizing his strength, Stanley asked Siki to return to America, and after some cajoling, the reporter “backed him into a suit of clothes and a pair of shoes.”<sup>139</sup> Unlike Zbyszko, Hussane, and Miyake, reports claimed that Siki lacked the technical skill usually seen among wrestlers. Instead, “[being] half savage, [and] unable to speak or understand English, the giant black depends on his wonderful strength and his native speed to tire out his opponents.”<sup>140</sup> Harkening to the long extant tradition within prize fighting of barring black fighters from challenging for the heavyweight title, both Joe Stecher and Ed Lewis were reported to have “drawn the colour line” on account of the Abyssinian’s physical prowess.<sup>141</sup> Fans were also informed that Jack Taylor would, out of necessity, have to modify his approach to wrestling because, “Siki’s head is much smaller than his neck making it almost impossible to hold him with a head lock.”<sup>142</sup>

Once more, the wrestler’s actual abilities belied the stereotypes, as both the Tribune and Free Press noted following his match that Siki’s abilities made a very favourable impression with the spectators.<sup>143</sup> The Abyssinian proved a technically competent wrestler, capable of applying and escaping from numerous holds. His much-heralded strength also played little role in the match, as the Canadian proved his superior in that quality. Likewise, despite predictions to the contrary, Taylor proved capable of defeating him with an arm and head hold during the first fall, much to the fans’ delight.<sup>144</sup> However, with comments alluding to his “panther-like gilding” and “gorilla-like legs,” metaphorical allusions to his sub-human status retained a prominent place in newspaper reports the day after the Taylor-Siki match. Although a good wrestler, he was still not quite considered human in the Anglo-Canadian sense.

## **Regionalism and the Two Solitudes**

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<sup>138</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 10 December 1923; 15 December 1923; 27 December 1923; 28 December 1923; Winnipeg Tribune, 27 December 1923.

<sup>139</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 15 December 1923.

<sup>140</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 29 December 1923

<sup>141</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 10 December 1923.

<sup>142</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 29 December 1923.

<sup>143</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 2 January 1924; Winnipeg Tribune, 2 January 1924.

<sup>144</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 2 January 1924.



Jack Taylor's bouts against numerous "foreign" opponents between 1922 and 1924 proved to be the most popular drawing cards for Winnipeg audiences. During the same period, however, he also cemented his claim to the Canadian and British Empire heavyweight titles. Taylor disposed of the region's rather slim roster of resident heavyweights or near-heavyweights, including former Manitoba Amateur Heavyweight Champion Leo L'Heureux, who he dominated in short exhibition bouts in Winnipeg and also defeated in matches on several occasions in other smaller Prairie centres, as well as Tom Johnstone the Winnipeg police officer.<sup>145</sup> None of these matches were promoted by McIlroy's Empire Athletic Club, who instead preferred to place Taylor against opponents with more widely-heralded reputations. McIlroy, however, did seek to bolster the "local boy's" standing as Canada's heavyweight wrestler *par-excellence*, pitting him against Montreal's Emil Maupas, regarded earlier in the century as "King of Sohmer Park," and "*le lutteur idolatre du public montrealais*."<sup>146</sup> Similar to Taylor's other matches under the Empire Athletic Club banner, widespread social tensions were manipulated to good effect. In this instance, Western Canadian regionalism, coupled with anti-francophone sentiment, permeated discussions surrounding the match.

Although Western Canadian regionalism predated the First World War, the issue intensified during the years after 1918 and into the 1920s. Many in the West were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with federal practices, including the longstanding National Policy, widely viewed as economically disadvantageous to the region. The belief among Western Canadians that they had shouldered a disproportionately-large proportion of the nation's war efforts while reaping few of the economic benefits that had accrued in the East through wartime industrial production heightened dissatisfaction with the

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<sup>145</sup> Taylor's first match with L'Heureux was a ten minute exhibition at the Winnipeg police gymnasium on 5 December 1922. Although warmly received for his performance, L'Heureux's proved incapable of mounting any effective offense against his veteran opponent. The wrestlers staged a second exhibition before Winnipeg audiences at the One Big Union Hall on 25 April 1924, with the French-Canadian once more "giving a good account of himself," in the face of Taylor's superior grappling acumen. Taylor later defeated L'Heureux in matches at Morris, Moose Jaw, and Swift Current. Taylor wrestled Tom Johnstone in a match for the Canadian Heavyweight Championship in October, 1923. Johnstone, who frequently challenged Taylor following the latter's arrival in the city, went into training several months in advance. However, the Winnipeg policeman proved utterly outclassed, and was unable to apply a single hold before being pinned twice in under four and a half minutes. See the Manitoba Free Press, 6 December 1922; Saskatoon Star, 10 July 1923; One Big Union Bulletin, 1 May 1924; Swift Current Sun, 18 December 1923; 21 December 1923 concerning Taylor's matches with L'Heureux. On his match with Johnstone, see the Manitoba Free Press, 16 October 1923; 19 October 1923.

<sup>146</sup> Montreal Star, 8 April 1905; La Presse, 9 May 1905.

Policy.<sup>147</sup> The deep economic recession experienced by Manitoba during the early 1920s stood in contrast to the growth seen in Eastern Canada, reinforcing the conclusion among Westerners that, in the words of John Herd Thompson and Allan Seager, “the cards of Confederation were stacked against them.”<sup>148</sup>

Decades of settlement and mounting political discontent contributed to the notion that Eastern Canada was no longer the wellspring for Western Canadian settlement and cultural institutions, but instead a colonial power.<sup>149</sup> By the early 1920s, Westerners were seeking political alternatives to the existing two-party federalist system, the most conscious expression of which was the emergence and remarkable (albeit short-lived) federal success of the Progressive movement.<sup>150</sup> Playbills describing the match between Maupas and Taylor as “Eastern Canada” versus “Western Canada” played on well-honed conceptions of regional self-identity.<sup>151</sup> The opportunity for Western interests to get ‘one-up’ on their Eastern oppressors also proved a palatable proposition, and the Free Press noted that “Maupas’ stock would take a big drop in the east if he loses.”<sup>152</sup> The Montrealer’s francophone heritage was frequently referenced, in one instance it being ironically noted that he had “plenty of supporters among his fellow countrymen.”<sup>153</sup> Further accentuating his linguistic background, one report noted with a hint of derision that, “Emile Maupas, the husky French-Canadian from Montreal... talks very poor English and needs an

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<sup>147</sup> Thompson, Harvests, 71, 72, 169-170. Historians have not universally accepted Thompson’s contention that the western provinces contributed disproportionately to the war effort. Christopher A. Sharpe, for example, has demonstrated that, while Manitoba contributed a greater percentage of its total available manpower to the Canadian Expeditionary Forces than did Ontario, Saskatchewan’s total enlistment numbers were significantly lower than that of either province. Alberta’s total military enlistment was roughly equal to that of Ontario. With respect to the Victory Loan Campaigns of 1917 and 1918, per capita contributions in both Saskatchewan and Alberta were less than half that of Ontario, and even Manitoba lagged significantly behind Canada’s largest province. However, Sharp’s study of Imperial Munitions Board Contracts between 1915 and 1919 strongly supports Thompson’s argument that the western industry accrued little benefit from wartime production. See Christopher A. Sharpe, “The Great War,” Historical Atlas of Canada Volume III, Plate 26.

<sup>148</sup> John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1985), 103.

<sup>149</sup> Friesen, The Canadian Prairies, 343; Howard and Tamara Palmer, Alberta: A New History (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1990), 54-55.

<sup>150</sup> W.L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 8, 11. It should be noted, however, that the Western Progressivism did not represent one single ideologically-unified movement. Although typically divided into the “Alberta” and “Manitoba” branches of the Progressive party, at least four distinct “progressive” ideological movements held political sway in the West during the 1920s and early 1930s. Despite such differences, however, all advocated the move toward a decentralized Canadian state. See David Laycock, Populism and Democratic Thought on the Prairies, 1910 to 1945 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 3-4, 19-22, 282.

<sup>151</sup> See, for example, the Manitoba Free Press, 2 June 1923.

<sup>152</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 June 1923.

<sup>153</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 4 June 1923.

interpreter in order to make headway with English-speaking people.”<sup>154</sup> Tensions between French and English-speaking Manitobans were longstanding in the province, dating back to the Confederation period and reaching their crescendo with debates over French-language schooling during the 1890s, and the Taylor-Maupas contest once more brought the issue forward. The well-known Eastern francophone Maupas lost to Taylor in two straight falls, solidly reinforcing the Western grappler’s claim to the Canadian heavyweight title while simultaneously bolstering Western regional pride.<sup>155</sup>

### **The Gold Dust Trio and American Expansion**

By the spring of 1924, Taylor had defeated nearly a dozen well-known heavyweight wrestlers in Winnipeg, several of them on more than one occasion and under handicap conditions, and had accomplished similar feats against scores of opponents in centres throughout the Prairies. Having buttressed his recognition as Canadian Heavyweight Wrestling Champion, Taylor also sought to extend his titular laurels to include Champion of the British Empire.<sup>156</sup> Finally, in late April, the Empire Athletic Club announced that they had secured world heavyweight champion Ed “Strangler” Lewis’ contract for a match on Victoria Day in the Manitoba capital. Indicative of his commercial appeal during the period, Lewis demanded a \$10,000 appearance fee and 35 percent of the gross gate, which constituted

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<sup>154</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 6 June 1923.

<sup>155</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 7 June 1923. Maupas’ match against Taylor proved to be one of the last in his professional career. That same year, he purchased property on Raymond Lake near Val Morin, Quebec, where he later opened a well-known athletic training camp, appropriately named Camp Maupas. Numerous athletes from a variety of disciplines trained at Maupas’ facility until his accidental death in 1948. See Berthelet, Yvon Robert, Le Lion du Canada Francais, 35-40; Oliver, The Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame: The Canadians, 155-156.

<sup>156</sup> In September 1923, Taylor was matched against Frank Simmons, “Champion of England,” in a bout for the Championship of the British Empire. Unlike most of the matches staged by the Empire Athletic Club, however, the event was poorly received both by the public and the press. Newspaper reports, which had been generally complimentary throughout Taylor’s homesteading tenure in Winnipeg, described the match as a “fizzle,” and “the most disappointing card yet offered by the Empire Athletic [C]lub.” The Canadian completely outclassed Simmons, proving “faster, defter, and stronger” than his overweight adversary, characterized by the Free Press as “weighing 257 pounds, much of which was superfluous.” Simmons’ credentials as a national champion were likewise called into question, with sceptical qualifiers including “billed as” and “alleged” accompanying reports after the match. In actuality, Winnipeg’s residents were justified in their scepticism toward Simmons, as he was neither a British champion nor in fact British at all, being instead a New Yorker whose real name was Frank Simmons Leavitt. Leavitt served with the United States Army in World War I, during which time he began wrestling under the name Soldier Leavitt. Although limited in actual wrestling ability, Leavitt later became a popular attraction during the 1930s when, following the advice of his wife and manager Doris Dean, he grew a long beard and adopted the hillbilly persona, Man Mountain Dean. Nevertheless, Taylor’s victory merely served to further bolster his bid for a match against world’s champion Ed “Strangler” Lewis, the Free Press noting before the match that “a win for Taylor would put the local boy in a position where Lewis would have to give him a chance.” See the Manitoba Free Press, 17 September 1923; 19 September 1923; and Griffin, Fall Guys, 114-115.

the largest guarantee ever offered to an athlete in Canada.<sup>157</sup> Significantly, however, the world's champion also stipulated that he would not agree to meet Taylor, but would instead wrestle the winner of a match between the Canadian and Washington state native Dick Daviscourt. Daviscourt (born Nicholas Dewiscourt) had already faced Ed Lewis on several occasions prior to April, 1924, losing in each instance.<sup>158</sup> However, Lewis' manager, Billy Sandow, declared that Daviscourt was the next closest contender for the champion's title.<sup>159</sup> Reports looked past the fact that yet another obstacle had been placed in their local pride's path. By the 1920s, supporters of sport in Winnipeg were already cognizant that their city, large as it was by Canadian Prairie standards, had difficulty competing with major American and Eastern Canadian markets in attracting top athletic talent: a fact already made apparent when skilled hockey players' regularly defected from the Prairie capital.<sup>160</sup> Enlivened with civic boosterism at the prospect of such a high profile event, the Free Press declared:

A world's heavyweight championship match should put Winnipeg on the sport map, as it will draw fans from all parts of Canada as well as from the neighbouring states across the border. Although for the past year there has been a great deal of talk about Lewis meeting Taylor for the title, very few of the local fans believed there was a chance of the world's championship being staged in this city.<sup>161</sup>

Local aspirations of seeing the Canadian champion in a match for the world's heavyweight title were dashed following his encounter with Daviscourt at the Pantages Theatre. Despite winning the first fall, Taylor's American opponent pinned him to the mat during the following two stanzas before a crowd of approximately 2,000 spectators. Although described as a "Sensational Match" and "one of the best matches ever seen in the city," nearly two years of promotional build-up on the part of the Empire Athletic Club and Emil Klank nevertheless came to an anti-climactic end.<sup>162</sup> The public and attendant press evidently did not, based upon what they witnessed, seriously doubt the match's legitimacy; the Free Press stated, in a tone far more reminiscent of the period before the Great War's end, that "The grapplers

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<sup>157</sup> Lethbridge Herald, 17 April 1924; Manitoba Free Press, 21 April 1924.

<sup>158</sup> For biographical information on Daviscourt, including references to his matches with Ed Lewis, see Greg Oliver and Steven Johnson, The Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame: The Heels (Toronto: ECW Press, 2007), 130-132.

<sup>159</sup> Lethbridge Herald, 17 April 1924; Manitoba Free Press, 26 April 1924.

<sup>160</sup> Mott, "Flawed Games," 182.

<sup>161</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 21 April 1924. For similar comments, see the One Big Union Bulletin, 15 May 1924.

<sup>162</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 9 May 1924.

were ‘shooting square’ all the way. Even the cynics admit this.’<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, Lewis’ decision to stipulate, as a condition for his appearance in the city, that Taylor face Daviscourt before being granted a title match, certainly reflects the reputation that the Canadian had developed in the United States prior to his arrival in Winnipeg.

By the end of the war, professional heavyweight wrestling in the United States was undergoing a radical organizational restructuring. Under the directorship of New York wrestling promoter Jack Curley, a wrestling cartel, colloquially known as “the Trust” was formed between major promoters in the East and Mid-West to control the outcome of professional wrestling matches and, more specifically, the heavyweight championship. Heavyweight wrestlers, who had previously exercised considerable autonomy over their careers, were now placed under heightened pressure to acquiesce to promoter’s demands to win or lose matches, or face blacklisting as a consequence.<sup>164</sup>

However, not all wrestlers acquiesced to the Trust’s attempts to monopolize control over the wrestling industry. A number of prominent wrestlers, colloquially termed “trustbusters,” continued to operate independently, primarily in the West.<sup>165</sup> Jack Taylor was among the most well-known trustbusters wrestling in the western United States during this period.<sup>166</sup> By the time Taylor arrived in Winnipeg, control over the heavyweight title had passed out of Curly’s hands when then-champion Stanislaus Zbyszko agreed to lose the title to Ed “Strangler” Lewis without the New York promoter’s consent. Lewis, his manager Sandow, and a third partner, Joseph “Toots” Mondt, informally dubbed “the Gold Dust Trio,” thereafter became the dominant power in heavyweight wrestling through their control over the world’s title, forming what Fall Guy’s author Marcus Griffin termed in 1937, “the biggest sports combine ever controlled by three men.”<sup>167</sup> In March 1924, following a trip to Chicago to negotiate for a match with Lewis, manager Emil Klank hinted to Winnipeg reporters that the Canadian was being

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> The details surrounding the Trust’s formation, organization, and operation are well documented within the existing literature on wrestling during the period. See for example, Beekman, Ringside, 53-57; Griffin, Fall Guys, 42-43.

<sup>165</sup> Beekman, Ringside, 60; Griffin, Fall Guys, 59-60. Hewitt, Catch Wrestling, 121,152; Hewitt, Catch Wrestling Round Two, 243.

<sup>166</sup> Beekman, Ringside, 61; Hewitt, Catch Wrestling, 153.

<sup>167</sup> Griffin, Fall Guys, 47. Concerning the “Gold Dust Trio” and the power they exercised over heavyweight professional wrestling, see also Beekman, Ringside, 57; Hornbaker, National Wrestling Alliance, 67-68, 96; Thesz, Hooker, 51.

deliberately denied a title match by the champion, who demanded instead that he again wrestle Stanislaus Zbyszko. However, Zbyszko, who himself had wrestled Lewis over a dozen times in the previous year, refused to meet Taylor again, making a title match nearly impossible.<sup>168</sup> Taylor's longstanding position as an outsider to Eastern wrestling cartels suggests that Lewis may have been hesitant to face the potentially-uncooperative Canadian grappler.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, although Taylor was one of the more well-known wrestlers on the continent, Lewis only consented to wrestle him years later.<sup>170</sup>

With Jack Taylor removed as a challenger for the title, considerable efforts were invested in advertising and promoting the match between Lewis and Daviscourt. Anticipating a massive turnout, the Winnipeg Amphitheatre was outfitted to accommodate 12,000 spectators. The *One Big Union Bulletin* noted the event's widespread appeal, stating, "There has never been a sporting event that has stirred up the interest of people of all classes the way the Lewis-Daviscourt bout is doing."<sup>171</sup> A film crew was contracted by the Empire Athletic Club to take motion pictures of the match from ringside, although the arrangement was later cancelled due to objections by Daviscourt that the intense lighting required could impair his performance.<sup>172</sup> Jack Taylor, for the first time in Winnipeg, served as a preliminary attraction to a wrestling main event, appearing against Harold "Hangman" Cantonwine, who he had defeated earlier in the year in Saskatoon, Regina, and Medicine Hat.<sup>173</sup> Owing to the appearance fee demanded by Ed Lewis, ticket prices were considerably higher than at any previous wrestling event staged in the province.<sup>174</sup> Despite predictions, however, the championship match, won by Lewis, failed to generate the anticipated public support. Only 3,000 spectators were in attendance, which was well under what was

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<sup>168</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 22 March 1924.

<sup>169</sup> May, *The Central Canadian Professional Wrestling Almanac*, 2-3.

<sup>170</sup> Jack Taylor began actively pursuing a match with Ed Lewis during the winter of 1916-1917. However, the first confirmed encounter between the two did not occur until 1932 in Seattle. Concerning Taylor's challenges to Lewis, see the *Lincoln Daily Star*, 9 November 1916; 18 March 1917; 19 March 1917. On his first known match with Lewis, see the *Calgary Herald*, 4 July 1933.

<sup>171</sup> *One Big Union Bulletin*, 15 May 1923.

<sup>172</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 19 May 1924; 21 May 1924.

<sup>173</sup> It should be noted, however, that Taylor had appeared two months earlier as the penultimate attraction on an Empire Athletic Club boxing card featuring Tommy Gibbons, former contender to Jack Dempsey's heavyweight boxing title. See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 15 March 1924; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 March 1924. Concerning Jack Taylor's matches with Harold "Hangman" Cantonwine, see the *Saskatoon Star*, 16 January 1924; *Regina Leader*, 5 February 1924, and *Medicine Hat Daily News*, 26 February 1924.

<sup>174</sup> See Appendix I.

anticipated. Although those in attendance were in overwhelming agreement that the Lewis-Daviscourt match was an excellent one, the Free Press noted that “The promoters were greatly disappointed at the apathy by local sportsmen.”<sup>175</sup>

Ed “Strangler” Lewis’ appearance in Winnipeg proved to be the disappointing climax to an era that saw professional wrestling, or more specifically, its heavyweight variant, achieve unprecedented popularity in the city. Winnipeg’s growth as a lucrative professional heavyweight wrestling market had ensured that powerful American interests, already firmly in control of the business in their own country, would inevitably turn their attention to the Prairie metropolitan centre. With Lewis’ appearance in the city, the Gold Dust Trio demonstrated its ability to dictate terms to local promoters, even at the cost of what would have potentially been the most heavily-attended match in the province’s history.

### **Wrestling Wanes in Winnipeg**

After the summer of 1924, professional wrestling entered into an extended decline in Winnipeg. In June, Jack Taylor once again faced Dick Daviscourt, losing to Lewis’ challenger a second time before a relatively modest crowd of 1,500.<sup>176</sup> The Canadian champion left the city shortly thereafter. Following Taylor’s departure, professional heavyweight wrestling matches became increasingly infrequent, with only one more card staged in 1924, two in 1925, and four in the remainder of the decade. The majority of main event matches featured grapplers imported from the United States, with local talent filling the role as preliminary attractions. Only in April 1926, when Stanislaus Zbyszko returned to Winnipeg to face Ivan Poddubny, the Ukrainian Graeco-Roman champion, did attendance numbers again rival those seen during Jack Taylor’s homesteading period. The two veteran grapplers had a longstanding rivalry that dated to before the First World War, and the Empire Athletic Club was once again able to capitalize on ethnicity’s well-established appeal with local spectators.<sup>177</sup> Although heavyweight wrestling did not

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<sup>175</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 26 May 1924.

<sup>176</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 June 1924.

<sup>177</sup> Ivan Poddubny and Stanislaus Zbyszko wrestled one another twice prior to their meeting in Winnipeg. The first contest, staged in London on 12 December 1907 at the London Pavilion, occurred when both men were widely considered to be the best Graeco-Roman wrestlers in Europe. The match was essentially a stalemate in which Poddubny was disqualified after 35 minutes

maintain its popularity, the One Big Union Athletic Association (OBUAA) continued to stage professional bouts featuring local talent in conjunction with their regular amateur boxing and wrestling cards at the Plebs Hall on Adelaide Street.<sup>178</sup> The OBUAA did not emulate the Empire Athletic Club's approach in promoting their cards, the talk concerning "rough" wrestling and an overt emphasis on ethnicity being absent from their regular reports in the One Big Union's labour-oriented Bulletin.<sup>179</sup> Among certain ethnic communities, including the Ukrainians, the sport also retained some popularity, with matches being staged at the Ukrainian Labour Temple in Winnipeg's North End.<sup>180</sup> Although the OBUAA and specific ethnic groups kept the sport alive in Manitoba's capital, their modestly-sized facilities did not allow for the large-scale spectacles seen earlier in the decade.

### **Wiley, Wrestling, and the Wheat City**

The second half of the 1920s represented a low point for professional wrestling in Winnipeg, yet the sport experienced a resurgence in Brandon during 1928, following several years of strictly-amateur cards. Bray Willey, a local middleweight amateur wrestler who, along with his brother Dave, had appeared a number of contests in Brandon during 1926 and 1927, turned professional in November 1928. Willey proved to be a popular local attraction for the remainder of the decade, appearing on joint boxing and wrestling cards staged by brothers Tom and Ollie Stark. Much as had been done in Winnipeg, matches were now regularly promoted on the basis of the "rough" entertainment that they offered to spectators.<sup>181</sup> However, despite the shift to a more sensationalistic approach to promoting matches, even

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for unfair tactics. Their second meeting occurred almost two decades later in New York on 8 March 1926 and resulted in a draw. Zbyszko ultimately defeated his long time rival when they came to grips in Winnipeg one month later. The Winnipeg match received extensive coverage in the local Polish-language press. A detailed examination of Zbyszko and Poddubny's London match is provided by Graham Noble in "'The Lion of the Punjab' – Part II: Stanislaus Zbyszko," InYo: Journal of Alternative Perspectives (June 2002), <http://ejmas.com/jalt/jaltframe.htm> (accessed 15 May 2010). See also the New York Times, 9 March 1926; Manitoba Free Press, 10 April 1926; Winnipeg Tribune, 10 April 1926; and Czas, 14 April 1926. For more information on Poddubny's career, see Dmitri Zuhov, "The Champion of Champions: Ivan Poddubny," in Their Way to the Top: Stories About Sportsmen, ed. Vladimir Anokhin (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 15-46.

<sup>178</sup> Regionally-based professional wrestlers such as Mike Bilinsky, Tommy Elder, Vic Jussic, and Archie McLaughlin participated in matches at Plebs Hall. See for example the One Big Union Bulletin, 17 December 1925; 7 January 1926; 14 January 1926; 16 December 1926; 20 January 1927; 10 March 1927; 10 November 1927; 14 November 1929. See also May, Central Canadian Professional Wrestling Almanac, 3-4.

<sup>179</sup> For more on the OBUAA, see Chapter VII.

<sup>180</sup> Ukrains'ki Robitnychi Visty, 28 February 1929.

<sup>181</sup> Brandon Sun, 27 October 1928; 3 November 1928; 5 November 1928; 5 April 1929; 6 April 1929.



as the decade came to a close, evidence suggests that some of the older attractions- and controversies- surrounding professional wrestling were not yet dead. In the Wheat City, gambling continued to be an important element in the sport as late as 1929. In October, the Sun noted of local favourite Bray Willey and his opponent Mike Bilinsky, that, “a side bet of considerable sum is being wagered between the two men, Bilinsky naming the sum and Willey taking it up without hesitation.”<sup>182</sup> However, following “one hour and a half of torturous work,” on the mat, neither man secured a fall, so the stake money, constituting \$50, was returned to both parties.<sup>183</sup> In Brandon, too, reminders still existed that not everyone yet considered the sport primarily a form of entertainment. Brandon’s wrestling promoters still sought to reassure elements of the population who remained deeply suspicious of professionalism. In an advertisement prior to their inaugural card, featuring a boxing and wrestling co-main event, the Stark brothers stated:

The promoters of these bouts hereby give the sporting public assurance that everything will be conducted above board, the bouts will not be prolonged for the “benefit” of those attending, and in both events the winner gets the long end of the purse. This, the promoters feel, is what the fans wish, and confidently look forward to the best attendance at the best affair of this kind that has ever been billed for this city.<sup>184</sup>

Brandon sports reporters acknowledged public concern over professional wrestling’s honesty, but evidently were enthusiastic about boosting the sport’s standing in the city. One report in January 1929, following a match between local favourite Bray Willey and visiting grappler Vic Jussack (sometimes spelled Jussick) contended, “Few fans knew that Vic Jussack tried so hard to throw Bray Willey on Tuesday evening that he collapsed after the evening’s entertainment. Medical men were in attendance on the wrestler for more than half an hour before he recovered sufficiently to leave for down town.”<sup>185</sup> Despite testimonials confirming the honest efforts put forth by wrestlers, not all of the local population was wholly convinced on the issue. The Sun, ever-cognizant of public opinion but still enthusiastic about

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<sup>182</sup> Brandon Sun, 16 October 1929.

<sup>183</sup> Brandon Sun, 6 November 1929.

<sup>184</sup> Brandon Sun, 29 October 1928.

<sup>185</sup> Brandon Sun, 24 January 1929.

championing the sport, asserted in November 1929 that, “A lot of fans are sceptical about grappling matches. They need have no fear about the serious nature of the match on Tuesday night. Willey is serious about convincing a lot of people that Bilinsky can be rolled over on his back and pinned to the mat.”<sup>186</sup> Discussion concerning professional wrestling’s respectability as a public spectacle had subsided in Manitoba by the end of the 1920s, and no overt scandals threatened to extinguish the public’s support. However, as the decade closed, professional wrestling was not, as it never had been, a sport wholly free from suspicion concerning its honesty as an athletic enterprise. Although public expectations surrounding sport had changed considerably since before the Great War, long-established beliefs were not wholly abandoned in the ensuing years.

## **Conclusion**

By the beginning of the Great Depression, Manitobans had witnessed remarkable changes in professional wrestling. The sport slowly re-emerged from oblivion in the immediate post-war years to become a viable form of public entertainment in several of the province’s secondary centres. By 1922, Winnipeggers had once again vociferously embraced the sport, as heavyweight standout Jack Taylor, aided by the promotional efforts of his manager Emil Klank, Darcy McIlroy’s Empire Athletic Club, and an increasingly supportive sporting press, became the region’s “star” grappler. Heavyweight wrestling’s rise in popularity occurred during a period when ideas concerning sport’s purpose were undergoing significant reappraisal. A decline in reformist sentiment and increased regulation meant that much of the criticism levelled at the sport subsided (although never completely vanished) during the early inter-war period. Viewed primarily as a form of entertainment, promoters presented wrestling as a “rough” spectacle and adopted aggressive strategies that played heavily on widespread public sentiments concerning race, ethnicity, and regionalism to draw spectators. Growing popularity also made it further subject to American wrestling interests seeking to monopolize control over heavyweight wrestling. By

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<sup>186</sup> Brandon Sun, 2 November 1929.

the latter half of the 1920s, professional wrestling had lost much of its former popularity in Winnipeg, although to the west in Brandon, it closed out the decade as a well-patronized athletic attraction.

## Chapter VII Amateurism Expands: Amateur Wrestling in Manitoba, 1919-1929

By the time the Great War came to an end, amateur wrestling, like its professional counterpart, had been stripped of much of the momentum that spurred its growth in the seven years prior to hostilities in Europe. As noted in Chapter V, enlistment in military service depleted both the sport's competitive and coaching ranks. At the YMCA, Winnipeg's initial stronghold for amateur wrestling, classes were offered during the fall and winter of 1918-1919, once more under the supervision of Tom Dickinson, who, injured overseas, was reported six weeks before the Armistice to be "completely recovered from his wounds" and ready to resume his coaching duties.<sup>1</sup> Although a large turnout was expected for classes, no amateur wrestling competitions were staged during the season.<sup>2</sup> After early 1921, however, amateur wrestling experienced rapid growth that would continue for the remainder of the decade, as the possibilities for competition on the local, regional, national and international level became ever-more frequent, and high-level competitive amateur athletics took on heightened importance. By the second half of the 1920s, amateur wrestling had superseded professional wrestling both with respect to frequency of competition and volume of news coverage in the province.

As the possibility for competition grew, so too did the diversity of athletes. Unlike prior to the war, when the YMCA and its largely middle-class Anglo-Protestant membership dominated the sport, the 1920s witnessed peoples of multiple class backgrounds and ethnicities embrace amateur wrestling in Manitoba. Although the YMCA remained an important contributor to the sport, French-Canadian athletes from St. Pierre and St. Boniface, the "company league" Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association, and the distinctly working-class One Big Union Athletic Association, each contributed tremendously to

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<sup>1</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 21 September 1918. In July 1916, Dickinson injured his chest after falling in a shell hole carrying a loaded stretcher. Dickinson did not initially tend to his injuries and several days later began coughing up blood. He was later admitted for medical care on 24 August and diagnosed with bronchitis before returning to duty. Dickinson was re-admitted on 7 September and spent most of the remaining year under medical care. See Dickinson's *Casualty Form*, *Medical Case Sheet*, and *Medical History Sheet*, Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2513 – 10.

<sup>2</sup> Classes for the year began on 2 October. See the Manitoba *Free Press*, 2 October 1918. A detailed analysis of daily newspaper reports in the *Free Press* and Winnipeg *Tribune* reveals that, if any competitions were held, they were not of sufficient note to garner attention from the local press.

wrestling's growth during the decade, spurred on not only by increased opportunities for competition but by ethnic, employment, and class-based interests. However, despite this apparent "democratization" in amateur wrestling during the 1920s, in which each organization embraced sport for varying purposes, the underlying tenets dictating what it meant to be an 'amateur' remained largely unchanged. Many of the principles guiding amateur sport before 1914 continued to hold sway in the early inter-war period, and as a result, important barriers to participation in amateur sport also remained in place. Thus, remarkable growth and continuity with the pre-war period simultaneously characterized amateur wrestling in Manitoba during the 1920s.

### **Re-Building After the War**

Competitive amateur wrestling took longer to reassert itself on the provincial sporting landscape than did professional wrestling, owing in part to the convention of having multiple athletes participating in multiple weight divisions in a tournament format for championship honours. Unlike professional cards, which were generally built around single matchups, such tournaments required a large number of entrants to make holding them worthwhile, and requisite numbers were evidently not forthcoming in the immediate post-war period. Contrary to what was seen in professional wrestling, virtually none of the athletes active on Manitoba mats prior to the Great War resumed their sporting career in the post-war period, the one notable exception being 1914 Dominion Champion James H. (Jimmy) McKinnon.<sup>3</sup> During the fall and winter of 1920-1921, the YMCA continued to offer wrestling instruction (but evidently no competition), under the direction of former professional wrestling standout Alex Stewart, while Thomas Dickinson concentrated on developing the "Y" boxing programme.<sup>4</sup>

The 1920s, on the whole, proved to be an exceedingly difficult period for the institution, which entered its fifth decade of operation in the city in dire financial straits. By 1922, the local Association

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<sup>3</sup> J.H. McKinnon, who had won the 1914 Dominion Championship in the welterweight (145 pound) division, participated in the 1920 Dominion Championships in Toronto. However, during this period, McKinnon, who was defeated in the 154 pound class during the second round by eventual-champion H. Adams, was wrestling out of Fort William, Ontario. See the Fort William *Daily Times Journal* 22 June 1920; and Leyshon, *Of Mats and Men*, 109.

<sup>4</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 22 October 1920; 15 December 1921.

was forced to seek protection from creditors under the Bankruptcy Act, and in 1926, its Selkirk branch, located in Winnipeg's North End, had to be sold to forestall further financial catastrophe.<sup>5</sup> Official records later noted that the Selkirk branch, "had not been operating long before it became apparent that it was doomed to failure," largely because the itinerant, multi-ethnic population in the district did not embrace the institution in the same way that the proportionally- larger Anglo-Protestant population nearer to the city centre (and the Vaughan Street branch) had done.<sup>6</sup> The YMCA, on the whole, remained a predominantly middle-class Anglo-Protestant institution both in Winnipeg and elsewhere in Canada after the First World War.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, however, other institutions which were more accessible to non-Anglo-Canadian segments of Manitoba's population arose to meet a growing interest in competitive amateur wrestling during the early 1920s. Notable in this respect were sporting clubs based out of the Franco-Manitoban communities of St. Boniface and St. Pierre.

### **Franco-Manitobans**

French Canadians had long maintained a strong interest in wrestling. In Montreal after 1900, professional wrestling cards were staged on a near-weekly basis at Sohmer Park during the non-summer months. Virtually every major heavyweight wrestler appeared before Montreal audiences, with some high profile performers such as the Russian Lion, George Hackenschmidt, attracting in excess of 5,000 spectators, the majority of whom were French-Canadians.<sup>8</sup> Even the legendary strongman Louis Cyr made occasional forays onto Montreal's wrestling mats, albeit with mixed success.<sup>9</sup> In addition to

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<sup>5</sup> Archives of Manitoba, P 3812, Young Men's Christian Association, YMCA- History Sketch and Material 1883-1935, "Y- One Hundred: A Winnipeg Commemorative Publication," 18-19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 19. Concerning Winnipeg's ethnic distribution by district, see Hiebert, "Winnipeg: A Divided City," Historical Atlas of Canada Volume III, Plate 31.

<sup>7</sup> See Zald, Organizational Change, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Montreal Gazette, 9 May 1905; Montreal Star, 9 May 1905. Well-known American and European heavyweight wrestlers who visited Montreal prior to the World War I included Tom Jenkins, Frank Gotch, Fred Beell, Yankee Rogers, Youssouf Mahmoud, Raoul de Rouen, Stanislaus Zbyszko, B.F. Roller, Raymond Cazeaux, Jess Pedersen, and Constant le Marin.

<sup>9</sup> On 21 January 1901, Louis Cyr wrestled former and future American professional catch-as-catch wrestling champion Dan McLeod (appearing under the alias George Little) in a handicap match in which the latter agreed to throw the famed strongman within twenty minutes. Although outweighed by 175 pounds, McLeod succeeded in his task in under four minutes. In an apparent attempt to save face, Cyr later wrestled and defeated the North West Territories (later Saskatchewan)-born circus giant Edouard Beaupre, who had a billed height of over eight feet. Cyr's match with Beaupre receives mention in historical treatments concerning his life such as Ben Weider's The Strongest Man in Canada: Louis Cyr (Toronto: Mitchell Press, 1976), 147, yet the

hosting visiting international talent, Montreal was also home to numerous highly skilled grapplers of francophone extraction, including world's lightweight champion Eugene Tremblay, Canadian heavyweight champion Emil Maupas, and well-known heavyweight contender Aloise Gonthier (Carl Pons). Tremblay appeared in Winnipeg on several occasions prior to 1915, and it is evident that he had a strong contingent of supporters among the local French-Canadian population. Although Tremblay wrestled in the province's capital, he lodged and trained in the predominantly francophone St. Boniface, where he was reported to have "a number of friends," and to be "the idol of the many French sportsmen of [the community]."<sup>10</sup> The French-language newspaper Le Manitoba noted a similar appreciation for the Montreal star prior to his first match with Walter Miller in 1913, stating, "*Tremblay est Canadien-français et nombreux seront les gens de Saint Boniface qui désireront assister à la rencontre avec le champion de St. Paul.*"<sup>11</sup> St. Boniface also produced a number of well known French wrestlers who appeared frequently on local mats, including Pierre (Pete) Menard and Rosario Duranleau. It deserves noting, however, that all of the prominent French-Canadian wrestlers prior to World War I were in the province's professional, not amateur, ranks.

As a chiefly Anglo-Protestant institution, the YMCA, which was the early driving force behind amateur wrestling in the province, held little cultural appeal to members of the francophone community in St. Boniface, much as was the case with the various other non-English speaking peoples in Winnipeg's North End. Indeed, an examination of both executive and active membership rosters from the pre-war period testifies to the dearth of French-Canadians enrolled in the "Y".<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, by the early 1920s, officials with the Roman Catholic Church were sufficiently concerned with its growing popularity to warn parishioners against taking out a membership. Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface, the community's local ecclesiastical and historical review, warned that, although the institution had the support of many

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extant literature is silent concerning his loss to the diminutive McLeod. Hewitt's Catch Wrestling: Round Two is, to date, the only secondary historical account to detail the incident.

<sup>10</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 1 December 1913; 6 December 1913; 10 December 1913.

<sup>11</sup> Le Manitoba, 19 November 1913.

<sup>12</sup> Analysis of the YMCA's Board of Directors Minutes from the before World War I, which included lists of active and new members, fails to reveal any French surnames. See 12 September 1910 to 12 July 1912, Archives of Manitoba, P 3798, Young Men's Christian Association, Minutes: YMCA Board of Directors 1910-1913.

influential citizens and offered a variety of attractive programs to its members, it nevertheless, “*propager l’indifference religieuse*” and ultimately “*corrompent l’integrite de la foi catholique en arrachment des enfants a l’Eglise leur mere.*”<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, papal authorities prohibited the distribution of any promotional materials related to the YMCA.<sup>14</sup>

Although the predominantly Roman Catholic francophone population in the province was discouraged from joining the YMCA due both to its ethnic composition and its unacceptable religious conduct, other organizations, such as the *Union Canadienne*, emerged to satisfy a growing interest in sport. Founded in 1915, the *Union* served many functions within the French-Canadian community. The organization maintained an informal, but close, association with the Roman Catholic Church: a link that was most evident through its St. Cecile choir which performed “Sacred Concerts,” at the St. Boniface Cathedral.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, it sponsored numerous faith-themed lectures which were delivered- and attended- by prominent Roman Catholic officials.<sup>16</sup> Beginning in 1916, the Catholic-affiliated *Union* formed an athletic committee and fielded baseball and hockey teams in the Winnipeg Amateur Baseball Association and Manitoba Amateur Hockey Association.<sup>17</sup> Wrestling does not appear to have been among its earliest athletic pursuits, but following the war, the *Union* opened a branch in St. Pierre (now St. Pierre-Jolys) south of Winnipeg which enthusiastically embraced the sport. The St. Pierre *Union Canadienne* boasted several highly talented amateur grapplers, including heavyweight Leo L’Heureux, lightweight Albert Choinard, and Armand Lavergne (weight unknown). By early 1921, the organization was staging amateur wrestling cards at the local municipal hall. The St. Pierre programmes were unique inasmuch as they featured only French-Canadian athletes, with St. Boniface’s International Athletic Club

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<sup>13</sup> “Le Saint Office et La Y.M.C.A.,” *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* 20, 1, (15 January 1921), 2; and (15 February 1921), 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Les Cloches*, (15 February 1921), 24.

<sup>15</sup> See for example the Manitoba *Free Press*, 12 April 1919; 21 April 1919; and 10 May 1919. The *Union Canadienne* choir also participated in the Winnipeg Festival of Music in 1920, where they performed a rendition of “Last Words of Christ.” See the Manitoba *Free Press*, 2 February 1920.

<sup>16</sup> Concerning lectures sponsored by the *Union Canadienne*, see the Manitoba *Free Press*, 18 January 1916; 24 February 1919; 26 January 1920; 10 March 1920; 29 November 1920.

<sup>17</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 2 October 1917; 13 June 1916; 12 August 1916.



providing the competition.<sup>18</sup> Manitoba's French-Canadian population proved appreciative, with spectators travelling from francophone communities such as St. Malo, St. Elisabeth, and Otterburne to witness the matches.<sup>19</sup>

The development of amateur wrestling programs that catered to Manitoba's French-speaking population coincided with the revitalization of the Manitoba Amateur Wrestling Championships (staged for the remainder of the decade in conjunction with the Manitoba Amateur Boxing Championships) in April 1921. The near-monopoly held by Anglo-Canadians during the pre-war period was authoritatively broken when French-Canadian wrestlers representing both the International Athletic Club and the *Union Canadienne* earned first place finishes in three out of the seven contested weight divisions.<sup>20</sup> Both 1922 and 1923 proved to be similarly propitious, with St. Boniface and St. Pierre wrestlers earning titles in two out of five and two out of four weight divisions at the Manitoba Championships in both respective years.<sup>21</sup> In 1923, Manitoba hosted the Dominion Amateur Wrestling Championships (likewise staged in conjunction with the Dominion Amateur Boxing Championships) for the first time since 1914. Albert Choinard, the 1922 and 1923 Manitoba lightweight champion and the only Franco-Manitoban entrant, advanced to the finals before being defeated by Tauno Makela (Karl Maki) of the Port Arthur Finnish-Canadian *Nahjus* club.<sup>22</sup>

As evidenced by the many successes experienced by Manitoba's French-Canadian matmen, the early 1920s represented a period when amateur wrestling became increasingly accessible to non-Anglophone and non-Protestant segments of the province's population. Nevertheless, amateur wrestling was by no means an enterprise where ethnicity and religion ceased to be an important factor. The

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<sup>18</sup> Organizational records pertaining to the International Athletic Club remain scarce. Opened in 1919 or early 1920, the club operated a gymnasium at 557 Tache Avenue, and held professional boxing and wrestling cards both at their headquarters and across the river in Winnipeg. In 1923, they offered a fourteen month membership at a cost of \$5 to amateur boxers and wrestlers wishing to train for the Provincial Championships. See the Manitoba *Free Press*, 6 May 1922; 9 May 1922; 26 October 1922; 11 November 1922; and 17 January 1923.

<sup>19</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 26 March 1921. See also the Manitoba *Free Press* 25 February 1921; and 30 March 1921.

<sup>20</sup> Special Class (125 pound) champion Albert Leveille and middleweight H. Dussessoie both represented the International Athletic Club and St. Pierre's Leo L'Heureux wrestled under the *Union Canadienne* banner. See Appendix II, and the Manitoba *Free Press*, 26 April 1921.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix II.

<sup>22</sup> Manitoba *Free Press*, 24 March 1923. For more on Tauno Makela's wrestling career, see Charles Nathan Hatton, "Battles on the Bay: Wrestling in Fort William and Port Arthur Before the Great Depression," *Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Papers and Records* 25 (2007), 59-61.

maintenance of group identity remained important during the 1920s, and non-Anglo-Protestant athletes made remarkable progress in open competition through participation in clubs which were organized along distinctly ethnic lines and with clear religious affiliation.<sup>23</sup> The growing competitive opportunities in amateur wrestling for francophone athletes, as well for as athletes of other ethnicities, also formed a counterpoint to the situation developing in professional wrestling, where anti “foreigner” rhetoric, which cast athletes into roles based upon perceived racial or cultural traits, proved to be a critical element in promoting the sport to Winnipeg audiences.

### **The Winnipeg City Police**

During the 1920s, groups that took a strong interest in wrestling also organized along occupational lines. In Manitoba, the most notable in this respect was the Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association (WCPAA), founded in September 1919. The WCPAA, which became the province’s most frequent sponsor of high profile amateur boxing and wrestling competitions during the 1920s, emerged as a direct result of the labour agitation surrounding the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. In 1918, the Winnipeg police formed a union to negotiate on their behalf with the Winnipeg Police Commission and the Winnipeg City Council.<sup>24</sup> The mounting labour discontent that emerged in the months following World War I was driven, in part, by a failure of wages to keep pace with inflation and the inability of many returning veterans to secure employment following their return from Europe. Members of the Winnipeg police, many of whom had also served overseas with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, were sympathetic to the veterans’ plight.<sup>25</sup> On 15 May 1919, the police union, which was itself affiliated with the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council, voted overwhelmingly in favour of general strike action. However, at the request of the Strike Committee, they agreed to remain on duty so as to prevent the

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<sup>23</sup> For a further discussion on the matter see Riess, *City Games*, 92.

<sup>24</sup> Hutchison, *A Century of Service*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Hutchison, *A Century of Service*, 52; Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, 150.

imposition of martial law.<sup>26</sup> As historian D.C. Masters notes, this placed the police in an “anomalous position,” having declared their support for the general strike while remaining simultaneously under the authority of a city council overwhelmingly against the strikers’ cause.<sup>27</sup> Many members of the Winnipeg City Council as well as other high ranking government officials such as Winnipeg’s district military commander Major General Herbert D.B. Ketchen, felt that the police, although still on duty, were firmly allied with the strikers.<sup>28</sup>

On 29 May, Winnipeg City Council requested that all members of the police force immediately sign a declaration recognizing the supreme authority of the Police Commission and agreeing not to participate in any type of sympathy strike. The police union responded the following day with a resolution which stated that the ultimatum gave them insufficient time for due consideration and was in violation of the existing agreement between the union and the Police Commission. Their official statement also contained a vaguely worded pledge of allegiance, declaring that the union, “[stood] behind constituted authority and [was] willing to do all in [its] power to preserve law and order as loyal British subjects.” Only 25 officers signed the City Council’s pledge.<sup>29</sup> In an effort to forestall a complete impasse between both sides, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen agreed to act as a mediator. However, beginning on 5 June, city officials, still doubting the police force’s loyalty, began recruiting special constables. On 9 June, having secured sufficient enlistment, the Police Commission fired 240 policemen. Only fifteen persons, most of whom were high ranking officials, retained their jobs.<sup>30</sup> Reflecting the horrible blow to police morale sparked by the dismissal, the police union requested that the Honour Roll on display at the Central Police Station be covered, and the photographs of the police officers who died in the line of duty be removed from public display until the police force was

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<sup>26</sup> Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg, 117, 150; Kenneth McNaught and David J. Bercuson, The Winnipeg General Strike: 1919 (Don Mills: Longman Canada Limited, 1974), 70; J.M. Bumstead, The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919: An Illustrated Guide (Winnipeg: Watson Dwyer Publishing Limited, 1994), 3.

<sup>27</sup> D.C. Masters, The Winnipeg General Strike (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 59.

<sup>28</sup> Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg, 150.

<sup>29</sup> Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg, 150-151; Hutchison, A Century of Service, 52; Masters, Winnipeg General Strike, 74; McNaught, Winnipeg General Strike, 70. A copy of both the Winnipeg City Council’s pledge and the police union’s response can be found in Norman Penner, ed., Winnipeg 1919: The Strikers’ Own History of the Winnipeg General Strike (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1973), 82.

<sup>30</sup> Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg, 152-154; Hutchison, A Century of Service, 52; Masters, Winnipeg General Strike, 83, 96; McNaught, Winnipeg General Strike, 74.

reinstated.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, most officers, save those most actively involved in the strike movement, were re-hired.<sup>32</sup>

Although Winnipeg's policemen regained their jobs, city officials no longer recognized the police union's bargaining rights. Officers were reinstated on the basis of agreeing to disavow union membership.<sup>33</sup> However, the events of May and June 1919 had adversely impacted the force's *esprit de corps*, so Winnipeg City Police Chief Constable Chris H. Newton, who assumed his position following the dismissal of Donald MacPherson on 11 June, permitted the formation of the WCPAA.<sup>34</sup> By the 1920s, company athletic associations had become relatively commonplace throughout North America and Western Europe. Since the 1890s, such organizations had been recognized as an effective means of ensuring amicable relations between workers and management and negating the potential for worker militancy.<sup>35</sup> In the case of the WCPAA, police officers themselves took a direct role in running the organization, which, from its outset, was devoted to "promoting Athletics, Social Entertainment and mutual welfare for the members of the Association, their wives and families."<sup>36</sup> Although not specifically an organ of the Police Commission, the WCPAA received its active endorsement through the provision of facilities for a reading room, billiard table, and a gymnasium.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, the Police Commission provided occasional funds in support of WCPAA social functions, and a reading of the Association's minutes from the 1920s suggests a favourable working relationship between the two organizations.<sup>38</sup>

Within six months of the WCPAA's formation, it became actively involved in promoting both boxing and wrestling in the city not only among its own members, but within the larger community.

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<sup>31</sup> Penner, *Winnipeg 1919*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Masters, *Winnipeg General Strike*, 136.

<sup>33</sup> Jack Templeman, "History of the Winnipeg Police Part Three: The Roaring Twenties," <http://www.winnipeg.ca/police/history/history3.stm> (accessed 30 June 2010).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Robert F. Wheeler, "Organized Sport and Organized Labour: The Workers' Sport Movement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, 2 (1978), 194; Joan Sangster, "The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-60," in *Labour/Le Travail* 32 (Fall 1993), 192.

<sup>36</sup> The organization's purpose was stated in its constitution, formulated on 2 October 1919. See 2 October 1919, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931, 5. For an overview of activities conducted by the WCPAA during the spring of 1924, see the Manitoba *Free Press*, 5 February 1924.

<sup>37</sup> Hutchison, *A Century of Service*, 55, 57.

<sup>38</sup> For example, the Police Commissioners provided \$50 for a WCPAA Smoking Concert, to be held on 5 March 1920. Similarly, requests for monies from the Police Commission appear to have been made occasionally by the WCPAA. See 3 March 1920, 7 April 1921, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

Initially, the Association was not specifically devoted to amateur sports. Their inaugural event, staged on 8 April 1920 at the Board of Trade building, featured several boxing matches and a main event wrestling match between the well-known local professional wrestling champion Constable Tom Johnstone and Constable McSweeney.<sup>39</sup> Boxers were paid between \$10 and \$100 for their performances, although it does not appear that either wrestler received remuneration.<sup>40</sup> By October, however, the WCPAA had declared itself a strictly amateur organization, and it would remain so for the duration of its existence.<sup>41</sup> Beginning in April 1921, with its sponsorship of the Manitoba Amateur Boxing and Wrestling Championships, it assumed the YMCA's mantle as the province's main promoter for high profile amateur wrestling tournaments. Excluding 1925 and 1926, the WCPAA hosted the event for the remainder of the decade. During the 1920s, the Dominion Boxing and Wrestling Championships were staged in Manitoba three times, and on two of these occasions (1923 and 1927), the Association was its sponsor. Additionally, regular tournaments were held at the Central Police Station gymnasium featuring athletes from both the WCPAA and various clubs across the city.<sup>42</sup> By January 1927, the WCPAA was staging monthly boxing and wrestling competitions at their gymnasium in the Central Police Station.<sup>43</sup>

During the 1920s, the WCPAA not only organized events, but also produced a number of outstanding wrestlers, particularly within the upper (middleweight and over) weight classes, including Joseph Mulholland (1924 Manitoba middleweight champion), James Harvey Paddison (1925 Manitoba light heavyweight champion), and Stewart Sinclair (1929 Manitoba middleweight champion).<sup>44</sup> However, certainly the most accomplished police wrestler during the period was William Lloyd

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<sup>39</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 9 April 1920.

<sup>40</sup> 9 April 1920, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>41</sup> In October 1920, John Albrecht, the Minneapolis police officer who had wrestled Tom Johnstone at the River Park Baseball Grounds on 6 August, wrote to the WCPAA asking them to promote a return engagement. The proposal was denied, since "owing the status of the Association as an Amateur organisation the offer of Mr. Albrecht [could not] be accepted." See 12 October 1920, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>42</sup> The WCPAA staged open meets as well as competitions featuring only their own athletes. For examples of the former, see the Manitoba Free Press, 17 December 1923; 19 February 1924; 28 February 1924; 15 December 1925; and 3 December 1926. Concerning the latter, see the Manitoba Free Press, 28 April 1926.

<sup>43</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 25 December 1926; 18 February 1927.

<sup>44</sup> See, respectively, the Manitoba Free Press, 10 April 1924; 10 January 1925; and 12 April 1929.

McIntyre. Born in Prince Edward Island on 16 March 1900, McIntyre joined the police force in 1922.<sup>45</sup> He became actively involved in competitive amateur wrestling several years into his career, and by 1930 claimed honours at multiple Provincial (1927, 1928, and 1929) and Dominion (1927, 1928, 1930) championships in the heavyweight and light-heavyweight classes.<sup>46</sup> McIntyre's many accomplishments made him, along with Jimmy McKinnon, the most decorated amateur wrestler in the sport's early history.<sup>47</sup> Many other police officers took an active interest in competitive wrestling throughout the 1920s, participating in various events arranged by the WCPAA or other clubs in the city.<sup>48</sup>

For an organization such as the Winnipeg City Police, active involvement in boxing, and especially wrestling, made sense for its membership because they promoted skills that had direct application to their jobs. To this end, the Association also took an active interest in jiu-jitsu during the early 1920s. Although, as noted in Chapter VI, Manitoba's Japanese population was extremely low, at least three individuals of Japanese descent, Dr. Sumar Herota, C. Hanada, and Alex Takeuchea, were invited to showcase their skills on cards staged at the Central Police Station.<sup>49</sup> These exhibitions were apparently well received by the local public, and the Free Press noted, following a match between Herota and W. Merritt, that "This style of wrestling certainly took with the gathering."<sup>50</sup> Although jiu-jitsu matches appear to have been a unique feature of WCPAA programmes during the 1920s, the precise details of the Japanese athletes' affiliation with the Winnipeg City Police remains unknown.

The WCPAA's regular involvement in staging amateur wrestling competitions boosted the organization's visibility within Manitoba and gave its members an athletic outlet that had definite work-related benefits. However, it is also clear that their events provided a more immediate and tangible gain. Because the cards were generally very well patronized by the public, they represented an extremely important source of revenue for the Association. Considerable effort was taken to promote the events,

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<sup>45</sup> Winnipeg Police Museum, Police Commission Books.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix II and Leyshon, Of Mats and Men, 110.

<sup>47</sup> McKinnon earned four Provincial titles and two Dominion titles between 1914 and 1926.

<sup>48</sup> Other prominent police wrestlers active during the 1920s included Leon Elfinson, Francis Lawrence Miller, Angus MacIver, Benjamin Cecil Newcombe, and William Ross.

<sup>49</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 December 1922; 11 December 1923; 12 February 1924.

<sup>50</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 6 December 1922. See also the Manitoba Free Press, 11 December 1923.

both in the newspapers and in other visible public venues. In March 1920, for example, 100 streetcar placards and fifteen large posters were purchased to publicize their inaugural show.<sup>51</sup> It is difficult to precisely determine the cost associated with staging the event, but calculations based upon known expenditures accrued between 27 March and 9 April reveal that approximately \$832 was paid out to various parties.<sup>52</sup> The WCPAA Secretary reported following the show that over \$1,300 had been received at a cost per ticket ranging from \$1 to \$2, “with a large number of ticket sellers still to be heard from.”<sup>53</sup> By 1924, the Association’s annual financial report declared that boxing and wrestling events were, “the chief source of revenue during the year” and that save for the provincial Olympic trials, “the shows were a success from all points as the public press and our financial statement show.”<sup>54</sup> Revenue earning potential remained high throughout the decade, reports noting that following the 1927 Dominion Championships, expenses totalled \$2,100 and returns \$3,500.<sup>55</sup> With such a profitable revenue stream, the WCPAA executive demonstrated its willingness to protect their organization’s financial interests and reputation as an amateur sporting body by seeking prosecution against individuals who did not turn in monies from ticket sales and by lobbying the province’s amateur governing body, the MAAUC, to place athletes who failed to appear for a performance on suspension.<sup>56</sup> The decision to vigorously protect its interests may have been derived, in part, from the Association’s desire to fulfill the third element in their mandate: the provision of mutual welfare for the Association members and their families.

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<sup>51</sup> 18 March 1920, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>52</sup> Reported expenses included hall rental, printing, and purses for competitors amounted to \$831.85, with some costs still to be determined. See 18 March 1920; 27 March 1920; 9 April 1920, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>53</sup> 9 April 1920, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>54</sup> 15 September 1924, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>55</sup> 12 May 1927, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>56</sup> On 14 June 1922, the WCPAA executive agreed to consult a Crown attorney due to the failure of A.R. Morrison, former secretary of the MAAUC, to submit monies collected in relation to ticket sales for the 1921 Manitoba Amateur Boxing and Wrestling Championships. Both Morrison and the MAAUC were notified of the board’s decision. In another instance, well-known Winnipeg boxer Dave Coulter failed to compete after weighing in at the Manitoba Olympic Trials in 1924. Coulter was suspended by the MAAUC from competing at the request of the WCPAA executive. See 14 June 1922; 15 September 1924, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

Although in title an athletic association, the organization took on additional duties over time to improve their membership's personal welfare. In October 1923, their constitution was amended to grant benefits to officers who were forced to leave the police department on account of disability, and monies were likewise allocated for the families of deceased members.<sup>57</sup> Donations were provided, if occasion warranted it, to the families of members who were removed from work due to extended illness.<sup>58</sup> The Association also advocated on their members' behalf for pay increases and fielded a delegation to negotiate with City Council concerning pension benefits.<sup>59</sup> Clearly, the capacity to fulfill their expanding mandate required large amounts of revenue, the principal sources of which were the many amateur boxing and wrestling programmes staged by the Association. In the absence of an official police union, both sports provided the WCPAA with the principal means to improve the plight of all the city's constabulary and act as a strong advocate on their behalf.<sup>60</sup>

### **One Big Union**

During the 1920s, the WCPAA sponsored the majority of tournaments staged to decide provincial and national honours. However, with respect to the sheer number of events held in the province during the decade, no institution rivalled the One Big Union Athletic Association (OBUAA), whose weekly boxing and wrestling cards attracted large numbers of spectators to their headquarters gymnasium at 54 Adelaide Street, colloquially known as Plebs Hall. Much like their police counterparts, the OBUAA's history is intimately connected to the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. Although formally founded in

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<sup>57</sup> 15 September 1924, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931. On 12 May 1927, the WCPAA President reported that \$300 had been paid to the widow of officer Harry Talbot, who was killed in a railway accident at Swift Current, Saskatchewan. During the next meeting, a further \$100 was provided for Mrs. Talbot, evidently to pay her coal and tax bills. See *Ibid.*, 12 May 1927; 2 June 1927.

<sup>58</sup> On 3 March 1927, for example, the WCPAA Executive granted \$50 to the wives of officers W. Deegan and W. Cameron, and investigations were initiated concerning a third officer, G. Caughey, who had also been ill for a considerable time. Similarly, in April, 1928, \$100 was given to ailing officer H.A. Sleeman so that he could go to Rochester for an examination. 3 March 1927; 6 April 1928, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>59</sup> 26 September 1927; 7 November 1927, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>60</sup> In 1945, the WCPAA became the official bargaining organization for the Winnipeg policemen, and in 1972, it was renamed the Winnipeg Police Association, representing all policemen in the greater metropolitan area. See Hutchison, *A Century of Service*, 58.



Calgary on 4 July 1919, several weeks after the Winnipeg General Strike ended, the OBU's central tenets, namely the unification of all industrial workers under a single organizational banner, and advocacy of the general strike as a bargaining tool, were central to Western Canadian labour militancy during the period.<sup>61</sup> By late 1919, the OBU had a membership of over 9,000 in Winnipeg alone, and by early 1920, approximately 75 percent of trade union members were affiliated with the union.<sup>62</sup> Despite its rapid growth, the organization went into an equally rapid decline the following year. Schisms developed between the OBU and a subsidiary organization, the Lumber Workers International Union (LWIU), during their second annual convention held during October 1920 in Port Arthur, Ontario. The disagreements between the OBU and the LWIU ultimately lead to the latter's withdrawal from the parent body.<sup>63</sup> Many other groups under the OBU banner followed suit. Beginning in mid-1920, economic recession adversely impacted the OBU's membership numbers and its ability to effectively pursue aggressive labour action.<sup>64</sup> By late 1921, further ideological disputes, this time with the Soviet Union's Comintern and its unofficial Canadian organ, the Worker's Party, whittled away at OBU membership.<sup>65</sup> In the ensuing years, the OBU had little representation outside of Winnipeg and yielded little influence within the Canadian labour movement. However, the period associated with the union's precipitous decline was, contrarily, one that saw its athletic organization ascend to prominence in the province.

Although by 1921, the One Big Union no longer carried the influence it once did in labour politics, the organization was nevertheless able to forestall financial insolvency through an ingenious lottery system run through its weekly Bulletin newspaper. For a cost of 25 cents, a person could purchase a three-week subscription to the paper and by joining a football lottery, have their name entered into a

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<sup>61</sup> Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg, 185; Masters, Winnipeg General Strike, 129; McNaught, Winnipeg General Strike, 30, 32; Tom Mitchell and James Naylor, "The Prairies: In the Eye of the Storm," in The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 178.

<sup>62</sup> David Bercuson, Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1978), 153.

<sup>63</sup> Bercuson, Fools and Wise Men, 166-169. The schism did not just affect the relationship between the OBU and lumber workers in Northern Ontario, as workers in British Columbia's forestry sector also withdrew from the union in January 1921. See the Manitoba Free Press, 17 January 1921.

<sup>64</sup> Bercuson, Fools and Wise Men, 216

<sup>65</sup> Attacking the OBU as idealistic and unrealistic, by late 1921 the Comintern and Workers Party advised workers to re-affiliate with traditional labour unions and "bore from within" to realize a Communist mandate. See Ibid., 221, 224, and 228; and J. Peter Campbell, Canadian Marxists and the Search For a Third Way (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 191.

draw for a cash prize. Public reaction was overwhelming, and by April 1922 over 150,000 entries were pouring in per week. Although multiple attempts were made to shut down the betting scheme by the provincial courts, the OBU was able to change the conditions for their contests (for example, shifting from a football guessing contest to a weather guessing contest), and thus skirt the law, for many years.<sup>66</sup> The ample revenue from the OBU lottery allowed the organization to invest funds into a number of other enterprises.<sup>67</sup> Among the most well-known was the OBUEA. On 20 February 1923 the OBU formed an Athletic Committee and thereafter constructed a gymnasium in their Adelaide Street headquarters.<sup>68</sup> Initially, the facility was only open to OBU members and participation was disappointing. However, a month later, the union's Central Committee, to which the Athletic Committee reported, extended membership to the general public.<sup>69</sup> By the following winter "a crowd of boys" were training at the facility.<sup>70</sup> In February 1924, the OBUEA hosted its first amateur boxing competition at the Plebs Hall and reported that, "Negotiations are now under way to hold semi-monthly amateur boxing and wrestling bouts between members of the various clubs and if successful it should prove a great stimulant to the amateurs and bring a lot more boys into this healthy and manly form of sport."<sup>71</sup> On the basis of an initial strong public support, the club decided to "stage these invitation shows every week until further notice."<sup>72</sup> The programs operated between October and May for the remainder of the decade.

As may be expected for a union-based organization, the OBUEA catered specifically to Winnipeg's working-class population. Unlike the YMCA, whose leadership and membership was primarily drawn from the middle class, the OBU's athletic leadership was, by its own admission, "all working boys, who give their services free."<sup>73</sup> The club also attracted a membership who, due to financial

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<sup>66</sup> Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 217-218; Kidd, *The Struggle For Canadian Sport*, 149-150.

<sup>67</sup> Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 219.

<sup>68</sup> 20 February 1923, Archives of Manitoba, MG10, A 14-2 #17, Robert Boyd Russell Collection, O.B.U. Central Council (Winnipeg) Minutes 1922-23.

<sup>69</sup> 20 March 1923, Archives of Manitoba, MG10, A 14-2 #17, Robert Boyd Russell Collection: One Big Union, O.B.U. Central Council (Winnipeg) Minutes 1922-23.

<sup>70</sup> OBU *Bulletin*, 17 January 1924; 24 January 1924. By the end of 1923, the Athletic Committee reported to the OBU Central Council that they had over one hundred members. See 18 December 1923, Archives of Manitoba, MG10, A 14-2 #17, Robert Boyd Russell Collection: One Big Union, O.B.U. Central Council (Winnipeg) Minutes 1922-23.

<sup>71</sup> OBU *Bulletin*, 31 January 1924.

<sup>72</sup> OBU *Bulletin*, 14 February 1924.

<sup>73</sup> OBU *Bulletin*, 17 April 1924.

strains, found the cost of enrolling in other clubs prohibitive and were permitted to “[pay] their way as they went along.”<sup>74</sup> The organization’s approach to securing funds from the public for their weekly programs also demonstrated their desire to make the sports of boxing and wrestling accessible to economically disadvantaged segments of the population. Unlike other amateur and professional cards staged throughout the province, the OBUAA typically did not charge admission. Instead, “voluntary collections” were taken at the door, which allowed individuals to donate according to what their financial circumstances permitted.<sup>75</sup> In instances where a set ticket price was announced for one of their weekly shows, prices were far below those offered elsewhere.<sup>76</sup> The OBUAA was not above trumpeting its membership’s working class connections, even noting in the spring of 1924 that Jack Taylor, who was training at their gymnasium, “was a union boilermaker before he took up the wrestling game for a living.”<sup>77</sup>

Funds accrued through newspaper lotteries, weekly silver collections, and the modest membership fees charged to athletes allowed the OBU to equip its gymnasium with some of the best modern conveniences available. To attract members, new equipment was constantly being purchased by the club and advertised with pride through their weekly sports column in the OBU Bulletin.<sup>78</sup> By the fall of 1924, in addition to being “well lighted, heated, and ventilated,” Plebs Hall boasted a padded boxing ring, wall weights that had six pulleys allowing both upright and ground exercising, six punching bags, ceiling rings, hurdles, boxing and bag punching gloves, chest expander cables, and hot and cold showers.<sup>79</sup> Of particular pride for the club was its wrestling mat. Manufactured by the Ostermoor mattress manufacturing company and filled with “Ostermoor wool”, it was covered by a double layer of

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<sup>74</sup> Kidd, The Struggle for Canadian Sport, 150; Howell, Blood, Sweat and Cheers, 56-57. Concerning the club’s pay-as-you-go policy, see 4 December 1923, Archives of Manitoba, MG10, A 14-2 #17, Robert Boyd Russell Collection: One Big Union, O.B.U. Central Council (Winnipeg) Minutes 1922-23. One of the club’s most prominent members was future Saskatchewan premier and father of Canadian Medicare, Tommy Douglas. In later reminiscences, Douglas recalled his affiliation with the OBUAA as a boxer and his association with various well known grapplers, including Jack Taylor, who he described as “the man famous for his great toe hold, a very fine wrestler.” See Lewis H. Thomas, ed., The Making of a Socialist: Recollections of T.C. Douglas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1982), 37-38.

<sup>75</sup> See for example OBU Bulletin, 16 October 1924; 16 December 1926; 29 April 1926; 8 December 1927.

<sup>76</sup> For example, a playbill in the 19 April 1928 edition of the OBU Bulletin announced that ticket prices for an upcoming show were 25 cents for adults and 10 cents for children.

<sup>77</sup> OBU Bulletin, 1 May 1924.

<sup>78</sup> OBU Bulletin, 17 January 1924; 21 February 1924; 28 February 1924; 22 September 1927.

<sup>79</sup> OBU Bulletin, 4 September 1924; 11 September 1924.

smooth canvas, presumably to minimize the abrasions that kept so many athletes away from the sport.<sup>80</sup> The OBUAA testified that their mat was “claimed by both Canadian and American professional wrestlers who have used it to be the best that they have had the opportunity to wrestle on.”<sup>81</sup> In keeping with longstanding practices in the province, in the fall of 1924 the club also secured the coaching services of a well-known professional, French Canadian heavyweight wrestler and former Dominion Amateur Champion Leo L’Heureux.<sup>82</sup> Middleweight professional Mike Bilinsky, although frequently absent from the city due to his wrestling schedule, also offered instruction to the membership.<sup>83</sup> Bilinsky demonstrated a particular interest in teaching young Ukrainian-Canadians the sport, and at least one Ukrainian-Canadian athlete, Vic Jussack, wrestled as an amateur under the auspices of the OBUAA before beginning his professional career.<sup>84</sup>

Unlike many other organizations, the OBUAA demonstrated a willingness to mix amateurs and professionals on their weekly cards.<sup>85</sup> Well-known international heavyweight professional wrestlers, who, as noted in Chapter VI, made increasingly less frequent trips to Winnipeg after the summer of 1924, made public appearances during the weekly shows, including Indian wrestler Jatrinda Gobar and Holland native Tom Draak.<sup>86</sup> In some instances, the OBUAA even featured matches that pitted amateurs against professionals, as was the case when Mike Bilinsky wrestled against 1929 Manitoba Amateur Heavyweight Champion William Crossley.<sup>87</sup> Boxing matches were occasionally contested under similar conditions.<sup>88</sup> The OBUAA’s practice of accepting donations instead of gate receipts likely helped its amateur athletes avoid punitive action from the MAAUC.

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<sup>80</sup> OBU Bulletin, 28 February 1924.

<sup>81</sup> OBU Bulletin, 11 September 1924.

<sup>82</sup> OBU Bulletin, 16 October 1924.

<sup>83</sup> OBU Bulletin, 7 January 1926.

<sup>84</sup> Jussack competed in the middle and light-heavyweight class at the 1926 Manitoba Amateur Boxing and Wrestling Championships, although he failed to win a title in either division. See the Manitoba Free Press, 6 April 1926; 7 April 1926. Concerning his ethnicity, see the Brandon Sun 18 November 1929; 30 November 1929.

<sup>85</sup> See for example the OBU Bulletin, 6 March 1924; 24 May 1924; 11 December 1924; 22 January 1925; 26 February 1925; Manitoba Free Press, 16 January 1925; 27 February 1925; 11 December 1925.

<sup>86</sup> OBU Bulletin, 27 November 1924; Manitoba Free Press, 6 March 1925; 9 March 1925.

<sup>87</sup> The OBU Bulletin, 14 November 1929, incorrectly identified William Crossley as William Crosby.

<sup>88</sup> In March 1924, for example, professional bantamweight boxer Jerry Salter fought city bantamweight amateur champion Billy Ayrtton. See the OBU Bulletin, 13 March 1924.

Despite being an overtly working class labour organization, as historian Bruce Kidd notes, the OBUAA's weekly reports in the Bulletin, unlike most of the newspaper's articles, did not espouse an explicitly socialist message.<sup>89</sup> This is not to say, however, that the OBUAA did not attach a very clear purpose to sport. To the contrary, well in keeping with the long held tenets of amateurism, it is evident that the association considered itself a firm defender of "sport for sports sake" and against commercialization.<sup>90</sup> To be certain, although boosters of amateurism had long criticized professionalism for its commercial nature, such a distinction posits a false dichotomy between both branches of sport. Since the 1870s and 1880s amateur sporting clubs accepted that revenue, often accrued from gate receipts, was vital to ensuring their ongoing operation: a trend still in evidence half a century later with both the WCPAA and the OBUAA.<sup>91</sup> However, the OBU maintained that sport conducted primarily as a means to generate profits, like other explicitly capitalist enterprises, was an inherently degenerate practice. More specifically, commercialization, in the OBUAA's case referring to sport that put money into the hands of specific entrepreneurs, was described as "a degrading process... [that] has filled the majority of lovers of clean sports with disgust."<sup>92</sup> One anonymous writer to the Bulletin, in a letter evidently endorsed by the club, cited the proclivity for many promoters, described as "marauding nickel grabbers" to debase sport by offering unsatisfactory shows or outright "fakery" to the paying public.<sup>93</sup> In contrast, the OBU's efforts were "a sterling tribute to what they have accomplished in fostering 'sport for sport's sake.'"<sup>94</sup> The OBUAA's keen willingness to welcome professional wrestlers into their facility not only as trainers but as competitors, stands in apparent contradiction to their stance against the institution of commercialized sport to which the money-seeking professionals belonged. However, in line with a world view that distinguished between capital and labour, the criticism against commercialism was

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<sup>89</sup> Kidd, The Struggle For Canadian Sport, 150.

<sup>90</sup> For specific use of the expression by the OBUAA in reference to itself, see the OBU Bulletin, 8 April 1926.

<sup>91</sup> Metcalfe, Canada Learns to Play, 133-134

<sup>92</sup> OBU Bulletin, 8 April 1926.

<sup>93</sup> OBU Bulletin, 8 April 1926. Virtually identical sentiments were expressed by the OBUAA in late 1924 when a professional card was staged on the same night as their regular Friday programme. In the 15 December 1924 OBU Bulletin, the club stated, "[W]e have... been instrumental to a large extent in helping to pull the game out of the mire where it has been dragged by at least some of the professional promoters of this city in their efforts to hoodwink the public and exploit the local talent in their scramble for easy money."

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

evidently directed more at the persons running sporting enterprises than at the athletes themselves. The association asserted that its regular professional performers such as Leo L'Heureux and Mike Bilinsky approached their sporting careers with more admirable motives. L'Heureux was described by the Bulletin as "a strict believer in clean living and clean sport and looks at the game more from a sporting viewpoint."<sup>95</sup> Concerning Bilinsky, it was maintained that, "Although Mike is a professional wrestler, he is in the game more for the love of the sport than the money end. And this is well proven by the fact that he has never asked or received a cent from the club for his many wonderful exhibitions."<sup>96</sup> Bilinsky was also praised as, "a great booster of amateur sport," and a "Jolly Good Sport."<sup>97</sup> Although amateur organizations in Manitoba, as evidenced, rarely insisted on a complete disassociation between professionals and amateurs, the OBUAA was more willing than most to condone their interaction on both the coaching and competitive levels if the athletes could be viewed to approach their craft with the proper motives.

During much of its existence, the OBU had strained relationships with other institutions in the province, particularly those that also possessed state-appointed authority and sought to restrict or curtail the union's activities. Their ongoing battles with Manitoba's judiciary over newspaper-run betting programs brought them into frequent contact with the police. The OBU Bulletin office, also located at Plebs Hall on Adelaide Street, was raided several times throughout the 1920s. In some instances, the police placed newspaper officials under arrest and brought them before the city police court.<sup>98</sup> Since OBU members were able to successfully avoid conviction, the police later attempted to thwart their betting competitions by physically confiscating the papers from the OBU headquarters.<sup>99</sup> Despite this often antagonistic relationship between their parent organizations, the WCPAA and the OBUAA maintained a very good working relationship. WCPAA wrestlers appeared on the weekly cards staged at the Adelaide Street gymnasium, and OBU athletes participated in events staged at the Central Police

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<sup>95</sup> OBU Bulletin, 16 October 1924.

<sup>96</sup> OBU Bulletin, 10 March 1927.

<sup>97</sup> OBU Bulletin, 7 January 1926; 10 March 1927.

<sup>98</sup> See for example the Manitoba Free Press, 23 March 1922; 7 July 1926.

<sup>99</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 12 January 1929.

Station gymnasium.<sup>100</sup> The OBU Bulletin gave considerable publicity to the WCPAA in their weekly sports column, describing them as “capable and efficient” in their management of competitions.<sup>101</sup> When the police resumed their monthly cards during the fall of 1927, the OBU Bulletin editorialized them in glowing terms stating:

It is not necessary to say anything to those who have attended these bouts in the past, for they know just what kind of show this association puts on, but to those who have not witnessed these bouts before, we want to tell them that these shows are worth any man’s money for they are the fastest, cleanest and peppiest bouts that can be seen anywhere.<sup>102</sup>

The Bulletin’s writers were returning a goodwill gesture, as earlier in the year OBUAA representatives had assisted with several WCPAA events. In response, the police association held a fundraiser on their behalf, contributing \$50 to the OBUAA and \$40 to the individuals who donated their time.<sup>103</sup> Early after the OBU formed a gymnasium, the WCPAA also donated equipment to the facility.<sup>104</sup>

Although working relations with other amateur sporting organizations were generally amicable, the OBU still demonstrated its willingness, on rare occasion, to be critical of decisions taken by other associations if they were seen to impede amateur sport’s development or to violate working-class interests. On 16 February 1925, for instance, the WCPAA staged a dance on the same night as the City Amateur Boxing and Wrestling Championships, held under the auspices of the MAAUC Olympic Committee.<sup>105</sup> The OBUAA, which hosted the preliminary wrestling bouts for the City Championships at the OBU Gymnasium a few days earlier inquired, “If an amateur club had staged a counter attraction last year when the police association were running the bouts, would the said association have considered it an act of co-operation.”<sup>106</sup> The YMCA was also criticized on more ideological grounds in the Bulletin as “Help[ing] the Boss” by acting as an employment agent for the Alaskan fishery industry and requiring the

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<sup>100</sup> See for example the Manitoba Free Press, 21 April 1927; 17 November 1927; 16 December 1927.

<sup>101</sup> OBU Bulletin, 14 February 1924. For coverage of WCPAA-sponsored events, see the OBU Bulletin, 10 January 1924; 7 February 1924; 17 April 1924; 8 December 1927.

<sup>102</sup> OBU Bulletin, 10 November 1927.

<sup>103</sup> 2 June 1927, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>104</sup> 6 November 1923, Archives of Manitoba, MG10, A 14-2 #17, Robert Boyd Russell Collection: One Big Union, O.B.U. Central Council (Winnipeg) Minutes 1922-23.

<sup>105</sup> OBU Bulletin, 26 February 1925.

<sup>106</sup> OBU Bulletin, 26 February 1926. For details concerning the preliminary wrestling matches for the 1925 City Championships, see the Manitoba Free Press, 14 February 1925.

workers they enlisted, most of whom were university and high school students, to pay a \$10 membership fee in the association to be able to secure jobs. The Bulletin described the YMCA as “Another ‘Employment Agency’ That Needs Watching,” but never specifically criticized the traditionally middle-class institution’s local activities nor their involvement in sport.<sup>107</sup> Criticism of any nature levelled by one wrestling club at another was extremely rare throughout the 1920s, as it was understood that the interests of amateur athletes were best served by ensuring that the doors to inter-club competition remained open. Similarly, Manitoba’s mainstream sporting press demonstrated its commitment sport boosterism by giving frequent free publicity to OBUAA boxing and wrestling cards: a courtesy gratefully acknowledged the association itself.<sup>108</sup> The OBUAA reciprocated by assisting with newspaper-sponsored charity events such as the annual Winnipeg Tribune Readers Empty Stocking Fund boxing and wrestling tournament.<sup>109</sup>

### **Amateur Wrestling’s Growth and the Importance of Competitive Sport**

The greater involvement in amateur wrestling of peoples from multiple ethnic and occupational backgrounds stood in contrast to the sport’s more exclusive nature during the pre-World War I period. Throughout the 1920s, a large number of organizations contributed wrestlers to the various events staged in Winnipeg, including the ethnically-oriented St. Jean Baptiste Society, the occupationally-based Canadian National Railroad Police Athletic Association, Winnipeg Light Infantry, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, and Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, as well as private gymnasiums such as the Pioneer Athletic Club, East Kildonan Athletic Club, and Beaver Boxing Club.<sup>110</sup> Amateur wrestling also

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<sup>107</sup> OBU Bulletin, 14 February 1924.

<sup>108</sup> At the end of their 1925-1926 season, the OBUAA stated in the 29 April edition of the Bulletin, “We... would like to thank the two local papers for the publicity they have given us throughout the season, and it speaks well for the sporting editors of the Free Press and Tribune that they are willing at all times to give space on their sporting pages free of charge in order to boost amateur sport.” For coverage of the OBUAA’s weekly boxing and wrestling programmes during the season, see for example the Manitoba Free Press, 31 October 1925; 6 November 1925; 7 November 1925; 13 November 1925; 14 November 1925; 20 November 1925; 27 November 1925; 28 November 1925; 11 December 1925; 8 January 1926; 21 January 1926; 22 January 1926; 23 January 1926; 5 February 1926; 19 February 1926; 26 February 1926; 5 March 1926; 19 March 1926; and 30 April 1926.

<sup>109</sup> OBU Bulletin 2 December 1926; Winnipeg Tribune, 7 December 1926.

<sup>110</sup> Wrestlers representing each of these clubs in amateur competition during the 1920s included H. Asselin, Lawrence Lang, and Clovis T. Amante (St. Jean Baptiste), W. Ketcheson (Canadian National Railroad Police Athletic Association and later OBU), William Crossley (Winnipeg Light Infantry and later the OBU and YMCA); Mark McDermott and E. L. Young (Royal Canadian Horse Artillery), Andrew Borg, Frank De Cock, Nate Fenson, William Fray, Bill Handbur, Teddy Newman (Pioneer Athletic Club), Joe Walker (East Kildonan Athletic Club), and Stanley Zajac (Beaver Boxing Club). Concerning club



began to expand beyond Winnipeg's metropolitan confines. In November 1926, Manitoba's second largest urban centre, Brandon, staged the inaugural City Amateur Boxing and Wrestling Championships, which featured one weight division and four competitors.<sup>111</sup> Prior to that point, professional contests had been the principal attraction in the Wheat City. On the strength of the initial public support, a second amateur boxing and wrestling card was held one month later with athletes performing before a "packed house" at the City Hall.<sup>112</sup> By 1927, however, professional wrestling once again replaced amateur wrestling in the city when Brandon's best amateur grappler, Bray Willey, joined the former's ranks. Once again Brandon suffered, as Winnipeg had shortly after the Great War, from an insufficient number of local participants to make viable the staging of unpaid amateur tournaments. During the latter half of the decade, amateur wrestling also expanded into smaller communities including Carman, Minnedosa, and Pine Falls.<sup>113</sup> Without question, however, Winnipeg remained the province's main source for amateur wrestlers and the location for the vast majority of amateur wrestling competitions.

Amateur wrestling, which had suffered in the late World War I years and immediate post-war period from a "dearth of athletes," had grown to such an extent that by February 1924, the OBU Bulletin reported, "[T]here never was a time in the city when so many amateurs were training [in boxing and wrestling], and despite the fact that there are many more clubs in existence than ever before, they all report that they are daily adding to their membership."<sup>114</sup> The newspaper declared in a later edition that "[A]mateur boxing and wrestling bids fair to oust the professional game, and this is doubtless realized by the pros themselves for it is no uncommon thing to hear them say nowadays, 'Gee, I wish I could get my amateur card.'"<sup>115</sup> Although such a prediction may have been slightly premature, it was nonetheless prophetic. With home-town professional champion Jack Taylor's departure several months later and

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affiliations, see the Manitoba Free Press, 26 March 1923; 11 August 1923; 14 August 1923; 5 April 1924; 9 April 1924; 17 May 1924; 15 December 1925; 19 March 1927, 23 March 1927; 23 April 1927.

<sup>111</sup> The four competitors in the inaugural Brandon City Amateur Boxing and Wrestling Championships were Bray and Dave Willey, Oxenbury and Art Nixon. Bray Willey emerged as the eventual victor. Brandon Sun, 3 November 1926.

<sup>112</sup> Brandon Sun, 7 December 1926; 9 December 1926.

<sup>113</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 30 November 1926; 20 December 1926; and 12 March 1928; Minnedosa Tribune, 16 December 1926; 23 December 1926.

<sup>114</sup> OBU Bulletin, 7 February 1924.

<sup>115</sup> OBU Bulletin, 14 February 1924.

subsequently infrequent appearances in the city by well known heavyweights due to the high fees they commanded, amateur wrestling became predominant not only as a participant sport but also as a public attraction during the last half of the decade.<sup>116</sup> With weekly competitions at the OBU Hall by 1924, monthly programmes at the Central Police Gymnasium after 1926, and many other clubs including the International Athletic Club, YMCA, Canoe Club, Rotary Boys Club, and Pioneer Athletic Club staging their own events throughout the decade in addition to the yearly city and provincial championships, the sport's devotees had little time to wait between engagements from October to May.

Although comparative analysis is beyond this study's scope, part of amateur wrestling's success during the 1920s certainly stemmed from its close association with boxing. The longstanding connection between boxing and wrestling became further entrenched during the decade, and it was rare to find amateur wrestling as a stand-alone sport in competitions. Typically, far more athletes registered for competition in boxing than in wrestling, both in high profile tournaments such as the city, provincial and Dominion championships as well as the regular attractions offered by such organizations as the OBUAA and WCPAA.<sup>117</sup> Interest in boxing rose to new heights in the 1920s, in part due to the enormous interest surrounding the pugilistic exploits of Jack Dempsey who ushered in "the golden age of boxing" with his well-publicized matches against Georges Carpentier, Louis Angel Firpo and Gene Tunney. Each of Dempsey's matches against these men earned more than double the gate of any previous boxing match in history.<sup>118</sup> Simultaneously, aided by the sterling reputation the sport gained as an aid to military training

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<sup>116</sup> The Manitoba Free Press noted that several well known heavyweights had been approached for matches in Winnipeg, including Joe Stecher, Marin Plestina, Wayne Munn, Dick Daviscourt, Jim Browning and Allan Eustace, but all demanded fees higher than local promoter Darcy McIlroy could afford. Ultimately, former world champion Wayne Munn was pitted against Jack Taylor, but the match proved a financial failure. See Manitoba Free Press, 12 June 1928; 4 July 1928.

<sup>117</sup> Indicative of participation levels during the period, 34 boxers entered the City Championships in 1924 compared to 19 wrestlers. A typical card offered by the OBUAA, for example, featured between six and eight boxing bouts and between two and four wrestling matches. See the OBU Bulletin, 14 February 1924; 17 December 1925; 11 February 1926; 18 November 1926; and 7 April 1927.

<sup>118</sup> John V. Grombach, The Saga of the Fist: The 9,000 year Story of Boxing in Text and Pictures (Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1977), 54-55; Sam Andre and Nat Fleischer, A Pictorial History of Boxing (New York: Bonanza Books, 1981), 96. Interest in Dempsey's exploits were not limited to the United States, as author Max Braithwaite colourfully illustrates in his personal recollection of crowds gathering outside of the newspaper office in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan to hear regular telegraph updates during his match with Georges Carpentier in 1921. Winnipeg photographer L.B. Foote captured a similar spectacle on 4 July 1923 when a large, and conspicuously male, gathering of boxing fans congregated in front of the Tribune building to listen to the latest updates from Dempsey's fight with Tommy Gibbons in Shelby, Montana. See Max Braithwaite, Never Sleep Three in a Bed (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 110-112; and Archives of Manitoba, L.B. Foote Collection 1072, Negative 1813.

during World War I, professional boxing lost some of its longstanding stigma as it came under government regulation in many states, beginning with New York in 1920. Other jurisdictions in North America, including Manitoba, followed suit.<sup>119</sup> Although it is difficult to ascertain amateur wrestling's public popularity independent of boxing, reports testify to the favourable reception granted the sport by the attendant public, and newspapers including the Free Press noted that "the mat sport has quite a large following in the city."<sup>120</sup> It is certain, however, that amateur wrestling, although popular, was not equal in this regard to its fistic counterpart. Nevertheless, the practice of staging both sports together significantly bolstered the competitive opportunities for Manitoba's grapplers.

During the 1920s a heightened emphasis on competitive athletics and nationalism also motivated interest in amateur wrestling. Although the trend was certainly underway during the pre-World War I period, between 1920 and 1930, Canada's amateur athletic movement shifted greater energy toward promoting elite sport than in decades past. Part of the impetus for the change stemmed from the growing importance being placed on international athletic competition, in particular the Olympic Games.<sup>121</sup> The modern Olympics began in 1896, but interest in the initial event was not particularly strong among Canadians, and no athletes from the country competed. This was not the case a quarter century later.<sup>122</sup> Leading up to the first post-Great War Olympics, staged in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1920, Manitoba could boast few amateur wrestlers. However, in 1924 and 1928, with dozens of skilled athletes in the province, greater interest centred on earning a potential spot on Canada's Olympic team. The significance accorded to the Olympics resulted in unprecedented co-ordination between provincial and national amateur organizations. During 1924, provincial Olympic trials preceded the national trials in Montreal.<sup>123</sup> In Manitoba's case, however, the trials were deemed a failure, both in terms of public support and with

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<sup>119</sup> Peter Arnold, History of Boxing (Secaucus, NJ; Chartwell Books, 1985), 59.

<sup>120</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 12 December 1928.

<sup>121</sup> Kidd, The Struggle for Canadian Sport, 64.

<sup>122</sup> Alan Metcalfe, "The Meaning of Amateurism: A Case Study in Canadian Sport, 1884-1970," Canadian Journal of History of Sport 36 (1995), 38.

<sup>123</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 8 May 1924.

respect to the evident talent displayed by many of the athletes.<sup>124</sup> On a larger scale, Canada's performance at the 1924 Olympics in Paris proved to be one of its worst, with medals awarded in only four events.<sup>125</sup> Four years later, in an effort to prevent disgrace in a sporting spectacle which was increasingly viewed in nationalistic terms, greater efforts were taken at selecting athletes who stood the best chance of winning medals.<sup>126</sup>

In Manitoba, instead of hosting a specific event devoted to determining potential Olympic team members, the MAAUC's board of governors chose wrestlers on the basis of their longstanding and consistent track records at winning in high level competition.<sup>127</sup> Three wrestlers, Jimmy McKinnon, W.L. McIntyre, and Johnny Endelman (the 1925 and 1926 Winnipeg City Champion as well as 1926 and 1928 Provincial Champion), were chosen to represent the province at the Olympic trials in Montreal.<sup>128</sup> Both McKinnon and McIntyre advanced to the finals, with the Winnipeg police officer winning first place in the light-heavyweight division.<sup>129</sup> McIntyre, however, was not selected for the Canadian Olympic team. The exclusion of McIntyre and other athletes from the Olympic roster received criticism, but Toronto's C.E. Higginbottam, chair of the Olympic Boxing and Wrestling Selection Committee defended their selection, given "the paramount idea of sending those that would be the best when pitted against the pick of other nations, even though such a course ran contrary to public favour and fancy."<sup>130</sup> Reflecting a growing sentiment for leaders in Canada's athletic movement to conceptualize their decisions in nationalistic terms, Higginbottam declared that, "It was the duty of the committee to choose for the

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<sup>124</sup> The Manitoba Free Press commented on 4 June that "Little talent of real Olympic class was visible at the opening of the Manitoba Olympic boxing and wrestling trials" the previous evening. Conclusions were unchanged after the second and final day of competition, when the Free Press noted on 5 June that, "As a whole the trials were a failure, as they failed to bring out any outstanding talent." The WCPAA, which hosted the event, credited the absence of entries from the highly-regarded Pioneer Athletic Club and the late date at which the event was held for its failure. See the 15 September 1924, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>125</sup> The 1924 Canadian Olympic Committee's official report on the Paris Games contended that Canadian athletes would likely have performed much better had matches been conducted according to the rules commonly adhered to in North America and officiating been more competent. Canadian team wrestling coach Sydney Chard opined that, "The general organization and conduct of the Tournament was deplorable as an Olympic event." Of particular concern was the allowance of "rolling falls," whereby a competitor could inadvertently pin himself when executing an offensive technique which brought his shoulders into contact with the mat. See Howard J. Crocker, ed., Report: Canadian Olympic Committee 1924 Games (Ottawa?: Canadian Olympic Committee, 1925), 13, 50.

<sup>126</sup> Kidd, The Struggle for Canadian Sport, 68.

<sup>127</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 30 June 1928.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 9 July 1928.

<sup>130</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 18 July 1928.

benefit of the country, and this it did to the best of its ability.”<sup>131</sup> The committee’s decisions were justified when three of the five wrestlers representing Canada in the Games earned medals: the best showing by a Canadian wrestling team in Olympic history.<sup>132</sup>

The emphasis on competitive success was in clear evidence within many of Manitoba’s sporting clubs during the 1920s. The OBUAA, despite advocating “sport for sport’s sake,” frequently boasted of their member’s athletic accomplishments, with one report in the OBU Bulletin following the 1924 City Championships proclaiming, “The O.B.U. Athletic club again demonstrated its superiority over others by carrying off three [titles], and supplying the best all-around bunch of athletes of any club in town.”<sup>133</sup> The YMCA, Manitoba’s first institution to embrace amateur wrestling and a longstanding advocate for sport’s character-building qualities also recognized the appeal that athletic success had with the sports-minded public. Following a successful showing at the 1929 Provincial Championships, the organization took out advertising in the Free Press declaring, “The Y.M.C.A. Trained and developed 11 Champions in Boxing and Wrestling, as shown in the Manitoba Championships last week! Use Your Y.M.C.A.”<sup>134</sup> The “Y’s” interest in maintaining high level competitors in their roster also facilitated a liberal approach to granting memberships to athletes from non-Christian backgrounds. Two of the organization’s most decorated wrestlers during the 1920s, multiple time Provincial and City Champion Johnny Endelman, and 1927 Dominion Champion silver medalist Lou Romalis, were both Jewish and competed under the YMCA banner for several years.<sup>135</sup> Despite their ethno-religious background, both men were nevertheless drawn from middle-class clerical occupations, which was typical of the organization’s membership during the

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> It should be noted, however, that Jim Trifunov, who earned a bronze in the 123 pound division, was not initially selected for the team, but went to Amsterdam with funds provided by the Saskatchewan provincial government. See Leyshon, Of Mats and Men, 96; Manitoba Free Press, 11 July 1928.

<sup>133</sup> OBU Bulletin, 21 February 1924. See also the OBU Bulletin, 12 June 1924; 1 January 1925; 26 February 1925; 22 September 1927; 2 February 1928.

<sup>134</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 20 April 1920.

<sup>135</sup> Endelman competed for the YMCA between 1924 and 1929, and Romalis between 1923 and 1927. See the Manitoba Free Press on the dates 18 December 1923; 15 February 1924; 10 March 1925; 23 March 1925; 18 February 1925; May 1927; and 11 April 1929 for references to both men and their YMCA club affiliation. Further information on both Endelman and Romalis is contained in Leible Hershfield, The Jewish Athlete: A Nostalgic View (Winnipeg, MB: By the Author, 1980), 162.

period.<sup>136</sup> However, the YMCA's toleration of Jewish participation was certainly not without reservation, and in 1929 the organization, declaring that "the Y.M.C.A. were quite within their rights in keeping the Jews out of [its] membership," passed a motion aimed at reducing the group's membership to a maximum of 5 percent.<sup>137</sup> It was not until 1936 that the Young Men's Hebrew Association was able to secure its own permanent facility and professional staff.<sup>138</sup>

### **New Growth, Old Problems**

Although the 1920s saw participation in amateur wrestling expand beyond its previously narrow class and ethnic boundaries, many of the difficulties facing athletes in Manitoba remained virtually identical to those in the pre-World War I period. Despite the fact that numerous clubs which promoted amateur wrestling did so according to their own unique interests and objectives, the underlying principles guiding amateurism in the province remained virtually unchanged from their pre-war incarnation. The AAUC and its provincial affiliate, the MAAUC, continued to adhere to the principle of "once a professional always a professional." In the months after the war's end, it initially appeared that the AAUC's longstanding stance on professionalism might be softened when a schism developed between Western and Eastern Canada concerning the national directorate's refusal to grant reinstatement to soldier professionals who had served overseas.<sup>139</sup> Several Western directors from Saskatchewan and Alberta tendered their resignations to the parent body and declared their intention to form an independent Western AAU. The fracture was averted when the AAUC agreed to a brief moratorium on professional soldier

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<sup>136</sup> Johnny Endelman worked for the Eaton's Company and Lou Romalis as an agent for Prudential Insurance. See 1927 Winnipeg Henderson's Directory.

<sup>137</sup> 26 September 1929, Archives of Manitoba, P 3798, Young Men's Christian Association, Minutes: YMCA Board of Directors 1910-1913.

<sup>138</sup> Winnipeg's Young Men's Hebrew Association was originally founded in 1895 as the Young Hebrew Social Assembly Club. By 1899 it had been renamed according to its more familiar designation. Although Winnipeg's Jewish residents were not able to secure their own gymnasium facility until 1936, interest in boxing and wrestling within the wider community were evident more than a decade earlier. In 1924, the Winnipeg Hebrew Free School secured the MAAUC's permission to stage boxing and wrestling in conjunction with a "Jubilee Carnival," staged on 1 and 2 September. Among the features was a match between Joe Romalis and the OBU's Harry Vernon. Over 1,000 people attended the event. J Arthur A. Chiel, The Jews in Manitoba: A Social History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 110-111; Manitoba Free Press, 12 July 1924; 2 September 1924.

<sup>139</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 September 1919. During the AAUC's 1919 national convention, the Manitoba delegates put forward the resolution that, "Any professional who has stayed out of professional sport for two years may be reinstated." Although supported by representatives from Alberta and Saskatchewan, Eastern delegates defeated the motion. See Library and Archives Canada, MG28 150, Vol. 20, Amateur Athletic Union of Canada Minutes 1919, 20-21.

athletes deemed worthy of reintegration into amateur athletics by their provincial governing bodies. The AAUC's 26 September 1919 statement on the matter, however, made their continuing position concerning professionalism clear:

[A]ll such applications must be made before Jan. 1 1920 and applicant must furnish an affidavit declaring that he will remain an amateur for the remainder of his life and that the reinstatement shall be recognized only in such provinces as it may be granted by.<sup>140</sup>

In May 1920, another schism, this time between the AAUC's parent body and its Thunder Bay branch developed over granting amateur status to long-time Fort William professional wrestler Jack Belanger, while denying it to two baseball players. Commentators attributed AAUC's evolution toward embracing high level amateur athletics as the reason for their decision, the Free Press opining that, "Belanger is regarded as a fine Olympic prospect. The other two have no such pretensions."<sup>141</sup> Belanger's petition for amateur status was ultimately rejected by the AAUC because he could not supply an affidavit from his branch.<sup>142</sup> During the MAAUC's annual meeting the following spring, former president J.D. Pratt urged "dramatic action" be taken against amateurs who engaged in professional sport, and later in the year the executive reaffirmed its commitment to the existing amateur definition.<sup>143</sup>

Throughout the decade, dissenting voices continued to challenge the AAUC's stance as outdated. During a visit to Toronto, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, a prominent figure in professional baseball, characterized the amateur code as an archaic representation of aristocratic values and noted the absurdity of the idea that a good college athlete could "sling hash in a cafeteria" to earn money in the summer to pay his way through college in order to earn his school glory, but would be scorned for deriving tuition funds from utilizing those very same skills.<sup>144</sup> Leaders in amateur sport, despite their own move toward emphasizing elite international competition, maintained that their rules ensured a level playing field for all athletes by preventing the participation of individuals whose ability to 'play for pay' granted them the

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<sup>140</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 September 1919.

<sup>141</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 7 May 1920.

<sup>142</sup> Fort William Daily Times-Journal, 7 July 1920; Library and Archives Canada, MG28 150, Vol. 20, Amateur Athletic Union of Canada Minutes 1920, 12.

<sup>143</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 3 May 1921; 2 December 1921.

<sup>144</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 29 April 1926.

time to further hone their skills.<sup>145</sup> Accordingly, despite various calls throughout the 1920s for reconsideration, their rigid stance towards professionalism remained largely unchanged.<sup>146</sup>

For several amateur wrestlers in Manitoba, the AAUC's policies concerning monetary compensation certainly had an adverse impact on their careers. Throughout the 1920s, one of the greatest concerns among advocates for reform in amateur sport was the issue of "broken time payments." Extensive travel for competition was a far greater barrier to participation in Canada's expansive West than in the East, but the AAUC remained steadfast in its policy that no Canadian athletes would receive financial remuneration for time lost from work.<sup>147</sup> For athletes living outside of Winnipeg such as Brandon's Bray Willey, regular participation in amateur competition required travelling 200 kilometres to the provincial capital. Given such distances, competitive opportunities were slim, particularly if money for travel expenses was not forthcoming. Willey competed in the 1927 Manitoba Championships, losing to perennial champion Jimmy McKinnon in the welterweight division, but was absent from other competitions staged in the province's capital during the surrounding years. Ironically, the AAUC's stance against monetary compensation unwittingly drove athletes who wished to practice their craft out of the amateur ranks. Following Willey's decision to turn professional in late 1928, the presence of financial inducements permitted him the opportunity to meet far more opponents on the mat in his home town than had ever been the case during his amateur career.

Because of the sport's highly physical nature, wrestlers also continued to run the risk of injuries that could sideline them from work. During the 1920s, the MAAUC, much like the provincial commission governing professional contests, instituted mandatory medical examinations for all participants prior to competition.<sup>148</sup> The policy aided in preventing unfit athletes from participating, but could do nothing to prevent acute injuries staged in training or competition. Compensation for injury was at the discretion of the organization sponsoring the event and was not always forthcoming. Following the

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<sup>145</sup> Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*, 56.

<sup>146</sup> Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*, 60; Metcalfe, "The Meaning of Amateurism," 41.

<sup>147</sup> Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*, 60; *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 May 1930.

<sup>148</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 5 March 1923.



1922 Provincial Championships, for example, the WCPAA refused to pay the \$5 medical bill submitted by Dr. W. Harvey Smith for treatment given to boxer H. Gregg of the International Athletic Club, stating that, “the Executive Board would accept no responsibilities for injured athletes.”<sup>149</sup> A similar resolution followed in April 1928 concerning injuries sustained by P.C. Roquette at a police-sponsored event.<sup>150</sup> However, the Association was more amenable to its own members, later agreeing to pay Constable W.L. McIntyre’s \$50 medical bill relating to injuries sustained while wrestling at the police station.<sup>151</sup>

The financial limitations facing amateur wrestlers during the 1920s were not exclusively a product of the AAUC and MAAUC’s ideological aversion to compensating its athletes. Despite having far-reaching control over virtually all branches of amateur sport, neither body could boast a large supply of money in their treasuries.<sup>152</sup> Winnipeg’s Jack McLaughlin, Dominion 158 pound Amateur Champion in both 1923 and 1924, was denied a place on the Canadian Olympic team despite being victorious in his class at the 1924 Olympic trials, due to lack of available funds in the Olympic budget. J.H. Crocker, a member of the national selection committee, explained that although McLaughlin was victorious, his performances were not deemed sufficiently impressive by the judges to warrant inclusion on the financially-strapped team.<sup>153</sup> The Olympic Committee’s decision contributed to the already extant regionalist tension between the AAUC’s Western and Eastern bodies, and in August 1924 the MAAUC passed a resolution declaring its intention to forward a separate Western Olympic team to the 1928 Olympics because of perceived discrimination against their athletes.<sup>154</sup> Although the plan was never realized, newspapers in the region continued to report bitterly on the McLaughlin incident, the Free Press, for instance, noting in its annual recap of the previous year’s sports during January 1925 that, “it was a great disappointment to his local admirers when he was deprived of his opportunity for world’s

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<sup>149</sup> 14 June 1922, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>150</sup> 6 April 1928, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>151</sup> 31 July 1929, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

<sup>152</sup> Concerning the AAUC’s financial problems, see Kidd, The Struggle for Canadian Sport, 65.

<sup>153</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 25 September 1924. See also the Manitoba Free Press, 19 August 1924.

<sup>154</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 23 August 1924.

honours.”<sup>155</sup> Four years later, W.L. McIntyre, as previously noted, was also denied a place on the Olympic team after earning a Dominion title.

Despite attempts to couch the Canadian Olympic Committee’s selections as being the product of regional prejudice, the MAAUC was itself forced to make similar decisions. In 1929, the MAAUC, then described as “far from wealthy,” was only able to field a team to the Dominion Amateur Boxing and Wrestling Championships in Port Arthur after the Thunder Bay Branch of the AAUC agreed to pay for the Manitoba contingent’s lodging expenses while at the Lakehead. Even then, only one wrestler, W.L. McIntyre, received sanction to attend by the provincial governing body, his expenses to be covered by the WCPAA.<sup>156</sup> Late financial contributions from outside sources finally allowed the MAAUC to expand its roster of three boxers and two wrestlers to include six boxers and two wrestlers (McIntyre and 1929 Provincial Welterweight Champion Bjorn Johnson).<sup>157</sup> Although, particularly during the second half of the 1920s, competition at the annual Dominion Championships was far more nationally-representative than prior to the war, events staged in the West nevertheless continued to produce a preponderance of Western-based participants and champions, with a similar situation occurring when the event was held in the East.<sup>158</sup> In 1928, the MAAUC tried to deepen its coffers by demanding one-third of the profits generated from hosting the Manitoba Boxing and Wrestling Championships. However, the WCPAA, which had been chosen to host the event and relied on such cards for a sizeable percentage of its annual revenue, simply refused. The MAAUC, despite its authority to grant or deny athletes amateur standing, proved impotent in its ability to dictate financial arrangements to its affiliate clubs, and the WCPAA was accordingly granted unconditional sanction to hold the event.<sup>159</sup> Regardless of its financial difficulties, the MAAUC clearly had more interest in ensuring continued participation in sport according to the

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<sup>155</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 1 January 1925.

<sup>156</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 16 April 1929.

<sup>157</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 17 April 1929. McIntyre ultimately did not attend the 1929 Dominion Championships, and instead heavyweight William Crossley made the trip, likely assisted by funds provided by the Winnipeg Electrical Company. Bjorn Johnson, a Winnipeg railway fireman, earned a Dominion title. See the Manitoba Free Press, 18 April 1929; Port Arthur Daily News-Chronicle, 19 April 1929; 20 April 1929; 22 April 1922.

<sup>158</sup> Based upon an examination of the championship rosters provided by Leyshon in Of Mats and Men, 109-110.

<sup>159</sup> 6 April 1928, Archives of Manitoba, P 1040/1, Winnipeg Police Association, Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association Minutes 1919-1931.

doctrine of “once a professional always a professional,” than it did attempting to impose its own rigid monetary demands on its affiliates.

## **Conclusion**

The 1920s proved to be a remarkable period for amateur wrestling in Manitoba. During the decade, participation in amateur wrestling expanded beyond its previously narrow class and ethnic boundaries, as people from various ethnic, religious and occupational backgrounds embraced the sport. Various organizations that sponsored amateur wrestling each did so, in part, according to their own particular desires and objectives. However, heightened enthusiasm for competitive athletics and a greater level of importance accorded to elite international amateur competition helped fuel enthusiasm for the mat game among many segments of Manitoba’s population. Yet, even as involvement in the sport increased and opportunities for regular competition grew, many of the factors shaping amateur athletics remained virtually unchanged from what had existed during the pre-war period. Remarkable expansion therefore occurred within the context of both long-extant definitions of what it meant to be an amateur wrestler and ongoing struggles for financial stability.

## Conclusion

In Jules Dassin's 1950 film noir adaptation of Gerald Kersh's novel, Night and the City, grifter Harry Fabian, played by Richard Widmark, gains the confidence of retired professional wrestling champion Gregorius by promising to stage classical wrestling in London. Aged Polish wrestler Stanislaus Zbyszko, cast in the role of the Great Gregorius, laments his once-beloved sport's transformation into a clownish burlesque as well as his semi-estranged son Kristo's decision to promote its 'modern' variant. Nearing the film's climax, the long-retired Gregorius is ultimately pitted in combat against Kristo's top wrestler, the Strangler, played by Mike Mazurki, in a bout that showcases the contrasting methods characteristic to both approaches. Gregorius' emphasis on submission holds and the calculated application of technique stands in juxtaposition to the Strangler's frenetic brawling style which places a premium on eye gouging, choking, punching, and kicking. After weathering a barrage of such assaults, Gregorius finally subdues his younger adversary. Turning to his promoter son who witnessed the battle's concluding moments, he admonishes, "That's what I do to your clowns." Although Gregorius' victory represents a brief symbolic vindication for his vision of wrestling, the strain caused by such intense exertion immediately overwhelms him and he perishes in the gymnasium, a crumbled relic of a bygone era.

Dassin's dramatization highlights, both literally and symbolically, some of the transformations that occurred in professional wrestling during the quarter century preceding the film's release. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the mat game was undergoing radical modifications that would revolutionize its presentation to the public and lay the foundations for what we currently recognize as professional wrestling. Although some critics, as represented by Night and the City's Gregorius, bewailed the changes, their cause ultimately succumbed to consumers' evolving tastes. In Manitoba, as elsewhere, advances in communication technology and subsequent changes in public expectations surrounding entertainment worked synergistically with acute economic hardship to drive demand for a more fast-paced and dramatic form of wrestling than had existed in decades-past.

The late 1920s saw heavyweight professional wrestling's decline in Manitoba, as high-profile American-based talent, which came to dominate the local market, made increasingly infrequent appearances in the province's capital. By 1928, widespread indifference to the once-popular sport was in evidence when a match between Winnipeg's one-time "local boy" Jack Taylor and former world's heavyweight champion Wayne "Big" Munn attracted a disappointingly small attendance for the Empire Athletic Club. For the remainder of the decade, no promoter expressed a willingness to risk paying the high appearance fees demanded by prominent American-based heavyweight professional grapplers in light of tenuous public support for their enterprise.

Professional wrestling's decline during the last few years of the 1920s was symptomatic of larger challenges facing live entertainment both in Manitoba and elsewhere in North America. Motion pictures had provided the public with relatively inexpensive amusement for more than two decades, and by the 1920s, Hollywood-based studios were producing well-acted feature length films with elaborate set and costume design that rivalled that available in many of the better live theatre productions. "High class" venues including the Walker Theatre, which by 1920 relied largely on British-based theatre companies due to a collapsing American touring system, found it difficult to compete with the flourishing motion picture industry. In 1933, C.P. Walker was forced to close his once-nonpareil venue.<sup>1</sup> Vaudeville continued into the latter half of the 1920s, but further technological advancements in the motion picture industry, most significantly the introduction of "talkies" after 1927, ultimately provided its death-blow.<sup>2</sup> Aggressive attempts by the motion picture industry to solidify their control over the theatre market forced their already-tottering competition into ruin. Famous Players Canada Limited purchased most independently-owned theatres and vaudeville houses in Canada during the late 1920s, and in 1930 the company banned live performances at their venues as the final effort to solidify motion picture market dominance.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Morton, *Manitoba*, 416; Skene, "C.P. Walker," 147.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart, *Prairie Theatre*, 75, 76; Skene, "C.P. Walker," 146.

<sup>3</sup> Skene, "C.P. Walker," 148.

The motion picture industry's growth, culminating in the introduction of "talkies," closed off many of the traditional theatrical venues available for staging professional wrestling in addition to reorienting much of the public's entertainment budget. Radio's heightened popularity by the late 1920s and early 1930s also altered existing recreational habits, taking previously public leisure forms and recasting them for home consumption. Sports programs, in addition to radio plays, became popular with the new medium, and as early as 1923, Prairie residents were tuning in to broadcasts of professional wrestling matches from distant locales such as Wichita, Kansas.<sup>4</sup> By the early 1930s, with radios more widely available, Manitobans regularly received their wrestling cards through the airwaves.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, the medium also helped break down longstanding barriers between the rural and urban environments by providing country residents with a comparative- and simultaneous- level of access to the same amusements as their city-dwelling contemporaries.<sup>6</sup> Typically, as with the "talkies," this came in the form of American-produced programming.<sup>7</sup>

Changing economic conditions after 1929 likewise assisted in reshaping public expectations concerning entertainment. By the end of the 1920s, Winnipeg was already beginning to lose its position as Western Canada's dominant metropolitan centre, as grain shipments through the Panama Canal, which had opened in 1914, were redirecting prairie crops toward Vancouver ports.<sup>8</sup> Declining wheat prices in 1929, coupled with the beginnings of prairie drought, foretold the decade-long disaster that was to follow the stock market crash in October of that year.<sup>9</sup> By 1930, Manitoba was in full-scale economic depression as grain prices continued their precipitous plummet to unprecedented lows, and crop output plunged. Large scale civic infrastructure projects which were initiated in the 1920s, including the construction of a railway line to Churchill and creation of associated harbour facilities, the development of hydroelectric power in the province's North, and, in 1931, the construction of Winnipeg's Civic

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<sup>4</sup> The Manitoba Free Press reported on 3 February 1923 that A. Taylor, a "local radio fan" residing in Waskada, Saskatchewan, had intercepted a detailed radio broadcast of a match between Ed "Strangler" Lewis and Allan Huston in Wichita.

<sup>5</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 16 June 1931.

<sup>6</sup> During the early 1930s, access to electricity was still largely confined to areas with higher population densities. However, those living in rural settings utilized batteries to power their radios. See Jackson, The Centennial History of Manitoba, 224.

<sup>7</sup> Donald G. Wetherell, "Some Aspects of Technology and Leisure in Alberta," Prairie Forum, 11, 1 (Spring 1986), 58.

<sup>8</sup> Morton, Manitoba, 413; Bellan, Winnipeg First Century, 203; Coates and McGuinness, Manitoba, 116.

<sup>9</sup> Morton, Manitoba, 421; Bellan, Winnipeg First Century, 191.

Auditorium, provided much needed employment at the decade's outset, but were completed by 1932.<sup>10</sup> Many unemployed people migrated to Winnipeg, drawn either by the hope for jobs or by the city's relatively generous relief programs, exacerbating the already-widespread poverty in Manitoba's capital.<sup>11</sup>

Although mass unemployment and generally difficult economic circumstances reduced the amount of disposable income available for most individuals and families, Depression conditions also increased available leisure time.<sup>12</sup> However, the trying economic times led to greater public interest in specific forms of entertainment, particularly those that offered a sharp counterpoint to the drudgery endemic to daily life. Manitobans explicitly sought out escapist diversions as a tonic to adverse circumstances over which they had no direct control. Dance halls, such as Winnipeg's Paradise Gardens Dance Pavillion, proved to be popular venues for socializing and listening to the latest music.<sup>13</sup> American influence on the Western Canadian leisure market was longstanding by the 1930s, but the trend advanced at a rapid pace during the decade. W.L. Morton noted, with nostalgic derision, the influence of commercial entertainment originating from the United States, "which required nothing but the cash of the spectator."<sup>14</sup> In particular, Morton singled out motion picture 'talkies,' musing that, "With the movies came the imbecilities of American slang and popular music, and youthful Winnipeggers were impelled, like others of their generation, to mimic the banalities of the mechanized and commercialized entertainment purveyed by Hollywood."<sup>15</sup>

American-based motion pictures did not achieve universal acceptance, but their popularity was certainly undeniable among Depression-era Winnipeggers, an appeal driven not only by engaging storylines, but also by their cost relative to live entertainment. For prices ranging from twenty five to fifty

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<sup>10</sup> Bellan, Winnipeg First Century, 193.

<sup>11</sup> Several historians of Manitoba, among them Coates and McGuinness, and Bellan, emphasize that the services provided by relief organizations in Winnipeg were decidedly superior to those offered in smaller communities or rural regions in the province, resulting in considerable migration into the city. Other historians such as Doug Smith, however, have been more expressly critical of Depression-era relief programs for the unemployed, stating that, "the official reaction to the suffering of the thirties was one of distrust and hostility." See Coates and McGuinness, Manitoba, 116; Bellan, Winnipeg First Century, 205, and Smith, Let Us Rise!, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Don Bailey, "The Lost Decade," in Shilliday, Manitoba 125- A History Volume 2, 219.

<sup>13</sup> Ticket prices at the Paradise Gardens Dance Pavillion, for example, were, at 50 cents, roughly equivalent to the larger movie palaces in Winnipeg. See the Winnipeg Tribune, 1 June 1931. See also Bailey, "The Lost Decade," 218, concerning the popularity of Depression-era dance halls.

<sup>14</sup> Morton, Manitoba, 415-416.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 416.

five cents, moviegoers could see the latest Hollywood offerings featuring well-known stars such as Marlene Dietrich, Joan Bennett, Claudette Colbert, Maurice Chevalier, and former Winnipeg police officer and wrestler Victor McLaglen, at any one of the many neighbourhood theatres throughout the city.<sup>16</sup> Radios, although considerably more expensive, could be purchased with a cash deposit and monthly payments, and prices dropped steadily as the decade progressed, making them more generally accessible.<sup>17</sup> To retain its relevance as a spectator activity, professional wrestling was forced to adapt to the public's interests by offering a spectacle that could compete for the consumer's limited discretionary funds with these popular new entertainment forms.

During the 1920s, a growing appreciation for sport as an amusing diversion as opposed to a predominantly moral enterprise, coupled with professional athletes' contributions to the war effort, increased regulation, a flagging reform movement, and influence from American "trusts" (at least within the lucrative heavyweight ranks) inducing wrestlers to co-operate, allowed professional wrestling to escape many of the problems that bedevilled it prior to the Great War. Already touted to the public as an explicitly rough endeavour, wrestling was re-introduced to Manitobans during 1931 in a decidedly different, and altogether more spectacular, form than had previously existed in the province.

On 12 June, a consortium of prominent Winnipeg businessmen, collectively named the Amphitheatre Boxing and Wrestling Club, announced their intention to stage professional wrestling matches at the Amphitheatre Rink.<sup>18</sup> Distinguishing it from what had been offered to the public in the past, the press explicitly billed the club's upcoming card, scheduled for 24 June, as the "New Style" of professional wrestling. The Winnipeg Free Press noted that, "During the last few years wrestling has

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<sup>16</sup> Motion picture ticket prices, listings, and theatre locations can be found in any daily newspaper from the period. In this specific instance, see the Manitoba Free Press, 2 February 1931; Winnipeg Tribune, 23 May 1931; and 2 June 1931.

<sup>17</sup> During the spring of 1931, a Minerva Electric Radio could be purchased outright for \$99.75, or with a cash deposit of \$10, followed by ten, \$10 monthly payments. The less expensive King battery operated model could be purchased for \$59.50, or by a \$6 cash deposit and 10, \$6 payments. Five years later, a Viking Electric Mantel Radio cost \$29.95, or a \$3 down payment and 10, \$2.80 monthly payments. See, respectively, the 1931 Timothy Eaton's Spring-Summer Catalogue, and 1936-1937 Timothy Eaton's Fall-Winter Catalogue.

<sup>18</sup> The Amphitheatre Boxing and Wrestling Club's members included Alderman L.F. Borrowman (Borrowman and Jamieson Engineer), C.E. Hayles and H.E. Riley (Canadian Consolidated Grain Company), C.H. McFayden (with ties to local football), Dyson P. Smith (manager, Empire Coal Company), and Arthur Burrows (Burrows Lumber Company). Matches were promoted by Amphitheatre Rink manager Jack McVicar. See the Manitoba Free Press, 13 June 1921; Winnipeg Tribune, 13 June 1931; 20 June 1931; and 1931 Winnipeg Henderson's Directory.



been enjoying the greatest popularity in its history and this is particularly due to the new style introduced since so many leading college athletes have entered the mat game.”<sup>19</sup> The “new” style had its genesis in the American Midwest during the mid- 1920s, where Joseph “Toots” Mondt, business partner to Ed “Strangler” Lewis, and Billy Sandow, devised the idea to begin introducing elements from boxing, brawling, and theatrical stunt work into professional wrestling. Mondt’s innovations, titled, “Slam Bang Western Style Wrestling” proved popular and were soon adopted in venues throughout the United States.<sup>20</sup> During the ensuing years, additional dramatic elements were added to the professional repertoire, and well-known athletes from other sports, in particular college football, entered into wrestling’s ranks where they utilized their spectacular gridiron manoeuvres to arouse excitement and generate revenue. Careful management by promoters and sidestepping uncooperative grapplers allowed college football recruits such as Dartmouth’s “Dynamite” Gus Sonnenberg, who possessed no previous wrestling experience, to become top box office attractions.<sup>21</sup> The Free Press, in differentiating old from new, stated, “Instead of the old style of punishing and laying down and grinding with nothing in stock but strength, there is Sonnenberg’s flying tackle... [t]he airplane spin, raising the opponent above the head, whirling him around and dashing him to the mat... and many other numerous holds and breaks too numerous to mention.”<sup>22</sup> Tasked with presenting the sport’s novel methods to Manitobans, however, was the already well known Canadian Champion, Jack Taylor. Two years earlier in Toronto, Taylor and promoter Ivan Michialoff introduced Central Canadian audiences to “Slam Bang” wrestling.<sup>23</sup> After its

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<sup>19</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 13 June 1931.

<sup>20</sup> Griffin, Fall Guys, 49-50; Hornbaker, National Wrestling Alliance, 96.

<sup>21</sup> Concerning Sonnenberg’s rise to wrestling fame and the measures taken by promoters such as Philadelphia’s Paul Bowser to ensure he remained protected from legitimate wrestlers who sought to expose his limited ability on the mat, see Mark Hewitt’s detailed account in Catch Wrestling Round Two, 151-175.

<sup>22</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 13 June 1931.

<sup>23</sup> Michialoff staged his first wrestling card in Toronto’s Arena Gardens on 4 May 1929 with Jack Taylor in the main event. His promotion initially attracted small crowds, with attendance being boosted by the availability of free tickets. By 1931, however, thousands of paying spectators were regularly patronizing his programs. Wrestling’s dramatic revival in Toronto was elegantly chronicled by Henry Roxborough in the 15 October 1931 edition of Maclean’s magazine. Michialoff later promoted wrestling in Winnipeg during 1933. Concerning Michialoff’s first wrestling card in Toronto and his tenure as a Winnipeg wrestling promoter, see, respectively, the Toronto Globe, 6 May 1929; and Nevada, Wrestling in the Canadian West, 17-18.

popular establishment in Southern Ontario, the former Winnipeg resident, who, “ha[d] taken to the new form of wrestling like the proverbial duck to water,” returned to the Prairies.<sup>24</sup>

Reports following the 24 June card at Winnipeg’s Amphitheatre colourfully illustrate some of the mayhem witnessed by the audience as well as their reaction to it:

[A]ccording to all the accepted signs of success the fans have had their appetite for thrills and spills considerably whetted... As far as the wrestling was concerned everything bar biting and eye gouging was passed off as O.K., and the crowd went into ecstasies as the bout proceeded blow by blow. Unprecedented scenes were witnessed as the matmen were in turn hurled out of the ring. On one occasion Jack Taylor manouevered [opponent Joe] Komar up against the ropes, feinted a la Dempsey with his right hand and caught the Lithuanian with a terrific kick in his ‘Johnny Risko’ and sent him spinning through the ropes into the crowd. Komar showed intense dislike for such hard boiled methods and retaliated by picking up a chair and hurling it at Taylor’s head as he stood in the centre of the ring.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to histrionic displays of anger, overt attempts to sensationalize pain and suffering were also among the new innovations, and whenever Taylor secured a toe hold, “the ‘Wild Bull of Lithuania’ tore his hair in pain and made desperate efforts to grab the ropes and drag himself out of the ring.”<sup>26</sup> The Free Press commented after the ‘show’ that, “[A]nyone who knows when people enjoy themselves will have to admit that Wednesday night[‘s] performance tickled the fans.”<sup>27</sup>

The “new” version of professional wrestling, although favourably received by many, did not earn universal praise, the Free Press acknowledging that, “It may be that it will take some time for the old-time wrestling enthusiasts who were willing to go and watch the old style tug and pull and grunt game, to get used to the action which is the stock and trade of the new crop of wrestlers.”<sup>28</sup> More scathing was Winnipeg Tribune sports columnist Paul E. Warburg’s review, which admonished, “How anyone could have believed that the show was indicative of what wrestling really is, is far beyond comprehension. The exhibition was something that would have been a good gesture on the part of the wrestling commission to

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<sup>24</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 24 June 1924. Taylor first wrestled in Calgary for promoter Josef Zabaw before making his return to Winnipeg. See the Calgary Herald, 17 April 1931, and 6 June 1931. For more information on Zabaw’s Calgary-based wrestling promotion, Nevada, Wrestling in the Canadian West, 14-16.

<sup>25</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 25 June 1931.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 27 June 1931.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

have intervened and prevented from continuing.”<sup>29</sup> Yet, Warburg was simultaneously forced to acknowledge that, “There were actually some who witnessed the ‘show’ and enjoyed it. They were satisfied for the money they spent.”<sup>30</sup> Following Jack McVicar and the Ampitheatre Boxing and Wrestling Club’s second programme three weeks later, a more acquiescent Tribune reporter acknowledged that, although there was “comparatively little wrestling,” the grapplers nevertheless put on a good show for the appreciative crowd.<sup>31</sup> As had been the case throughout the United States, after the spring-summer of 1931 the “new” style permanently superseded the older, mat-oriented style of catch-as-catch-can wrestling in Western Canada. In a 1936 visit to Winnipeg, Ed “Strangler” Lewis, who had begun his career in 1910, reflected pragmatically on the changes, stating, “The public has shown they like it. Gate receipts have demonstrated it beyond our wildest prediction... you may not ‘go’ for this modern wrestling. Neither do I, but the public wants it and I’m only merchandising my wares.”<sup>32</sup>

The professional wrestling that emerged in Manitoba during the 1930s appealed to the public on several fronts. For a society growing increasingly accustomed to seeing its entertainment delivered through the heavily-edited medium of film, the dramatics presented in (and frequently often outside of) the ring succeeded in providing a similarly fast-paced spectacle. Although skilled wrestlers were long heralded for their speed and science, an understanding of the sport’s technical intricacies required greater study than the more readily-discernable purpose of a flying tackle, toss from the ring, or well-placed kick to the “Johnny Risko.”<sup>33</sup> Such tactics would, and certainly did, earn professional wrestlers censure in the decades prior to the Great War, but the growing appreciation for professional sport as an entertainment form dulled, if never wholly eliminated, the moralistic, reform-era baggage attached to the mat game in the following decade. The sport’s roughness, so heavily emphasized in the 1920s, gave way to orchestrated mayhem in the 1930s. Morton’s observation that the emerging entertainment forms seen

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<sup>29</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 26 June 1931.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 9 July 1931.

<sup>32</sup> Ed “Strangler Lewis, quoted in the Winnipeg Free Press, 28 April 1936.

<sup>33</sup> Morris Markey, a reporter who investigated professional wrestling’s growth popularity in New York for the 18 April 1931 edition of the New Yorker, 37, likewise observed that, “In the game itself there has been gradual changes toward showmanship. No longer was it a glum tussle on the mat —two interminably long falls out of three, with all the fine points hopelessly concealed from the spectators.”

during the Great Depression did not require, as a prerequisite, concerted intellectual effort from the spectator, applied in considerable measure to professional wrestling. By adding over-dramatic displays of anger, pain, and suffering in addition to exciting new technical innovations, the action became more emotionally, as well as more technically, intelligible.<sup>34</sup> Coupled with substantially reduced ticket prices relative to earlier years, professional wrestling supplied an affordable form of escapist entertainment to the public during an emotionally trying period marked by economic hardship.<sup>35</sup>

Although “new” in several respects, the wrestling seen in Manitoba during 1931 cannot be wholly divorced from the sport which preceded it in the previous five decades. Professional wrestling remained an enterprise that drew heavily on ethnicity, and in the ensuing weeks and months, Jack Witchon, the “local Frenchman,” and the distinctly-Eastern European surnamed Paul Danelko and Johnny Yurkovich, followed the “Lithuanian Champion” Komar in making appearances before Winnipeg audiences.<sup>36</sup> Local talent, too, continued to figure prominently in professional wrestling programmes, capitalising on civic pride and a longstanding booster spirit. Amateur wrestlers still transitioned into the professional ranks to earn an income, although as competitive wrestling skill became less important, fewer professional wrestlers were retained as coaches by local sporting organizations.<sup>37</sup> Divorced from much of the moralising that surrounded all sports during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, professional wrestling nevertheless failed to achieve universal acceptance, in particular because certain elements within the province’s public, echoing Paul E. Warburg’s sentiments, continued to expect pure sporting competition. Even though the “new” professional wrestling presented to the public was more evidently spectacle than sport, such criticisms were already decades-old by the Great Depression. Those wishing to patronize a ‘simon-pure’ sporting enterprise could still do so during the winter months at MAAUC-affiliated venues.

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<sup>34</sup> See also Rickard, “Spectacle of Excess,” 136.

<sup>35</sup> Tickets for the initial Amphitheatre wrestling card were priced at \$1.75 (ringside), \$1.25 (reserved) and \$0.75 (rush), making them considerably less expensive than C.P. Walker and Walker Deering’s “high class” bouts at the Walker Theatre prior to World War I. See the *Manitoba Free Press*, 24 June 1931 and Appendix I for comparison.

<sup>36</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 23 June 1931; 6 August 1931.

<sup>37</sup> See also Hatton, “Headlocks at the Lakehead,” 149.

Amateur wrestling prospered on the national level during the early 1930s, the emphasis on high-level national and international competition persisting following the Depression's onset, despite harsh economic conditions. In August 1930, Canada hosted the inaugural British Empire Games in Hamilton and the country's grapplers, including the WCPAA's W.L. McIntyre, won gold medals in all seven weight divisions. In 1931, the WCPAA again staged the Dominion championships in Winnipeg. Contrasted with the earliest competitions staged two decades earlier, the tournament had become far more "national" in character. Seventeen athletes from outside Manitoba participated in the championships, drawn from such centres as Victoria, Toronto, Montreal, and Regina.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, in 1931 the AAUC adopted the newly-formulated Olympic rules for amateur wrestling, ensuring that Canada's submission to the global standardization process would not result in a repeat of the problems that bedevilled North American wrestlers in Paris during 1924.<sup>39</sup> However, in Manitoba itself, the sport was clearly in decline. During the 1931 Dominion Championships, no wrestlers earned first prize in any weight division.<sup>40</sup> An examination of entry rosters for the Provincial championships staged two weeks earlier also reveals that far fewer clubs were fielding entries than in the past.<sup>41</sup> With professional wrestling's reintroduction to the province in 1931, fans proved, as they had frequently before the mid-1920s, that they were willing to turn out in greater numbers for professional cards than amateur tournaments: Amateur wrestling's central strength therefore remained as a participatory, as opposed to spectator-driven, venture. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the Great Depression, the sport's foundation had been cemented in the province.

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This dissertation has sought to examine wrestling in Manitoba from its earliest inception in the post-Confederation period, through to the genesis of what is largely recognizable today as professional wrestling. Wrestling was never hermetic from the values, beliefs, prejudices, entertainment expectations, and prevailing economic conditions of the peoples fostering its practice. Long before widespread

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<sup>38</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 1 May 1931.

<sup>39</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 5 December 1931.

<sup>40</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 4 May 1931.

<sup>41</sup> In the finals of the 1931 Provincial championships, for example, five of the eight athletes represented the OBUAA, one represented the WCPAA, and one came from Pine Falls. Neither the YMCA nor commercial clubs submitted participants. See the Winnipeg Tribune, 20 April 1931.

European settlement, it served as a form of ritualized combat among the region's Aboriginal peoples, acting as a safety valve to stave off more serious violence. Strict social mores ensured that the combat did not extend beyond the parties directly involved. Among the Chipewyan males, it proved vital in arbitrating contested marriage relationships, and within Netsilik Inuit, ritualized individual combat help preserve community cohesion. Wrestling, particularly among the Nestilik, also helped to forge communal bonds between married couples which were vital to their survival, and served as a means by which individuals could demonstrate the strength requisite in effective hunting. Within the voyageur and tripmen sub-cultures which developed within the fur trading industry, strength, endurance and bravery were highly valued. Violent displays of fighting competence, wherein wrestling was a necessary element, earned participants considerable social capital among their peers and conditioned them to the harsh realities of a vocation characterized by constant danger.

After Confederation, the province's new settlers, most of them being from English Ontario, brought with them their own wrestling traditions. During this period, the sport reflected the competing values held among Anglo Canadians. For some urban residents, in particular the large population of males who frequented the city's less prestigious liquor establishments and variety theatres, professional wrestling matches were a popular entertainment form that was often connected to recreational alcohol and tobacco consumption, gambling, and various blood sports. Many of the sport's most well-known figures during the era did not live their lives in accord with the values held by other residents in the province, particularly middle class social reformers who saw in wrestling an opportunity to promote their own vision of proper Christian manhood which stressed, among other things, temperance, moral virtue, and healthy competition. Reformers saw money as the root cause for many of the woes afflicting sport in the province and, through their doctrine of amateurism, sought to prevent athletes from receiving financial compensation for their sporting performances. However, sport was not so easily compartmentalized into separate amateur and professional domains in Manitoba's early years. Reflecting a far more layered social existence, nascent amateur programs depended heavily on professional wrestlers for their coaching expertise who, despite efforts to cultivate an image that adhered to middle class tenets of respectability,

often found themselves induced into returning to professional competition due to financial inducements and public demand.

During the first decade and a half of the twentieth century, a growing interest in all sports, including wrestling, occurred simultaneously with a rapid population rise in Manitoba. Professional wrestling garnered popularity due to widespread cultural appreciation for physical expressions of masculinity that placed considerable value on muscular development. Many also valued it for its merit as a 'scientific' undertaking that gave physical expression to the principles that were likewise revolutionizing economic, financial and technological development in the Western world. In this context, the male body, developed through disciplined, systematic 'scientific' training, became an increasingly marketable commodity for display in professional wrestling matches. Wrestling was also valued by some as a 'rough' activity that celebrated aggression and strength, and athletes were respected for their ability to give, and endure, physical hardship. Despite the many positive characteristics attributed to professional wrestling, however, it remained a site for considerable public controversy, as excessive violence, fixing in matches, and poor public conduct from prominent athletes continued to embroil it in controversy.

Although sports promoters sought to adopt strategies to ensure that professional wrestling retained respectability, many within the public continued to reject it altogether as an appropriate venue of athletic expression. In particular, middle class men of Anglo-Protestant extraction devoted increased vigour to advancing amateur sport. Aided by institutions such as the YMCA, monetary compensation remained the central concern for amateurism's acolytes. In the six years before the Great War, amateur officials succeeded in creating a central governing body for all amateur sport in the province, created programs to instruct young men in wrestling, and successfully hosted competitions that not only brought Manitoba's grapplers together, but connected them to amateur sport on the national and international level. Despite considerable advancements, however, amateur wrestling did not extend far beyond the Anglo-Protestant urban middle class, unlike professional wrestling which catered to people from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds throughout the province.

During the immigration boom at the beginning of the twentieth century, peoples of non-British ancestry who arrived in the province patronized professional wrestling matches, in part, because the linguistic barriers present in many other commercial entertainments were not an impediment to enjoying the show. European immigrant groups also came to Canada with their own wrestling traditions, and entrepreneurial promoters capitalized on intercultural rivalry by staging matches between athletes representing various ethnic communities. With growing Anglo-Canadian nativism during the period due to perceived threats from Continental European immigration, many matches also pitted members of the ethnic and linguistic majority against “foreign” adversaries. However popular such contests were, wrestling’s merit extended beyond its ability to capitalize on the intercultural enmity that could be found in Manitoba during the early twentieth century. For some groups, such as the Icelanders, wrestling represented a deliberate attempt to continue Old World traditions in the New, and preserve their culture from assimilationist pressures. *Glima*, the Icelandic wrestling style, celebrated individualism, and rewarded speed and skill over brute strength. Additionally, the art, whose history dated back to the early Icelandic settlement period, linked the more recent North American sojourners to their Viking past, thus providing a thread of continuity among a peoples whose history was marked by a series of major upheavals and mass migrations. For Manitoba’s Polish community, wrestling had quite a different purpose. Polish interest in professional wrestling was partially attributable to its popularity in their homeland, but also developed in Manitoba within the context of a fledgling Polish-nationalist movement. Wrestling programs represented a way of attracting people into the cause while providing them with the physical wherewithal that the movement’s leaders saw as necessary for aiding the nationalist endeavour. Before the First World War, Polish wrestlers were the public face for the Polish nationalist movement in the province.

During the war, both amateur and professional wrestling were curtailed as the sport took on new significance as a military-related activity. The years preceding the European conflict were marked by a heightened emphasis on militarism in Canada, and wrestling lent itself well to aggressive expressions of masculinity, a view bolstered by popular literature and newspapers, where the language used to describe



wrestling was often analogous to war. After the declaration of war, civilian amateur sports organizations forged a close relationship with Canadian military authorities, and wrestling became valued as one of many ‘Patriotic’ activities that helped generate revenue for the families of overseas soldiers. Military authorities also considered wrestling to be a valuable tool for character building, fostering esprit de corps, reinforcing military hierarchy, and assuring proper conduct in the homo-social environment of military camps. Wrestling was also viewed as an aid to recruiting, and the availability of sporting competitions helped attract men into uniform, especially as the war dragged on and casualty numbers rose.

Although professional wrestling fell into decline during this time, enlisted professional wrestlers, due to their prominence as public figures, were held up as examples to follow for those who had not yet joined the services’ ranks, a process that reinforced a vision of masculinity that privileged the soldier-athlete over those who were not yet in the military. For immigrant communities outside of the Anglo-Protestant majority, the presence of their well-known professional wrestlers in uniform also served to publicize that they too were committed to the national and imperial cause. Although the period was marked by remarkable pressures toward conformity, wrestling also remained a site for power struggle, particularly as amateur organizations shrunk and military-based sporting bodies grew due to high enlistment. In this context, ideas concerning the dangers of intermingling amateurs and professionals were challenged as the latter repeatedly demonstrated their value to the war effort both in and out of the theatre of conflict.

In the post-World War I decade, declining public concern over professional sport’s moral propriety, coupled with increased regulation, allowed professional wrestling to avoid much of the controversy that dogged it in previous decades. Changing public attitudes, chief among which was an increased appreciation for sport as an entertainment commodity, allowed professional wrestling to be promoted as an explicitly “rough” enterprise throughout the decade. Capitalizing on heightened Anglo-Canadian nationalism and nativist sentiments, professional wrestling in Winnipeg achieved unprecedented popularity by pitting Canadian wrestler Jack Taylor against “foreigners” who, according to various widely-entrenched racist stereotypes held during the period, posed their own peculiar threats to

Anglo-Canadian dominance. Yet, despite extremely aggressive attempts to control their public personas during the decade, wrestlers, through their performances in the ring, still proved capable of defying the images that had been created for them by promoters. This period also witnessed growing American influence over the sport in Manitoba, as trusts from south of the border sought to control the matches staged in the province's capital.

Although concerns over professional wrestling's respectability declined (but by no means disappeared) during the 1920s, increased emphasis on national and international competition also allowed amateur wrestling to expand its participation base to include a greater cross-section of Manitoba society. Previously confined largely to the Anglo-Protestant middle class, the sport was adopted by various other ethnicities and occupational groups who also attached their own purposes to the activity. Within the francophone community which had long taken an interest in wrestling, amateur programs were organized by the *Union Canadienne*, as an alternative to those offered by Protestant organizations such as the YMCA, which was considered to be a threat to Roman Catholic authority. For occupationally-based groups such as the Winnipeg City Police Athletic Association, the central concern, more material in nature, was to provide for the direct welfare of its members. With the inability to collectively organize on their own behalf, the WCPAA afforded recreational opportunities for the city's police force and also served as a mutual aid society whose funds were procured, in large part, from sponsoring boxing and wrestling programs.

The working-class based One Big Union Athletic Association offered the sport to individuals whose occupational background made memberships in other middle-class sports organizations prohibitive. The OBUAA, similar to middle class amateur clubs, valued "sport for sport's sake," but nevertheless permitted considerable interaction between amateurs and professionals, owing to a class view that saw unscrupulous entrepreneurs, more than the athletes themselves, as the main culprits in fostering "degenerate" sporting practices within the professional ranks. Additionally, although wrestling frequently represented "contested territory" between different groups in Canadian society, the 1920s were also marked by a considerable degree of cooperation, even between associations whose agendas

frequently ran into conflict with one another. The relationship between the WCPAA and the OBUAA, for example, evidences a rather more layered reality, in which common cause could bring about considerable collaboration, even in the midst of larger ideological conflict. Yet, despite amateur wrestling's growth beyond its narrow ethnic and class confines during the 1920s as well as repeated calls for reform, the rules governing amateurism remained largely unchanged throughout the decade, so many of the limitations to competition previously facing athletes likewise remained unchanged in the post-World War I years.

Overall, the argument presented here is that wrestling represented far more than just the physical act of two men coming to grips with one another on a padded mat. Throughout its long existence, wrestling was inseparably connected to widespread, and shifting, debates over acceptable public conduct, the social values that should be attached to sport, and the place of minority peoples in Western Canadian society, both according to their own self conception and according to how members of the Anglo-Protestant majority viewed them. Wrestling matches were brief, transient, and deliberately orchestrated episodes of human interaction around which ideas related to class, respectability, masculinity and ethnicity found acute expression. Additionally, the training associated with the sport was conducted by organizations whose goal was more than to merely facilitate physical contests between men, but instead to ensure that, through conducting wrestling programs, 'higher' goals were achieved.

In detailing wrestling's history in Manitoba during the roughly 60 years before the Great Depression, a considerable void in the existing historical literature has been filled. In Ringside, Beekman noted that professional wrestling was, to that point, a sport without a history inasmuch as virtually nobody had sought to grant it concerted examination.<sup>42</sup> Until relatively recently, academic scholars virtually ignored the sport, despite (or perhaps because of) its rich and colourful past. Even the modest number of popular histories on the subject barely extended their narratives beyond chronicling, and frequently re-chronicling, the exploits of the most well-known professional wrestlers, typically in the heavyweight ranks. Hundreds of athletes, many of them internationally known during their careers, but still more of

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<sup>42</sup> Beekman, Ringside, viii.

them of regional and local repute, have been almost completely ignored by the sport's chroniclers and subsequently forgotten. At a basic level, this study represents an attempt at to create an overarching narrative devoted to wrestling in Manitoba which exhumes the major figures and events associated with the sport's past from obscurity. By placing wrestling's development within a regional context, it also invites future comparative analysis that will lead to a greater understanding of the factors shaping the sport's growth in other regions of Canada and North America.

Although a regionally-based study, many of the themes addressed here have resonance beyond both the wrestling mat itself and the limited geographic confines of a single Prairie province. This examination connects wrestling to larger trends seen throughout the Anglo-Protestant world, placing Manitoba within the context of broad-reaching social reform movements that sought to mould society according to value systems that were frequently defined and articulated by the English-speaking middle class. Through wrestling, there was an attempt to extend Anglo-Protestant values and British culture into new frontiers. Thus, it was intimately tied to larger notions of middle class respectability, Christian manliness, rational recreation, scientific progressivism, militarism, and Canada's place in the British Empire. Simultaneously, this study provides insight into how other groups, differentiated by such indicators as class and ethnicity, attempted, through various means, to negotiate their own place in society by moulding alternative visions of sport or by working within the existing system to achieve their own particular goals. The argument presented here fundamentally rejects a rigid class-based analysis that compartmentalizes certain practices and behaviours as explicitly and exclusively working or middle class. Interest in wrestling transcended such narrow boundaries, and the evidence suggests a more layered reality, in which peoples from multiple backgrounds interacted, frequently in competition, but sometimes in concert, to shape the social landscape. In this regard, the study also contributes to the as yet scant body of literature in Canadian history related to the sporting traditions of Canada's non-British immigrant peoples during the early decades of settlement in the country. Conversely, it also provides further insight into the highly racialized understanding of the world possessed by many early Western Canadian residents, particularly those within the English-speaking majority.

By linking wrestling to larger developments in transportation and communication technology, this study contributes to our understanding of late nineteenth and early twentieth century leisure culture. It charts how repeated advancements in both fields brought the province, once physically isolated from other important population centres, into ever more frequent contact with the entertainment forms seen elsewhere on the continent. In this regard, the analysis furthers our appreciation for America's growing influence on Canadian leisure pursuits. Additionally, by focusing on wrestling as a commercial undertaking, it enhances an understanding of how critical social constructs, among them masculinity, respectability, ethnicity, race, racism, and the male body itself, evolved as marketable commodities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**Appendix I**  
**Professional Wrestling Cards in Winnipeg Before 1930**

**Date:** 18 August 1886  
**Location:** Royal Roller Rink  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Frank Elmore (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Matsuda Sorakichi (The Jap) bt. John Blackey

Sorakichi won in two straight falls

Boxing

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**Date:** 20 August 1886  
**Location:** Princess Opera House  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Frank Elmore (referee), Mr. Tremblay (timekeeper)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

John McKeown bt. Matsuda Sorakichi (The Jap)

Handicap match. Sorakichi undertook to throw McKeown three times in one hour but only got one fall

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**Date:** 4 November 1890  
**Location:** Princess Opera House  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Ed McKeown (master of ceremonies and referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$0.50, \$0.75, \$1.00  
**Attendance:** Described as “not a very large... audience”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

G. Perrie dr. John Richardson

Perrie won the first fall at Graeco-Roman and Richardson the second fall at catch-as-catch-can

G. Perrie bt. Gillis

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**Date:** 4 January 1894  
**Location:** Princess Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Fred Plaisted (master of ceremonies and referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

F.H. Joslin bt. E.W. Johnston	Johnston won first the fall at side-hold style, Joslin the second at Cumberland-Westmoreland, and Joslin the third fall at catch-as-catch-can.
C. Walley the Human Bird and Harry Logrenin	Provided music between wrestling falls during the main event
Sid Mitchell dr. Blanchard	Boxing
Johnston vs. Macpherson	Juvenile boxing
Blindfolded boxing with blackened gloves	
Athletic exhibitions	Included kicking, jumping and club swinging

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**Date:** 22 February 1894  
**Location:** Princess Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Fred Plaisted (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

F.H. Joslin bt. Elwood Rourke	One fall. Joslin wins the Heavyweight Championship of Manitoba
F.H. Joslin bt. E.W Johnston	One fall
Elwood Rourke bt. John Blackey	One fall
F.H. Joslin bt. J.W. Moffatt	Collar and elbow style
Music between contests	Provided by C. Walley, C. Hamplebee and Harry Logrenin

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**Date:** 19 July 1895  
**Location:** Winnipeg Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

F.H. Joslin dr. W.B. Faulkner

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**Date:** 22 July 1895  
**Location:** Winnipeg Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

F.H. Joslin bt. Andrew Crystal  
F.H. Joslin bt. W.B. Faulkner

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**Date:** 27 June 1901  
**Location:** Winnipeg Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** J.W. Harris (referee), Dr. J. G. Baird, A.W. St. John (judges)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$0.50, \$1.50, \$1.75  
**Attendance:** Described as “a large audience”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Mouradoulah bt. Tom Jenkins      Handicap bout. Mouradoulah succeeded in defeating Jenkins three times in an hour

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**Date:** 7 May 1902  
**Location:** Winnipeg Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Dr. J. G. Baird (referee), William Carson (timekeeper)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$0.75, \$0.50, \$0.25  
**Attendance:** Described as a “Big Crowd Present”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Mouradoulah bt. Mont, “The U.S. Giant”      Mouradoulah won the first and third falls

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**Date:** 20 October 1905  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Winnipeg Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** J.W. Harris (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “big crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

James Theran bt. Tom Dixon (Dickinson)

**Event Details**

Handicap bout. Theran threw Dixon once within fifteen minutes, gaining a fall in 11 minutes. Staged in association with the Provincial Amateur Boxing Championships

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**Date:** 21 October 1905  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Winnipeg Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** James Hewitt (referee), J.W. Harris (timekeeper)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “big crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

James Theran bt. S. Anderson

**Event Details**

Handicap bout. Theran threw Anderson once within fifteen minutes. Staged in association with the Provincial Amateur Boxing Championships

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**Date:** 27 October 1905  
**Location:** Winnipeg Theatre  
**Promoter:** Winnipeg Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** James Hewitt (referee), Dr. Baird, H. Hueston (timekeepers)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

Tom Dixon (Dickinson) bt. James Theran

**Event Details**

Handicap bout. Theran failed to throw Dixon in fifteen minutes. Staged in association with the Provincial Amateur Boxing Championships

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**Date:** 28 October 1905  
**Location:** Winnipeg Theatre  
**Promoter:** Western Athletic Association  
**Official(s):** James Hewitt (referee), Dr. J.S. Baird, A.H. Kent (judges), J.H. Harris (timekeeper)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “packed house”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

James Theran bt. S. Anderson, Charles Beards

**Event Details**

One fall each. Staged in association with the Provincial Amateur Boxing Championships

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**Date:** 26 January 1906

**Location:** Arcade Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** "Kid" Davis (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as "crowded"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Root bt. James Theran

Five fall contest, Root winning the first, fourth and fifth falls

"Kid" Davis bt. Ben Rolf

Boxing. Decision

Jimmie Conley dr. Willie Campbell

Boxing

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**Date:** 1 February 1906  
**Location:** German Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** "Kid" Davis (referee), A.C. Ross (timekeeper)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** 200

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Root bt. Jack Downs

Handicap match. Downs failed to throw Root three times in an hour. Downs won two falls, Root won one

James Theran bt. Hansen

Two straight falls

Casper Franklin vs. Joe Perry

Boxing

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**Date:** 3 February 1906  
**Location:** Arcade Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** James Theran (referee, main bout)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Over 100

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Downs bt. Jack Root

Handicap match. Downs was required to pin three points down on his opponent's body, while Root was required to pin two points

James Theran dr. Tom Dickinson

15 minute bout

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**Date:** 14 February 1906  
**Location:** Edwards Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Tom Dickinson  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a "large crowd"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Ole Oleson bt. James Ramsey, James Theran, ftt.  
Jack Downs

Oleson undertook to throw the three men twice each in 60 minutes. He succeeded in throwing Ramsey and Root, but gained only one fall on Downs before time expired

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**Date:** 17 February 1906  
**Location:** Young Liberal Club Room  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Jack Root (referee, preliminary), Mr. Hannay (referee, main event)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as "crowded," and "a large attendance"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Downs bt. Ole Oleson

Best three in five falls. Oleson won the first fall, and Downs the next three

James Ramsey bt. James Theran

Handicap match. Theran failed to throw Ramsey twice in 40 minutes, gaining only one fall

---

**Date:** 28 April 1906  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Crescent Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Sidney Slocum, Dr. Baird (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Artie Edmunds bt. William Lauder

Two straight falls

William Lauder dr. Artie Edmunds

Boxing. Decision

"Kid" Anderson bt. Charles Britch

Boxing

David Irons bt. Charles Hambleton

Boxing. Decision

Abbie Brady bt. Ben Rolf

Boxing. Decision

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**Date:** 23 July 1906  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Crescent Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Larry Piper  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as a "good crowd"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Artie Edmunds bt. James Theran

Handicap match. Theran failed to throw Edmunds three times in an hour. He secured the first fall but was himself thrown in the second

Fitz Willoughby bt. Walter Hambleton

Boxing. Hambleton quit in the third round

Kid Buchanan bt. Akins

Boxing

Reddy Lamont bt. Harry Hambleton

Boxing. Hambleton quit

Moving Pictures

Boxing. Bob Fitzsimmons vs. Jack O'Brien

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**Date:** 24 July 1906  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Crescent Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Larry Piper (boxing)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Artie Edmunds bt. Larry Piper

Two straight falls. Piper was an outfielder for the Maroons baseball club

James Theran dr. Ed Thomas

Boxing

Kid Buchan bt. Earl Dack

Boxing. Decision

"Reddy" Lamont bt. Alf Mitcheson

Boxing. Decision

Moving Pictures

Boxing. Bob Fitzsimmons vs. Jack O'Brien

---

**Date:** 25 July 1906  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Crescent Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dr. Baird (boxing)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as “a big crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

William Lauder bt. Artie Edmunds

Boxing

Robert Lauder bt. James Theran

Theran got the first fall but retired in the second due to an upset stomach

---

**Date:** 3 August 1906  
**Location:** Winnipeg Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** James Hewitt (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Robert Lauder bt. Artie Edmunds

Boxing. Decision

James Theran bt. Harry Muldoon

Handicap. Muldoon was to throw Theran three times in an hour, but only got two falls. Theran secured the third fall

---

**Date:** 30 August 1906  
**Location:** Winnipeg Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “big crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

William Lauder bt. Dave Irons

Boxing. Decision

Tom Fiefield bt. Jack Page

Boxing

Robert Lauder bt. Tom Dickinson

Both men secured one fall. Tom Dickinson declined to go on the mat for the third fall

Jimmy Page bt. Tom Willets

Boxing

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**Date:** 9 February 1907  
**Location:** Liberal Hall  
**Promoter:** International Glassworkers Association  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Monfield bt. Manstead

Jim Winnie bt. Mike Hall      Boxing. Decision

Shaughnessy bt. O. Motte      Boxing. Decision

---

**Date:** 20 February 1907  
**Location:** German Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Jack McKeown, W. Dixon (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Over 100

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Tom Dickinson vs. W. Priem      Match declared no contest after Dickinson sustained an injury

W. Priem dr. McLaughlin      This was likely one of the McLaglen brothers, Victor or Fred. Staged as a result of Dickinson being unable to continue

W. Keast bt. William Lauder      One fall

W. Frederickson bt. W. Fair      One fall

---

**Date:** 30 May 1907  
**Location:** Happyland  
**Promoter:** W.O. Edmunds  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Hume Duval bt. Robert Lauder      Handicap bout. Duval was meeting all comers at Happyland. He secured one fall in under fifteen minutes

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**Date:** 2 June 1907  
**Location:** Happyland  
**Promoter:** W.O. Edmunds  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Hume Duval bt, W. Keast

Handicap bout. Duval threw Keast within fifteen minutes

---

**Date:** 8 June 1907  
**Location:** Happyland  
**Promoter:** W.O. Edmunds  
**Official(s):** Robert Lauder  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Young Tom Sharkey bt. Hume Duval

Handicap bout. Duval failed to throw Sharkey in fifteen minutes. Young Sharkey was the stage name for Victor McLaglen

---

**Date:** 26 June 1907  
**Location:** Happyland  
**Promoter:** W.O. Edmunds  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as "a large crowd"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Hume Duval bt. Stanley Sielski

Handicap bout. Graeco-Roman rules. Sielski refused to continue after a disputed fall

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**Date:** 19 July 1907  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Dr. Mullally (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Hume Duval dr. Young Tom Sharkey

Neither Duval or Sharkey (McLaglen) secured any falls in one hour

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**Date:** 4 October 1907  
**Location:** German Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Joseph Ross, Anderson, R. Lewis (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “crowded”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Donald Gaunt bt. Duncan C. Ross

Two straight falls

Stanley Sielski bt. Charles Gustafson

One fall. Gustafson refused to continue for the second fall.  
Newspapers referred to Stanley Sielski as Steve Sielski

Jiu-jitsu exhibition

Performed by Duncan C. Ross

Max Turner vs. Mike Coddon

Boxing. No decision

Joseph Ross vs. Anderson

Boxing. Ross boxed under the name Corney Mack

Wright vs. Jenkins

Boxing. No decision

Harry Reynolds vs. Jimmy Connelly

Boxing. No decision

Stanley Sielski bt. Charles Gustafson

One fall. Gustafson refused to continue for the second fall.  
Newspapers referred to Stanley Sielski as Steve Sielski

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**Date:** 18 October 1907  
**Location:** German Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Charles Gustafson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a very fair attendance”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herman Mace bt. Dan Simpson

Handicap bout. Simpson agreed to throw Mace three times in  
an hour but only got one fall

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**Date:** 25 October 1907  
**Location:** Edwards Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** About 100

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Stanley Sielski

Two straight falls

Robert Lauder dr. Ben Sielski

No falls



**Date:** 1 November 1907  
**Location:** German Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** J.W. Harris, Dan Simpson (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “small” crowd

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herman Mace bt. Dan Simpson

Simpson won the first fall, Mace the second and third

Robert Lauder dr. Ben Sielski

No falls

---

**Date:** 8 November 1907  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown. Described as “a much larger crowd than last week’s bout”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herman Mace bt. Alf Dolding

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 15 November 1907  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herman Mace bt. Charles Gustafson

Handicap bout. Gustafson agreed to throw Mace three times in an hour but only secured two falls

Ernest Sundberg bt. A. Douer

Two straight falls

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**Date:** 22 November 1907  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “deserv[ing] better patronage”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herman Mace bt. Numarso

Two straight falls

C. Deisondis bt. J. Berin

Two straight falls. Berin was sometimes spelled Berrin, Biron, and Beran

J. Tureene bt. R. St. John

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 29 November 1907  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “increased attendance”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Pete Menard

Two straight falls

Ernest Sundberg bt. J. Berin

Two straight falls

A. Douer bt. J. Tureene

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 6 December 1907  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as the “largest crowd of the season”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Alex Bowden

Bowden won the first fall, Gustafson the second and third

Charles Dalager bt. Ernest Sundberg

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 13 December 1907  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a fairly large attendance”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herman Mace bt. Charles Dalager

Disqualification

Ernie Sundberg dr. A. Douer

Sundberg secured one fall. No decision given

William Keast bt. Alf Dolding

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 20 December 1907  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a record crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Hume Duval

Handicap bout. Duval agreed to throw Gustafson three times in an hour but secured no falls

Alf Dolding bt. Berin

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 27 December 1907  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herman Mace bt. William Keast

No falls. Keast unable to continue due to injury

Berin bt. R. St. Jean

Berin won the first and third fall

---

**Date:** 3 January 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Moth bt. Charles Taylor

Two straight falls

Ernest Sundberg bt. Alf Dolding

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 10 January 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Charles Moth

Handicap bout. Moth was to throw Gustafson three times in an hour but was himself thrown twice

Alf Dolding bt. St. Jean

Dolding took the first and third falls

---

**Date:** 17 January 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a large number”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Alex Bowden

Gustafson won the first and third falls

Ernest Sundberg bt. Berin

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 24 January 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “small”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herman Mace bt. Charles Willis

Two straight falls

Alf Dolding bt. St. Jean

Dolding won the second and third falls

---

**Date:** 29 January 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “of fair proportions”

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Charles Gustafson bt. Charles Taylor	Two straight falls
Alf Dolding bt. St. Jean	Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 5 February 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee), B. Russell (timekeeper)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a large crowd”

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Herman Mace bt. Alex Bowden	Two straight falls
Alf Dolding bt. Ogilvie	Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 13 February 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “fair crowd”

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Herman Mace bt. Dave Campbell	Two straight falls
William Keast bt. Ogilvie	Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 19 February 1908  
**Location:** Unknown  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

Herman Mace bt. Dan Simpson

Herman Mace bt. William Keast

Alf Dolding bt. Franklin

---

**Event Details**

Mace won the first and third falls. Simpson substituted for Keast following his injury

No falls. Keast unable to continue due to injury

Dolding won the first and third falls

---

**Date:** 26 February 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “fair house”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

Herman Mace bt. Dan Simpson

Herman Mace bt. Tom Cribb

Alf Dolding bt. Wakefield

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**Event Details**

Mace took one fall. Simpson substituted for Cribb following his injury

Mace took one fall. Cribb unable to continue due to injury

Two straight falls

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**Date:** 4 March 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

Herman Mace bt. Bobby Anderson

Alf Dolding bt. Warfield

---

**Event Details**

Two straight falls

Dolding secured two out of three falls

---

**Date:** 18 March 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Alex Bowden (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “fair crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Dan Simpson bt. Dan Stack

Two straight falls

Cole bt. Tait

Cole secured the second and third falls

Alf Dolding bt. Warfield

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 25 March 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “more than usually large”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herman Mace bt. Charles Dalager

Two straight falls

Robert Lauder bt. Alf Dolding

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 1 April 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** William Keast (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Dan Simpson bt. Ben Sielski

Both men secured one fall. Sielski was injured in the third period and unable to continue

Alf Dolding bt. Jack Cole

---

**Date:** 8 April 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** National Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Dan Simpson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “large number of spectators”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Pete Menard bt. Herman Mace

Menard won the first and third falls

Alf Dolding bt. Jack Cole

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 19 June 1908  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** L.A. Goulet  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “not large”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Pete Menard bt. George Clark

Two straight falls

William Keast bt. Alf Dolding

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 17 February 1909  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Bob Lewis (referee), H.O. Osmond, Jos. Theabault (timekeepers)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Knute Hoel bt. Charles Gustafson

One fall exhibition

Charles Gustafson bt. Pete Menard

Two straight falls

Knute Hoel bt. J. Scwist

Two straight falls

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**Date:** 17 March 1909  
**Location:** Dominion Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Tom Dickinson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$0.25 to \$1.00  
**Attendance:** Described as “a crowded houseful of spectators”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Hume Duval bt. Charles Gustafson

Gustafson won the first fall but conceded defeat due to injury in the second stanza and was not permitted to continue

Ernest Sundberg bt. Alf Dolding

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 3 April 1909  
**Location:** Grand Opera House  
**Promoter:** Wrestling syndicate  
**Official(s):** Dr. Mullally, Hume Duval (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Fred McLaglen bt. Knute Hoel

McLaglen won the first fall and Hoel was unable to continue for the second fall due to injury

Richmond bt. John Brown

Richmond won the first and third falls. This may have been boxer Billy Richmond

Ernest Sundberg bt. Brown

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 24 May 1909  
**Location:** Happyland  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Victor McLaglen bt. Hume Duval

Handicap bout. McLaglen succeeded in winning three falls within an hour

W. Tait vs. Harry Coleman

Boxing. No decision

Jack Cordon vs. Billy Richmond

Boxing. No decision

---

**Date:** 4 June 1909  
**Location:** Happyland  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Hume Duval (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

Victor McLaglen bt. eight football payers

**Event Details**

Handicap match. McLaglen agreed to throw eight football players in one hour. Among the players was Edwin Quist (sometimes spelled Qwist)

---

**Date:** 8 June 1909  
**Location:** Grand Opera House  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Casper Franklin (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as "half empty"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

Charles Gustafson bt. Edwin Quist

Hume Duval bt. Charles Gustafson

**Event Details**

One fall

Duval won the first fall and Gustafson quit in the second stanza

Boxing and wrestling preliminaries

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**Date:** 16 July 1909  
**Location:** Happyland  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

Billy Redmond bt. Billy Munroe

**Event Details**

Redmond won the second and third falls

---

**Date:** 26 November 1909  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker  
**Official(s):** Dr. Mullally (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50, \$0.25  
**Attendance:** Described as "a large audience"

<b>Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)</b>	<b>Event Details</b>
Charles Gustafson bt. George LePage	Gustafson won the first and third falls
H. Cork bt. Stewart Logan	Two straight falls
Ernest Sundberg bt. P. Margaulssen	Three straight falls
Dunbar vs. Ward	Boxing
Frank Ford dr. Joe Hughes	Boxing
J. Ingram bt. Billy Richmond	Boxing. Richmond unable to finish bout due to injury

---

**Date:** 16 December 1909  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker  
**Official(s):** Larry Piper (referee, accouncer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50, \$0.25  
**Attendance:** Unknown

<b>Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)</b>	<b>Event Details</b>
Charles Gustafson bt. Ferdinand Cook	Two straight falls
Ernest Sundberg bt. Bud Bert	One fall
Connelly vs. Franklin	Boxing
Dunbar vs. Clark	Boxing

---

**Date:** 8 February 1910  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker  
**Official(s):** Larry Piper (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as “a fair-sized house”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Ernest Sundberg bt. Artie Edmunds	Two straight falls
John Halfidsson bt. Stewart Logan	Halfidsson won the second and third falls
Billy Richmond bt. Harry Coles	Boxing. Knockout
Billy Nutt vs. George O’Malley	Boxing. No decision

---

**Date:** 9 February 1910  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker  
**Official(s):** Carl Miller, Larry Piper (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as “a big crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Dick Shepperd	Two straight falls
Billy Nutt bt. George O’Malley	Boxing. O’Malley unable to finish the bout due to injury
Charlie Conkle vs. Frank Carrol	Boxing
Billy Richmond vs. Billy Dean	Boxing

---

**Date:** 11 February 1910  
**Location:** Von’s Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Charles Gustafson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charlie Conkle bt. Stanley Sielski	Handicap. Conkle succeeded in throwing Sielski three times in an hour
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**Date:** 28 February 1910  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker  
**Official(s):** Larry Piper (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as “the biggest crowd that ever saw a wrestling match in Winnipeg”

**Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)                      Event Details**

Charles Gustafson dr. Charlie Conkle	No falls
Ernie Sundberg bt. Bud Bert	Two straight falls
George Clark vs. Billy Robinson	Boxing
George Clark vs. Billy Richmond	Boxing

---

**Date:** 10 March 1910  
**Location:** Grand Opera House  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** George LePage  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50, \$0.25  
**Attendance:** Described as “a big attraction”

**Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)                      Event Details**

Charles Conkle bt. Ole Samson	Handicap match. Samson agreed to throw Conkle three times in an hour but both men gained one fall
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**Date:** 21 March 1910  
**Location:** Grand Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Thomas Dickinson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as a “large crowd”

**Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)                      Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Charles Conkle	Disqualification. Match awarded to Gustafson during first fall
Stewart Logan bt. an unknown Swede	Logan secured the second and third falls
Billy Richmond dr. Frank Carrol	Boxing

---

**Date:** 11 April 1910  
**Location:** Grand Opera House  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Larry Piper (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Approximately 300

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Ole Samson bt. Charles Gustafson	Two straight falls
George Clark vs. W. Knott	Boxing
Pete Menard bt. Stewart Logan	Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 27 April 1910  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Winnipeg Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Pete Menard, W.J. Coleman (referees), H.E. Burgess (timekeeper)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as "poor"

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Max Schultz bt. Ole Samson	Two straight falls
Billy Nutt bt. Beaulieu	Boxing. Decision
Oze Dunbar bt. Billy Richmond	Boxing. Richmond conceded defeat in the third round
Pete Menard bt. Clarke	One fall

---

**Date:** 2 May 1910  
**Location:** Arena Rink  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Charles Gustafson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as "quite a large crowd"

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Eugene Tremblay bt. Thomas Dickinson	Handicap match. Tremblay succeeded in throwing Dickinson three times in an hour

One boxing and one wrestling preliminary

---

**Date:** 6 May 1910  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Duncan McMillan (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** 1,500

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Eugene Tremblay bt Walter Miller

Handicap bout. Miller failed to throw Tremblay in one hour

Jack Murphy vs. Jimmy Burns

Boxing

Billy Richmond vs. Kid Beaulieu

Boxing

---

**Date:** 18 May 1910  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Dan McMillan  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** 150

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson dr. Alex Stewart

Fifteen minute wrestling exhibition held after George LePage's refusal to meet Gustafson on account of the small audience

George Clarke bt. Billy Richmond

Clarke won the second and third falls

---

**Date:** 3 June 1910  
**Location:** Dominion Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

John Willys bt. Ole Samson

Handicap bout. Samson failed to throw Willys in fifteen minutes

---

**Date:** 25 June 1910  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker  
**Official(s):** Charles Gustafson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

B.F. Roller bt. Pat Connelly

Two straight falls

Max Schultz bt. Edwin Quist

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 8 July 1910  
**Location:** Arena Rink  
**Promoter:** Red River Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** McMillan, Charles Gustafson (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Approximately 600

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Herrick dr. Kid Ashe

Boxing

Max Schultz dr. Johnson

No falls

---

**Date:** 20 July 1910  
**Location:** Arena Rink  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Tony Caponi, Charles Gustafson (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Approximately 800

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Billy Nutt dr. Johnny King

Boxing

Pat Connelly bt. Max Schultz

One fall

---

**Date:** 7 November 1910  
**Location:** Queen's Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Ernest Sundberg (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as "a large crowd"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

T. Cook bt. W. Vic

Handicap bout. Vic agreed to throw Cook twice in an hour but secured no falls

---



**Date:** 21 November 1910  
**Location:** Selkirk Hall  
**Promoter:** Charles Gustafson  
**Official(s):** F. Mitchell (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (reserved), \$1.00, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as a "fair crowd"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Ernest Sundberg bt. Alex Stewart

Handicap match. Stewart agreed to throw Sundberg three times in an hour but scored no falls

John Halfidsson bt. A. Tredgoed

Two straight falls

Charles Gustafson dr. Alexander Logan

Exhibition. No falls

---

**Date:** 19 December 1910  
**Location:** Trades Hall  
**Promoter:** Charles Gustafson  
**Official(s):** Ernest Sundberg (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Clarence Eklund bt. Tom Johnstone

Eklund won the second and third falls

John Halfidsson bt. Jack Winart

Two straight falls

John Logan vs. Young Smith

Boxing

---

**Date:** 30 January 1911  
**Location:** Queen's Theatre  
**Promoter:** Colonial Athletic Association  
**Official(s):** Alex Stewart (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50, \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50, \$0.25  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Clarence Eklund bt. Charles Gustafson

Two straight falls

Ernest Sundberg dr. John Halfidsson

Fifteen minute exhibition. No falls

John Halfidsson bt. Steddinger

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 7 February 1911  
**Location:** Queen's Theatre  
**Promoter:** Colonial Athletic Association  
**Official(s):** Ernest Sundberg (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50, \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

John Gordon bt. Clarence Eklund	Handicap bout. Gordon secured two falls in ninety minutes
Pete Menard dr. John Halfiddson	No falls
Kid Atill dr. Harry Barnes	Boxing

---

**Date:** 9 March 1911  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker  
**Official(s):** W. Vic, Jack Ryan (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$3.00 (stage), \$2.00 and \$1.50 (orchestra), \$1.50 (balcony circle) \$1.00 (balcony), \$0.75 (gallery)  
**Attendance:** Described as "just as many wrestling fans as could be crowded into the Walker theatre"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Frank Gotch bt. George Eberg	Two straight falls
Ernest Sundberg bt. Charles Dalager	Dalager was injured unable to continue
Moving pictures	Footage from Frank Gotch versus George Hackenschmidt
Johnny Hayes vs. Young Peters	Boxing
Franklin vs. Busse	Boxing
Page bt. White	Boxing

---

**Date:** 10 July 1911  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** John Smith (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as "a mere handful of fans"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson dr. Walter Miller	Miller secured the first fall and Gustafson the second. Miller was unable to continue in the third and agreed to a draw.
Logan vs. Young Peters	Boxing
Alex Stewart bt. Clarke	One fall
John Halfidsson bt. Jim Nesbitt	Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 22 December 1911  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker  
**Official(s):** R. Sutherland (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Unknown

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Charles Gustafson dr. Otto Suter	No falls
John Halfidsson bt. George Clarke	Two straight falls
Kid Logan vs. Young Fitz	Boxing

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**Date:** 16 February 1912  
**Location:** Empress Theatre  
**Promoter:** Charles Gustafson  
**Official(s):** R. Sutherland, Young O'Brien (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside, boxes), \$1.00 (lower floor), \$0.75 and \$0.50 (balcony)  
**Attendance:** Described as "every seat being taken"

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Charles Gustafson bt. Ben Sielski	Handicap bout. Gustafson was to throw Sielski three times in an hour. Sielski quit during the third period
Ernest Sundberg bt. Louis Barney	Two straight falls
Mulhall bt. Brown	Boxing

---

**Date:** 15 March 1912  
**Location:** Grand Opera House  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$0.50 to \$2.00  
**Attendance:** Unknown

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Alex Munro bt. Murdoch Graham	One fall. Graham refused to continue in the second period

---

**Date:** 5 April 1912  
**Location:** Empress Theatre  
**Promoter:** Charles Gustafson  
**Official(s):** Charles Dalager (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)                      Event Details**

Ernest Sundberg dr. Alex Stewart                      No falls

Young O'Brien bt. Dave Nichol                      Boxing

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**Date:** 24 April 1912  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker  
**Official(s):** Charles Gustafson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.50 (stage) \$2.00, \$1.50, \$1.00, \$0.75  
**Attendance:** Approximately 1,000

**Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)                      Event Details**

Stanislaus Zbyszko bt. Paul Sigfried                      Two straight falls

Young O'Brien vs. Young Mulhall                      Boxing

Chuck Skelly vs. Thorburn                      Boxing

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**Date:** 23 May 1912  
**Location:** Empress Theatre  
**Promoter:** Tom Russell  
**Official(s):** Charles Dalager (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (boxes and ringside), \$1.00 (lower floor), \$0.75 (balcony), \$0.50 (gallery)  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)                      Event Details**

Alex Stewart bt. Ernest Sundberg                      Stewart won the first and third falls

---

**Date:** 14 January 1913  
**Location:** Queen's Theatre  
**Promoter:** Charles Dalager  
**Official(s):** Ernest Barschel, Ernest Sundberg, Billy Bowman (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Alex Stewart dr. Bert Simmons

Each man secured one fall and the referee declared the bout a draw

Young Attell bt. Kid Burns

Boxing

Casper Franklin dr. Young Fitz

Boxing

Billy Marsh bt Billy Goodman

Two straight falls

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**Date:** 3 February 1913  
**Location:** Queen's Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Charles Gustafson, Charles Dalager (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a "fair sized house"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Clarence Eklund bt. Ernest Barschel

Handicap bout. Eklund agreed to throw Barschel three times in an hour. He obtained two falls and Barschel declined to continue during the third period

Ben Sielski bt. Young Zbyszko

Sielski secured the second and third falls. This Zbyszko was not one of the well-known brothers of the same surname

Young Abe Attell bt. Bronson

Boxing

Young Goo[?] bt. Americus

Two straight falls. This Americus was not the well-known American grappler, Gus Schoenlein

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**Date:** 16 April 1913  
**Location:** Grand Opera House  
**Promoter:** Charles Gustafson  
**Official(s):** Charles Gustafson (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Unknown

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Jack Taylor bt. Chris Person	Two straight falls
Ben Sielski bt. Carl Miller	One fall
Bert Weatherhead bt Cyclone Williams	Boxing
Syd Knott vs. Spider Spencer	Boxing

---

**Date:** 1 December 1913  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker, Walter Deering  
**Official(s):** Jack Forbes (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.50 (ringside), \$2.00, \$1.50, \$1.00, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as "crowded"

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Walter Miller bt. Eugene Tremblay	Two straight falls
Alex Stewart bt. Rosario Duranleau	Two straight falls
Muff Bronson bt. Kid Smith	Boxing
William Mckenzie bt. Curley Hume	Boxing

---

**Date:** 15 December 1913  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker, Walter Deering  
**Official(s):** Jack Forbes (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.50 (ringside), \$2.00, \$1.50, \$1.00, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as a "large crowd"

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Walter Miller bt. Eugene Tremblay	Two straight falls
Eddie Marcoo dr. Young Morris	Boxing

---

**Date:** 3 February 1914  
**Location:** Coliseum  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Charles Dalager (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50, \$1.00, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** 600 to 700

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Walter Miller bt. Otto Suter

Two straight falls

Alex Stewart bt. Rosario Duranleau

Two straight falls

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**Date:** 3 March 1914  
**Location:** Grand Opera House  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Iron Man Clarke  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00 (ringside), \$0.75, \$0.50, \$0.25  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Alex Stewart bt. Jack Forbes

Stewart secured one fall and Forbes quit during the second period due to injury

Noble bt. Young Americus

Two straight falls

Billy Marsh bt. Jimmy Nesbitt

One fall

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**Date:** 11 May 1914  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Jack Forbes (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00 to \$3.00  
**Attendance:** Described as "small"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Wladek Zbyszko bt. Joe Collon

Two straight falls

Kid Brien vs. Billy Mackenzie

Boxing

Ernest Barschel dr. Ben Sielski

No falls

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**Date:** 25 November 1914  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker, Walter Deering  
**Official(s):** Alex Stewart  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00 (orchestra), \$0.75 (balcony circle), \$0.50 (balcony), \$0.25 (gallery)  
**Attendance:** 1,600

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Charles Cutler	Cutler gained the first fall but was disqualified during the second period
Mike Mulhall dr. Reynolds	Boxing
Iron Man Clarke vs. Frank Bryan	Boxing
Abe Mantell vs. Joe Brown	Boxing

---

**Date:** 1 February 1915  
**Location:** Walker Theatre  
**Promoter:** C.P. Walker, Walter Deering  
**Official(s):** R. Lanham, Bun Foley (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00 (orchestra), \$0.75 (balcony circle), \$0.50 (balcony), \$0.25 (gallery)  
**Attendance:** Described as a "big crowd"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jean Paradis bt. Alex Stewart	Two straight falls
Clarence English vs. Tom Mulhall	Boxing
Glima wrestling	Thirteen bouts.

---

**Date:** 18 March 1915  
**Location:** Queen's Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Bun Foley, Alex Stewart, Charles Gustafson (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Small

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Patsy Bachant bt. Jack Davis	One fall
Kid Ross bt. Young Wall	
Mulhall bt. Couch	Boxing
McKenzie bt. Reynolds	Boxing
Muff Bronson bt. Steve Domino	Boxing

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**Date:** 31 May 1915  
**Location:** Coliseum  
**Promoter:** Josselyn  
**Official(s):** George Walker (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50, \$0.35  
**Attendance:** Modest

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Walter Miller dr. Joe Carr

No falls

Muff Bronson bt. Edwards

Boxing

Kid Young bt. Scotty Bell

Boxing. Decision

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**Date:** 25 March 1920  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Charles Gustafson  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50, \$1.00  
**Attendance:** Described as "somewhat small"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Tom Johnstone bt. Charles Gustafson

Johnstone took the second and third falls

Johnny White vs. Johnny Armstrong

Boxing

Billy Groffs vs. Young Josephs

Boxing

Herb Stone bt. Young Thomas

Boxing

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**Date:** 6 August 1920  
**Location:** River Park Baseball Grounds  
**Promoter:** Charles Moll, Charles E. Smith  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman (referee), J.W. Harrison (timekeeper), Joe Fahey (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.20 (central grand stand), \$1.10 (general admission)  
**Attendance:** 2,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Tom Johnstone dr. John Albrecht

Both men secured one fall

John Bradley bt. Frank Cross

Two straight falls

John Payne bt. Louie Ketchall

Two out of three falls

Donald White vs. Bill Connor

Boxing

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**Date:** 17 August 1920  
**Location:** River Park  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Leo Alexander bt. Frank Montour

Alexander won the second and third falls

Young Joe bt.. Kid Ewing

Boxing

Ted Newman vs. I. Dowdie

Boxing

Young Edgar vs. Kid Williams

Boxing

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**Date:** 6 October 1920  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00, \$1.50, \$1.00  
**Attendance:** Described as "a small crowd"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Tom Johnstone bt. Carl Peters

Straight falls

A. Bradley bt. Frank Frost

One fall

Kid Kliene vs. Billy Kaye

Boxing

Don White dr. Billy Carona

Boxing

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**Date:** 27 October 1920  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Winnipeg Attractions Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman (referee), Joe Fahey (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$3.00, \$2.00, \$1.50, \$1.00  
**Attendance:** 2,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Tom Johnstone bt. Charles Olson

Two straight falls

Billy McKenzie dr. Kid Whitey

Boxing

Freddy Dundee bt. Young Josephs

Boxing

Mick Durrant bt. Tiger Davis

Boxing

Johnny Webb dr. Wally Kaye

Boxing

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**Date:** 8 December 1920  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Winnipeg Attractions Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman (referee), Joe Fahey (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$3.00, \$2.00, \$1.50, \$1.00  
**Attendance:** Described as a “large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

John Albrecht bt. Tom Johnstone	Albrecht took the second and third falls
Dandy Dillon bt. Percy Buzza	Boxing
Dickey Buck bt. Barney McGinnis	Boxing
Young Carrier bt. Charles Lexier	Boxing

---

**Date:** 27 January 1921  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Winnipeg Attractions Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Nowman (referee), Joe Fahey (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “small crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Olson dr. Cal Farley	No falls
Percy Buzza bt. Frank Gilman	Boxing
Nate Rippon bt. Dickie Buck	Boxing

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**Date:** 24 June 1921  
**Location:** Happyland  
**Promoter:** Spring Jubilee Shows  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Tom Johnstone bt. Tom Marvin	One fall. Staged as a carnival attraction. Marvin was a carnival wrestler with Spring Jubilee Shows
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**Date:** 15 March 1922  
**Location:** Ukrainian Hall  
**Promoter:** Ukrainian Athletic Association  
**Official(s):** Sid Sarson, Tom Johnstone (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “big crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Joe Troy vs. James Acheson	Boxing
Stanley Zaje bt. Mike Gasch	Zaje won the first and third falls
Mike Phillips bt. Mike Bilinsky	Boxing
Steve Nyduick bt. Mick Gasch	Boxing
Dave Adleman bt. Walter Fry	Boxing

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**Date:** 5 May 1922  
**Location:** Dominion Theatre  
**Promoter:** Benny Travers, International Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.20, \$1.10, \$0.85  
**Attendance:** Described as a “fair crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Leo L’Heureux dr. Charles Gustafson	No falls
Seaman Smart dr. Benny Franks	Boxing
Johnny Gardiner bt. Jack Reid	Boxing
Johnny Leclair bt. Pete Gaudea	Boxing
Mike Cherion bt. Desire Saltel	Boxing

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**Date:** 1 August 1922  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Stook (referee), Sam Poons (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$3.00, \$2.00, \$1.00 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 600, described as “a small crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Jatrinda Gobar	Taylor won the first and third falls
Rogers bt. Leo L’Heureux	Handicap bout. L’Heureux failed to throw Rogers in fifteen minutes

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**Date:** 19 October 1922  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$3.30, \$2.20, \$1.10  
**Attendance:** Close to 3,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor dr. Stanislaus Zbyszko	Zbyszko won the first fall, Taylor the second
Young Stone vs. Matt McArthur	Boxing
Young Gotch bt. Mike Polinsky	One fall. Polinsky was likely Mike Bilinsky
Sid Kelly dr. Dave Adilman	Boxing
Kid Perry vs. Young Russell	Boxing

---

**Date:** 16 November 1922  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), J.W. Harris and Arthur Morrison (timekeepers)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$3.30, \$2.20, \$1.10  
**Attendance:** Approximately 2,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Henry Ordemann	Two straight falls
Dick Smith bt. Jack Dennisey	Boxing
Young Stone bt. Joe Brown	Boxing
Mike Dubas bt. Mike Bilinsky	Handicap bout. Bilinsky failed to throw Dubas in fifteen minutes
Fred Dundee bt. Jack Reid (Reed)	Boxing

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**Date:** 15 December 1922  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Alex Stewart (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75, \$2.25, \$1.10  
**Attendance:** 2,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. John Freberg	Taylor won the first and third falls
Billy Groff bt. Frank Beenham	Boxing
Young Lavoie bt. Joe Brown	Boxing
Young Stone bt. Mike Cherion	Boxing

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**Date:** 19 January 1923  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O’Conner (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75 (ringside and box), \$2.25 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** Described as “a large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Yussif Hussane	Straight falls
Billy Hodgins dr. Jimmy Page	Boxing
Billy Groff bt. Joe Gans	Boxing
Jack Reed bt. Kid Perry	Boxing

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**Date:** 2 February 1923  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O’Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75 (ringside and box), \$2.25 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** Described as a “large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. John Freberg	Taylor won the second and third falls
Billy Groff dr. Fred Gregory	Boxing
Johnny Dillman bt, Kid Perry	Boxing
Jack Reed bt. Joe Beckett	Boxing
Ed McMaster dr. Fat Salter	Boxing

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**Date:** 3 April 1923  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Eddie Carsey, Alex Stewart (referees), Sam Poons (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75, \$2.25, \$1.25  
**Attendance:** 2,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Paul Martinson      Straight falls

Bill Hart dr. Ginger Carr      Boxing

Billy Britt bt. Dick Britton      Boxing

Steve Carpentier bt. Les Bannerman      Boxing

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**Date:** 18 April 1923  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Eddie Carsey, Alex Stewart (referee), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75 (ringside and box), \$2.25 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 3,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Yussif Hussane      Taylor won the first and third falls

Fred Saltel bt. Joey Dundee      Boxing

Mike Bilinsky bt. Fat Salter      Mixed bout. Boxer Salter versus wrestler Bilinsky

Jack Reed bt. Kid Perry      Boxing

Ginger Carr dr. Frank Klady      Boxing

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**Date:** 18 May 1923  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Eddie Carsey, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75 (ringside and box), \$2.25 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 3,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Taro Miyake

Mixed bout. The first fall was conducted according to jiu-jitsu rules and Miyake won the fall on points. Taylor won the second and third falls at catch-as-catch-can

Ginger Carr vs. Ralph Klady

Boxing. Staged between falls in the main event

Fat Salter vs. Wild Irish

Boxing

Danny LeClair bt. Mike Cherion

Boxing

Charlie Watanabe dr. Kid Perry

Mixed bout, jiu-jitsuka Watanabe versus boxer Perry

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**Date:** 6 June 1923  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75 (ringside and box), \$2.25 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 1,500

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Emil Maupas

Two straight falls

Red Carr dr. Ralph Blakey

Boxing. Staged between falls in the main event

Mike Bilinsky bt. Kid Whittaker

Mixed bout, wrestler Bilinsky versus boxer Whittaker

Dave Perry vs. Charlie Watanabe

Mixed bout, jiu-jitsuka Watanabe versus boxer Perry

Mike Cherion bt. Jack Reed

Boxing

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**Date:** 15 June 1923  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Eddie Carsey, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75 (ringside and box), \$2.25 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 1,500

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Taro Miyake	Jiu-jitsu match
Mike O'Connor bt. Mike Bilinsky	Boxing
Dave Perry bt. Jack Meade	Boxing
Mike Cherion bt. Charlie Josephs	Boxing

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**Date:** 17 July 1923  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75 (ringside), \$2.25 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 4,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Wladek Zbyszko	Taylor won the first fall, Zbyszko the second. Zbyszko was unable to continue due to injury during the third stanza
Jerry Saltel vs. Dave Perry	Boxing
Jack Reed bt. Mike Cherion	Boxing
Pepper Klady bt. John Pollack	Boxing

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**Date:** 21 August 1923  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), John Laird (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75 (ringside), \$2.25, \$1.25  
**Attendance:** Described as "hardly up to expectations"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. John Freberg	Taylor won the first and third falls
Joe Brown bt. Mike Cherion	Boxing
Patsy Pollick bt. Robby Ruff	Boxing
Young White dr. Pepper Klady	Boxing

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**Date:** 18 September 1923  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75 (ringside), \$2.25 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 3,000

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Jack Taylor bt. Frank Simmons	Two straight falls
Sid Marks bt. Kid Alberts	Boxing
Joe Page bt. Jole Cook	Boxing
Joe Semenick vs. Joe Farako	Boxing
Mike Cherion bt. Joe Brown	Boxing

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**Date:** 18 October 1923  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Grand Army of United Veterans  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75 (ringside), \$2.25 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** Described as a "small" audience

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Jack Taylor bt. Tom Johnstone	Two straight falls
Mike O'Conner bt. Art Allen	Boxing
Joe Brown bt. Mike Cherion	Boxing
Bill Bennett bt. Young Wiffin	Boxing
Joe Semenick vs. Joe Faraco	No falls
Young Pollock vs. Steve Gotch	Boxing

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**Date:** 5 November 1923  
**Location:** Amphitheatre Rink  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Alex Stewart (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75, \$2.25, \$1.25  
**Attendance:** Almost 4,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Wladek Zbyszko	Zbyszko won the first fall, Taylor the second and third
Herb Stone bt. Mike Cherion	Boxing
Jack Reed bt. Danny Cliff	Boxing
Pepper Klady vs. Ginger Carr	Boxing
Young Whiffen bt. Billy Bennett	Boxing

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**Date:** 1 January 1924  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.25, \$1.25  
**Attendance:** More than 2,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Reginald Siki	Two straight falls
Leo L'Heureux bt. Frank Saxon	One fall
Joe Holland vs. Seaman Smart	Boxing
Danny LeClair bt. Herb Stone	Boxing
Mike Cherion vs. Dave Perry	Boxing

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**Date:** 14 March 1924  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Eddie Carsey, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75, \$2.25, \$1.25  
**Attendance:** 3,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Tommy Gibbons bt. Jack Moore	Boxing
Jack Taylor bt. Herman Miller	One fall
Herb Stone bt. Mike Cherion	Boxing
Joe Holland bt. Jack Reed	Boxing
Joe Brown bt. Fred Hicks	Boxing

---

**Date:** 25 April 1924  
**Location:** One Big Union Hall  
**Promoter:** One Big Union Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** 600

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)      **Event Details**

Rube Pilbeam vs. Phil Orestes	Boxing
Jack Taylor vs. Leo L'Heureux	No falls
Gordon Broadhurst vs. Burrell Jones	Boxing
Danny LeClair vs. Mike Cherion	Boxing
Saltel Brothers	Boxing

---

**Date:** 8 May 1924  
**Location:** Pantages Theatre  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Eddie Carsey, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.25, \$1.75, \$1.25  
**Attendance:** 2,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Dick Daviscourt bt. Jack Taylor	Daviscourt took the second and third falls
Joe Holland bt. Ernie Scott	Boxing
Patsy Pollock bt. Pepper Klady	Boxing
Leo l'Heureux bt. Paul Lemieux	One fall

---

**Date:** 24 May 1924  
**Location:** Amphitheatre Rink  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Jimmy Freeman, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$5.75 (ringside), \$3.50 (reserved), \$2.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 3,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Ed "Strangler" Lewis bt. Dick Daviscourt	Lewis won the second and third falls
Jack Taylor bt. Howard Cantonwine	One fall
Joe Holland bt. Joe Page	Boxing
Leo L'Heureux bt. Buck Olson	One fall

---

**Date:** 17 June 1924  
**Location:** Amphitheatre Rink  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Jim Freeman, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$3.25, \$2.25, \$1.25  
**Attendance:** 1,500

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Dick Daviscourt bt. Jack Taylor	Daviscourt won the first and third falls
Henry Ordemann dr. Leo L'Heureux	One fall each
Red Carr bt. Patsy Pollock	Boxing

---

**Date:** 3 December 1924  
**Location:** Amphitheatre Rink  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.75, \$2.25, \$1.25  
**Attendance:** 2,000

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Ed "Strangler" Lewis bt. Jatrinda Gobar	Two straight falls
Percy Buzza bt. Dave Perry	Boxing
Dixie Kid dr. Fred Gregory	Boxing
Patsy Pollock bt. Mike Cherion	Boxing

---

**Date:** 12 March 1925  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Eddie Carsey, Alex Stewart (referees), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.25, \$1.75, \$1.25  
**Attendance:** 2,500

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Stanislaus Zbyszko bt. Tom Draak	Two straight falls
Leo L'Heureux bt. Scotty McDougall	One fall
Joe Darbell bt. John Engler	Boxing
Dixie Kid bt. Joe Lauder	Boxing

---

**Date:** 15 October 1925  
**Location:** Auditorium  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), D'arcy McIlroy (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.25 (ringside), \$1.75 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 1,000

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Joe Stecher bt. Leo L'Herureux	Two straight falls
Patsy Pollock bt. Robby Ruff	Boxing
Dave Perry bt. Mickey Logan	Boxing

---

**Date:** 18 January 1926  
**Location:** Alhambra Theatre  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Billy Bowman, Alex Stewart (referees), D'arcy McIlroy (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.50 (ringside), \$1.75 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 2,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Joe Stecher bt. Dick Daviscourt

Stecher won the first and third falls

Jack Kempton bt. Johnny Engler

Boxing

---

**Date:** 9 April 1926  
**Location:** Amphitheatre Rink  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Alex Stewart (referee), Mike O'Connor (announcer)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.50 (ringside and boxes), \$1.75 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** 3,000

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Stanislaus Zbyszko bt. Ivan Poddubny

Zbyszko won the second and third falls

Leo L'Heureux bt. Tom Jenkins

Two straight falls

Mike Bilinsky bt. Jack Croft

One fall

---

**Date:** 24 May 1926  
**Location:** Amphitheatre Rink  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Alex Stewart (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.25, \$1.75 (reserved), \$1.25 (rush)  
**Attendance:** Described as a "ridiculously small house"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Stanislaus Zbyszko bt. Dick Daviscourt

Zbyszko won the first and third falls

Leo L'Heureux dr. Frank Judson

One fall each

Tom Johnstone bt. Vic Jussack

One fall

---

**Date:** 3 July 1928  
**Location:** Amphitheatre Rink  
**Promoter:** Empire Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** Alex Stewart (referee), A. Bradshaw (announcer), A.R. Morrison, J. Coates Brown (timekeepers)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50 (reserved), \$1.00 (rush)  
**Attendance:** Described as a "small crowd"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Taylor bt. Wayne Munn

Taylor won the second and third falls

Archie McLaughlin dr. Mike Bilinsky

One fall each

Vic Jussack bt. Bill Smith

Two straight falls

**Date:** 1 March 1929  
**Location:** Ukrainian Labour Temple  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50, \$0.25  
**Attendance:** 1,200

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Mike Bilinsky bt. Oscar Lewich

Two out of three falls

Archie McLaughlin bt. Rocky Brooks

Two straight falls

Mike Kukurziak bt. Scotty Lawson

Two out of three falls

Kid Stuzie bt. Young Wilson

Boxing

Note: This list does not represent a complete compendium of all professional wrestling cards staged in Winnipeg.

All bouts contested according to catch-as-catch-can rules unless otherwise specified

**Terms:**

bt. = defeated

dr.= drew

vs.= versus



**Appendix II**  
**Manitoba Amateur Wrestling Champions 1908-1930**

1908

**Date(s):** 27, 28 November  
**Location:** YMCA  
**Officials:** Thomas Dickinson (referee); R.W. Bonnifield, J. Williams (judges); Ed W. DuVal, J.D. Pratt, Major Macdonell (timekeepers); J.D. Ormaby, F.S. Filmer (weight inspectors); H.R. Hadcock (announcer)

Bantamweight (105 pounds)	J. Franklin
Featherweight (115 pounds)	R. Turner
Special Class (125 pounds)	Jack Macdonald
Lightweight (135 pounds)	Christie Akins (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Welterweight (145 pounds)	P. H. Dilts (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Middleweight (158 pounds)	Les Moir
Heavyweight (over 158 pounds)	A.J. Mitchell (Winnipeg, YMCA)

1909

**Date(s):** 22, 23 April  
**Location:** YMCA  
**Officials:** Thomas Dickinson (referee); Dr. Jones, Dr. Mullally (judges); J.D. Pratt, F.F. Carruthers, Thomas Boyd (timekeepers); F. Filmer (weight inspector)

Featherweight (115 pounds)	P. Kennedy (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Special Class (125 pounds)	Jack Macdonald (Winnipeg, Rowing Club, YMCA)
Lightweight (135 pounds)	Christie Akins (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Welterweight (145 pounds)	A.J. Mitchell (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Middleweight (158 pounds)	George Akins (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Heavyweight (over 158 pounds)	George Akins (Winnipeg, YMCA)

NOTE: No Manitoba Championships held in 1909. This tournament was the Western Canadian Championships

1910

**Date(s):** 27, 28 January  
**Location:** YMCA  
**Officials:** Thomas Dickinson (referee); Major Macdonell, Thomas Boyd (timekeepers)

Bantamweight (105 pounds)	Jack Deves (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Featherweight (115 pounds)	Jack Macdonald (Winnipeg)
Special Class (125 pounds)	C. Boulton (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Lightweight (135 pounds)	R.M. Hillis (Winnipeg)
Welterweight (145 pounds)	A.J. Mitchell (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Middleweight (158 pounds)	George Akins (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Heavyweight (over 158 pounds)	George Akins (Winnipeg, YMCA)

1911

**Date(s):** 17, 18 March  
**Location:** YMCA  
**Officials:** A.J. Mitchell (referee)

Bantamweight (115 pounds)	A. McIntosh (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Lightweight (125 Pounds)	J. Macdonald (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Special Class (135 pounds)	R.L. (Bert) McAdam (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Welterweight (145 pounds)	Christie Akins (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Middleweight (153 pounds)	George Akins (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Heavyweight (over 153 pounds)	L.G. Ore (Winnipeg, YMCA)

1914

**Date(s):** 26, 27 May  
**Location:** Drill Hall  
**Officials:** Unknown

Bantamweight (115 pounds)	Patsy Picciano (Winnipeg, Boys Club)
Special Class (125 pounds)	J. Cordy (Winnipeg, Boy's Club)
Lightweight (135 pounds)	J. Holmes (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Welterweight (145 pounds)	J. McKinnon (Winnipeg, Boy's Club)
Middleweight (158 pounds)	George Akins (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Heavyweight (over 158 pounds)	E. Abrahamson (Winnipeg, Viking Athletic Club)

NOTE: The 1914 National Championships were held in Winnipeg in lieu of the Provincial Championships

1921

**Date(s):** 22, 25 April  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Officials:** Sam Kennedy (referee); J. Coates Brown (timekeeper); A.E.H. Coe, Tim Ching (judges); A.R. Morrison (weight inspector); Joe Fahey (announcer)

Featherweight (115 pounds)	F. Runge (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Special Class (125 pounds)	A. Leveille (St. Boniface, International Athletic Club)
Lightweight (135 pounds)	I. Gislason (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Welterweight (145 pounds)	F. Carter (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Middleweight (158 pounds)	H. Dusessoye (St. Boniface, International Athletic Club)
Light-Heavyweight (175 pounds)	J.C. Rogers (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Heavyweight (over 175 pounds)	Leo L'Heureux (St. Pierre, Union Canadienne)

1922

**Date(s):** 3, 6 March  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Officials:** Sam Kennedy (referee); J.W. Finlay, Tim Ching (judges); J. Coates Brown, Thomas Boyd (timekeepers); Dr. W. Black (medical examiner); A.R. Morrison (weight inspector); Joe Fahey (announcer)

Featherweight (115 pounds)	S.C. Acheson (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Special Class (125 pounds)	A. Leveille (St. Boniface, International Athletic Club)
Lightweight (135 pounds)	Albert Choinard (St. Pierre, Union Canadienne)
Welterweight (145 pounds)	J. McKinnon (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Middleweight (158 pounds)	Jens Eliasson (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Heavyweight (over 175 pounds)	J.E. Johnson (Winnipeg, YMCA)

1923

**Date(s):** 2, 5 March  
**Location:** Board of Trade  
**Officials:** Sam Kennedy (referee); George Steffen, "Steppy" Fairman (judges); J. Coates Brown, J.F. Thorogood (timekeepers); Dr. W. Black, Dr. A.J. Douglas (medical examiners); R. Ridd, W. Asbury (weight inspectors); Mike O'Connor; Joe Fahey (announcers)

Featherweight (115 pounds)	W.E. Shane (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Lightweight (135 pounds)	Albert Choinard (St. Pierre, Union Canadienne)
Welterweight (145 pounds)	Jens Eliasson (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Middleweight (158 pounds)	J.A. Pelletier (St. Boniface, International Athletic Club)

1924

**Date(s):** 8, 9 April  
**Location:** Central Police Gymnasium  
**Officials:** Sam Kennedy (referee); Billy Bowman, Art Allen (judges); Joe Fahey (announcer)

Bantamweight	Frank Garrod (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Featherweight	I. Gislason (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Lightweight	W. Fray (Winnipeg, Pioneer Athletic Club)
Welterweight	Bill Hanburg (Winnipeg, Pioneer Athletic Club)
Middleweight	Andrew Borg (Winnipeg, Pioneer Athletic Club)
Light-Heavyweight	Joe Geoffrion (St. Jean)
Heavyweight	Joe Mulholland (Winnipeg, City Police Athletic Association)

1925

**Date(s):** 1, 8, 9 January  
**Location:** One Big Union Hall  
**Officials:** Sam Kennedy (referee); J. Coates Brown, Jack F. Thorogood (timekeepers); Danny McIlroy, Billy Bowman (judges); Joe Fahey (announcer)

Bantamweight	Mike Robinson (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Featherweight	R.Douglas Scott (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Lightweight	Harry Vernon (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Welterweight	Jack McLaughlin (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Middleweight	Andrew Borg (Winnipeg, One Big Union)
Light-Heavyweight	James Harvey Paddison (Winnipeg, City Police Athletic Association)

1926

**Date(s):** 5, 6 April  
**Location:** Alhambra Hall  
**Officials:** Alex Stewart (referee); Sam Kennedy, Christie Akins (judges); Joe Fahey (announcer)

Featherweight	Johnny Endelman (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Lightweight	A.G. Gislason (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Middleweight	J. McKinnon (Winnipeg, unattached)
Light-Heavyweight	B.B. Anderson (Winnipeg, One Big Union)
Heavyweight	Jack McLaughlin (Winnipeg, YMCA)

1927

**Date(s):** 21, 22 March  
**Location:** Central Police Gymnasium  
**Officials:** Sam Kennedy (referee); Christie Akins, J. Coates Brown (judges); Jack Thorogood (timekeeper); John Eccles (ring manager)

Featherweight	G. Stapleton (Winnipeg, Rotary Boy's Club)
Lightweight	Mark McDermott (Winnipeg, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery)
Welterweight	J. McKinnon (Winnipeg)
Light-Heavyweight	B. Anderson (Kenora)
Heavyweight	W.L. McIntyre (Winnipeg, City Police Athletic Association)

1928

**Date(s):** 4 May  
**Location:** Amphitheatre Rink  
**Officials:** Alex Stewart (referee); Joe Fahey (announcer)

Bantamweight	W.F. Ketcheson (Winnipeg, One Big Union)
Featherweight	Johnny Endelman (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Lightweight	Mark McDermott (Winnipeg, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery)
Welterweight	W. Pitman (Kenora)
Light-Heavyweight	B.B. Anderson (Kenora)
Heavyweight	W.L. McIntyre (Winnipeg, City Police Athletic Association)

1929

**Date(s):** 11, 12 April  
**Location:** Central Police Gymnasium  
**Officials:** Alex Stewart (referee); Christie Akins, Graham Currie (judges); Jack Thorogood (timekeeper); George McBeth (weight inspector); Joe Fahey (announcer)

Bantamweight	V. Clancy (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Featherweight	Johnny Endelman (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Lightweight	Melvin Dawson (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Welterweight	B. Johnson (Winnipeg, YMCA)
Middleweight	Stewart Sinclair (Winnipeg, City Police Athletic Association)
Light-Heavyweight	W.L. McIntyre (Winnipeg, City Police Athletic Association)
Heavyweight	W. Crossley (Winnipeg, YMCA)

1930

**Date(s):** 22, 23 April

**Location:** Playhouse Theatre

**Officials:** Tom Johnstone (referee), Sam Kennedy, Christie Akins (judges), John Thorogood (timekeeper), Joe Fahey (announcer), Hal Moulder (weight inspector), George McBeth (master of ceremonies)

Featherweight

W. Fletcher

Lightweight

Mark McDermott (Winnipeg, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery)

Welterweight

W. Miller

Light-Heavyweight

W.L. McIntyre (Winnipeg, City Police Athletic Association)

Heavyweight

J.H. Paddison (Winnipeg, City Police Athletic Association)

**Appendix III**  
**Manitoba Islendingadagurinn Glima Champions Before 1930**

1890

Glima cancelled on account of rain

1891

No record of wrestling

1892

No record of wrestling

1893

Wrestling cancelled due to the programme running late

1894

S. Johannson

1895

No wrestling held

1896

No wrestling held

1897

John Erickson (first)

E. Gislason (second)

1898

No wrestling held

Rival festival held 17 June

1899

Wrestling postponed due to the athletic program running late

1900

H. Martenson (first)

J. Peterson (second)

S. Stevenson (third)

1901

I. Isfield (first)

E. Davidson (second)

A. Isfield (third)

1902

Sigurd Baldwinson (first)

Paul S. Palsson (second)

Baldwin Jonsson (third)

1903

Kitill Sigurgeirson (first)

Helgi Marteinson (second)

S. Baldwinson (third)

Paul Magnusson (most skilful)

1904

E. Davidson (first)  
T.O. Sigurdson (second)  
John Davidson (third)  
K.S. Eyford (best glima)

1905

E. Davidson (first)  
Helgi Marteinson (second, most scientific wrestler)  
E. Abrahamson (third)

1906

S.D.B. Stephenson  
Halldor Mathusalemsson (most scientific wrestler)  
E. Abrahamsson (overcame greatest number of opponents)

1907

Halldor Mathusalemsson (first)  
Ketill Eyford (second)  
Sveinn Bjornsson (third)

1908

H. Mathusalemsson (first)  
Einar Abrahamsson (second)  
Sig Stefansson (third)  
NOTE: Matches were said to have been decided by wrestling skill rather than by falls

1909

Jon Arnason (first)  
J. Halfiddison (second)  
A. Johnson (third)

1910

Jon Arnasson (first)  
Einar Abrahamsson (second)  
Gisli Bemson (third)  
Sig Stephensen (fourth)

1911

V. Olason (first)  
J. Gilles (second)  
Agust Eyjolfsson (third)

1912

Sig Sigfusson (first)  
Vilhjalmur Petursson (second)  
Thorliefur Hansson (third)

1913

Gudmundur Stefansson (Belt of Honour)  
Einar Abrahamsson (second)

1914

Gudmundur Stefansson (Belt of Honour)  
Adalsteinn Johannsson (most graceful performance)  
Chris Oliver (most agile performance)

1915

J. Kristijansson (first)  
Gudmundur Sigurjonsson (second)  
B. Olaffson (third, best style of wrestling)

1916

Gudmundur Sigurjonsson (first)  
Ben Olafsson (second)

1917

E. Erlendsson (first)  
A. Siddell (second)

1918

Steindor Jakobson (gold medal)  
Adalsteinn Johannsson (silver medal)

1919

Benedikt Olafsson (first)  
Jens Eliasson (second)  
Unnsteinn Jakobson (third)  
Gudmundur Sigurjonsson (best style of wrestling)

1920

Glima cancelled on account of rain

1921

A.E. Thorgrimsson (first)  
Jens Eliasson (second)

1922

Jens Eliasson (belt)  
A.E. Thorgrimsson

1923

Karl Magunusson (Hanneson Belt)  
G.B. Gudmundsson (second)  
Jens Eliasson (third)

1924

Jens Eliasson (Hanneson Belt)  
Mr. Fabnis (second)  
B. Olafsson (third)  
N. Ottenson (best wrestling)

1925

Jens Eliasson (Hanneson Belt)  
O.J. Thorgilsson (second)  
Benedikt Olafsson (Jonas Palsson Cup)



1926

Chris Oliver (Hanneson Belt)  
B. Olafsson (Jonas Palsson Cup)  
K.J. Johnson

1927

Sigudur Thorsteinson (awarded the Hanneson Belt for first place and the Palsson Cup for most artistic execution)

1928

Bjorn Olafsson (Hanneson Belt)  
Benedikt Olafsson (Jonas Palsson Cup)

1929

Wrestling cancelled due to the programme running late

**Appendix IV**  
**Professional Wrestling Cards in Manitoba Communities Before 1930**

**Date:** 20 March 1908  
**Community:** Souris  
**Location:** Sowden Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “quite a large number”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herb Lee bt. Allan Murphy

Handicap match. Murphy agreed to throw Lee twice in thirty minutes but failed to secure a fall

---

**Date:** 1 April 1908  
**Community:** Souris  
**Location:** Sowden Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$0.50, \$0.25 (ladies)  
**Attendance:** Described as “a large number”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Allan Murphy bt. Charles Dalager

Murphy won the first and third falls

---

**Date:** 4 April 1908  
**Community:** Souris  
**Location:** Sowden Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Tom J. Isbister (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as a “large” audience

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Dalager dr. Allan Murphy

Handicap match. Murphy agreed to throw Dalager twice in thirty minutes and Dalager agreed to throw Murphy once in thirty minutes. Murphy secured one fall

---

**Date:** 12 June 1908  
**Community:** Souris  
**Location:** Sowden Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Tom J. Isbister (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a good crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herb Lee bt. Herman Mace

Lee secured one fall

---

**Date:** 6 October 1908  
**Community:** Souris  
**Location:** Sowden Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Fred Tamblyn (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Dalager bt. L. McMoir

Handicap match. McMoir was to throw Dalager three times in forty minutes and Dalager agreed to throw McMoir once in forty minutes. Dalager secured one fall

---

**Date:** 13 October 1908  
**Community:** Melita  
**Location:** Unknown  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Dalager bt. George McMurdo

Dalager secured one fall

---

**Date:** 23 October 1908  
**Community:** Souris  
**Location:** Sowden Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Tom J. Isbister (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Dan Simpson bt. Herb Lee

Simpson secured the first and third falls

---

**Date:** 26 October 1908  
**Community:** Souris  
**Location:** Sowden Hall  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a slight attendance”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Herb Lee bt. Dan Simpson

Simpson secured the first fall, Lee the second. Simpson was forced to concede defeat after the second fall due to injury

---

**Date:** 6 August 1910  
**Community:** Minnedosa  
**Location:** Unknown  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “large”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Pat Connelly bt. Max Schultz

Two straight falls

Johnny King dr. Jack Conners

Boxing

---

**Date:** 5 August 1914  
**Community:** Dauphin  
**Location:** Baseball park  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Jack Skelly (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Stacey bt. Jack Paul

One fall

---

**Date:** 15 December 1920  
**Community:** Melita  
**Location:** Melita Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (stage), \$1.50 (regular), \$1.00 (rush)  
**Attendance:** Described as “quite a large number”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. D.C. Braun

Charles Joseph vs. Freddie Dundee

Boxing

---

**Date:** 28 January 1921  
**Community:** Elie  
**Location:** Unknown  
**Promoter:** Elie Athletic Club  
**Official(s):** J.H. Chouquette (referee), F. Dutour (timekeeper)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a capacity house”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Louis Herbert bt. Dewey Roy

Herbert won two out of three falls

Dailie Roy bt. Tom Roy

Two out of three falls

Ernest Leveque

Exhibition of heavy bag punching

---

**Date:** 31 January 1921  
**Community:** Melita  
**Location:** Melita Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Jack Rebman

Gustafson secured the second and third falls

Boxing preliminary

---

**Date:** 2 February 1921  
**Community:** Melita  
**Location:** Melita Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Madsen

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 5 March 1921  
**Community:** Melita  
**Location:** Melita Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (stage), \$1.50 (front seats), \$1.00 (rush)  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)                      Event Details**

Charles Gustafson dr. Charles Olson                      No falls

Norris Higgins dr. Harold Edwards                      No falls

Mel Loucks dr. Slim Nelson                      Boxing

---

**Date:** 31 March 1921  
**Community:** Melita  
**Location:** Melita Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50 (reserved), \$1.00 (rush)  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)                      Event Details**

Charles Gustafson bt. Lorne C. Curtis                      Gustafson won the second and third falls

---

**Date:** 8 July 1921  
**Community:** Dauphin  
**Location:** Northern Manitoba Fair  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “the largest ever seen in Dauphin before” surrounding the stage with the grandstand “filled to its utmost capacity”

**Event Result (Main Event and Preliminaries)                      Event Details**

Tom Johnstone bt. J. Sanders                      Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 15 August 1923  
**Community:** Portage la Prairie  
**Location:** Arena Rink  
**Promoter:** George Thompson  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “very poor”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

Jack Taylor bt. Zeonski, Ernie Arthur, George Thompson

Pete Schotoski bt. Paul Ferman

**Event Details**

Handicap bout. Taylor defeated three men in one hour

Boxing

---

**Date:** 7 February 1925  
**Community:** Ashern  
**Location:** Unknown  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

Scotty McDougall bt. Jack Taylor

Homer Chase bt. Paul White

Billy Otto vs. Tom Jones

Hans Kettler vs. Edgar Hague

Tom Jones vs. W. Kidd

**Event Details**

Handicap bout. Jack Taylor failed to throw McDougall two times in an hour. No falls

Wrestling

Boxing

Boxing

Boxing

---

**Date:** 2 April 1925  
**Community:** Carman  
**Location:** Memorial Hall  
**Promoter:** Carman War Veterans  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a capacity house”

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
--	----------------------

B. Brown dr. G. Lewis	No falls
-----------------------	----------

E.J. Don Rowand vs. Chief Long Lance	Boxing
--------------------------------------	--------

P. McNamara vs. R. Greer	Boxing
--------------------------	--------

Fred Eby vs. Earl Chambers	Boxing
----------------------------	--------

J. Holtslag vs. A. Herman	Wrestling
---------------------------	-----------

---

**Date:** 7 March 1929  
**Community:** Portage La Prairie  
**Location:** Playhouse Theatre  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Unknown

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
--	----------------------

“Wild” Bill Cox bt. Dan O’Dowd	Boxing
--------------------------------	--------

Young Jack Dempsey bt. Tony McGovern	Boxing
--------------------------------------	--------

Drain bt. Bedford	Boxing
-------------------	--------

Young Strangler Lewis dr. Mesyton	Wrestling
-----------------------------------	-----------

Favell bt. Kenny	Boxing
------------------	--------

---

Note: This list does not represent a complete compendium of all professional wrestling cards staged outside of Brandon and Winnipeg.

All bouts contested according to catch-as-catch can rules unless otherwise specified

**Terms:**

bt. = defeated

dr.= drew

vs.= versus



**Appendix V**  
**Professional Wrestling Cards in Brandon Before 1930**

**Date:** 20 March 1894  
**Location:** Opera House  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Approximately 150

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

John Allen bt. E.W. Johnston

Best three out of five falls

---

**Date:** 10 May 1902  
**Location:** Opera House  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Chief of Police (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a couple of hundred”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Mouradoulah bt. Mont, “The U.S. Giant”

Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 25 November 1905  
**Location:** Unknown  
**Promoter:** M.C. Cameron  
**Official(s):** M.C. Cameron (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** Described as “a fairly good house”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Peter Larsen bt. James Theran

Handicap bout. Theran agreed to throw Larsen three times in thirty minutes. Theran secured two falls

Ben Rolf bt. Jack Ross

Boxing

James Connelly bt. James Gillis

Boxing

Fred Neville bt. F. Altkins

Boxing

Frank Lusk vs. Charles Lusk

Boxing

---

**Date:** 13 January 1906  
**Location:** Unknown  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Chief of Police (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** 300-400

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

James Theran bt. Peter Larsen

Three straight falls

---

**Date:** 31 January 1906  
**Location:** Unknown  
**Promoter:** Unknown  
**Official(s):** Matt McLeod (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** Unknown  
**Attendance:** 400-500

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Jack Downs bt. James Theran

Best three in five falls. Downs won the first, third and fourth falls

Kid Grainer dr. Kid Davis

Boxing

---

**Date:** 1 September 1920  
**Location:** Willis Theatre  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** G.R. Pickering (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Ernie Arthur bt. Young Gotch

Arthur won the first and third falls

McDonald bt. Delvette

Boxing

Perks bt. Webb

Boxing

McCrae bt. McCarthy

Boxing

---

**Date:** 3 November 1920  
**Location:** Willis Theatre  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** Sergeant Aldridge (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.00, \$0.75, \$0.50  
**Attendance:** Described as “a large crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Olson bt. Ernie Arthur

Arthur secured the first fall and Olson the second. Arthur was unable to continue during the second stanza due to injury

Elzer Lavigne bt. Corporal Rainer

Boxing

---

**Date:** 24 November 1920  
**Location:** Willis Theatre  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50, \$1.00  
**Attendance:** Described as “a large audience”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Olson bt. Ernie Arthur

Two straight falls

Young Macfee vs. Young Probey

Boxing

Hawkins bt. Delvette

Boxing

McCrae bt. Lafoncoise

Boxing

---

**Date:** 7 December 1920  
**Location:** Willis Theatre  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** G.R. Pickering  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50, \$1.00  
**Attendance:** Described as “the largest crowd that has yet turned out to see an athletic contest of this nature”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Olson bt. Lorne C. Curtis

Olson earned one fall. Curtis was unable to continue in the second stanza due to injury

G. Mitchell bt. G. Tyndall

Boxing

Balfour bt. L.B. Reid

Boxing

Little W. Hilton bt. McKenzie

Boxing

Devellette bt. Collins

Boxing

---

**Date:** 29 December 1920  
**Location:** Willis Theatre  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** G.R. Pickering  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50, \$1.00 (auditorium), \$0.75 (gallery)  
**Attendance:** Unknown

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Charles Olson bt. Nels Moe	Two straight falls
Young Waldron bt. Bennett	One fall\
Billy Hilton dr. Jack Dundas	Boxing
Reed bt. Balfour	Boxing

---

**Date:** 5 January 1921  
**Location:** Willis Theatre  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** Sergeant Pickering, E.S. Martin (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50, \$1.00 (auditorium), \$0.75 (gallery)  
**Attendance:** Described as “the largest crowd that has attended a wrestling bout at the Willis”

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Charles Olson bt. Lorne C. Curtis	Two straight falls
Hall dr. Collon	Boxing
Salter bt. Young Bennett	Salter won the second and third falls
Hawkins bt. Davis	Boxing

---

**Date:** 16 February 1921  
**Location:** Willis Theatre  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** Sergeant Pickering (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00, \$1.75, \$1.50  
**Attendance:** Unknown

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Charles Olson bt. Harry McDonald	Olson won the first fall. McDonald was unable to continue in the second stanza due to injury
J. Barry bt. T. Payne	Boxing
Corporal Ranier dr. Lorne C. Curtis	No falls
Hawkins bt. Pierce	Boxing

---

**Date:** 16 March 1921  
**Location:** Willis Theatre  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50 (auditorium), \$1.00 (gallery)  
**Attendance:** Described as “the largest crowd that has ever attended a match here”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Bull Montana bt. Charles Olson

Montana won the first and third falls

Bragg bt. Salter

Boxing

Pupur bt. Young Doko

Boxing

---

**Date:** 21 March 1921  
**Location:** Willis Theatre  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50, \$1.00 (auditorium), \$0.75 (gallery), \$0.50 (boys under sixteen)  
**Attendance:** Unknown

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Charles Olson bt. Bull Montana

Handicap match. Montana was to throw both Lorne C. Curtis and Olson on the same night. He succeeded in throwing Curtis but was himself thrown by Olson

Bull Montana bt. Lorne C. Curtis

One fall

Preliminaries staged

---

**Date:** 26 April 1922  
**Location:** City Hall  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50 (first six rows of the auditorium) \$1.00 (remainder)  
**Attendance:** Described as a “small crowd”

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Tom Johnstone bt. Nels Moe

Johnstone won the first and third falls

Boxing preliminary

---

**Date:** 22 January 1923  
**Location:** City Hall  
**Promoter:** Harry Willis  
**Official(s):** Gus Quigley (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.20 (ringside), \$1.10 (any seat)  
**Attendance:** Unknown

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Jack Taylor bt. Nels Moe	Two straight falls
Dave Willey bt. Bray Willey	One fall
Gordon Manson dr. Robert Connolly	Boxing

---

**Date:** 6 November 1928  
**Location:** Armouries  
**Promoter:** Tom and Ollie Stark  
**Official(s):** Jim Hanley (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.25 (special seats, soldiers in uniform ringside), \$1.00 (general admission, soldier special seats), \$0.75 (soldiers special admissions), \$0.50 (under 18), free to newsboys  
**Attendance:** Described as “the largest crowd that ever turned out for wrestling and boxing bill”

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Mike Bilinsky bt. Bray Willey (pro debut)	Bilinsky won the first and third falls
Laurie Peppin bt. Danny LeClair	Boxing
Frankie Mason bt. Eddie Carsey	Boxing

---

**Date:** 11 December 1928  
**Location:** Armouries  
**Promoter:** Tom and Ollie Stark  
**Official(s):** Jim Hanley, Gus Quigley (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.25 (special), \$1.00 (general admission)  
**Attendance:** Described as “a record-making crowd”

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Jeff Vidal bt. Jack Reddick	Boxing
Bray Willey bt. Vic Jussack	Willey won the second and third falls
K.O. Stahan bt. H. Manson	Boxing

---

**Date:** 22 January 1929  
**Location:** Armouries  
**Promoter:** Tom and Ollie Stark  
**Official(s):** Tom Stark (referee)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50 (special), \$1.00 (general admission)  
**Attendance:** Described as a "capacity crowd"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Laurie Peppin bt. Jeff Vidol                      Boxing  
Bray Willey bt. Vic Jussack                      Willey won the first and third falls  
K.O. Stahan bt. Ring Ryan                      Boxing  
Tuffy Havelick bt. Frank Moran                      Boxing

---

**Date:** 18 February 1929  
**Location:** City Hall  
**Promoter:** Tom and Ollie Stark  
**Official(s):** Tom Stark, Jim Hanley, Gus Quigley (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00 (ringside), \$1.50 (special), \$1.00 (general admission)  
**Attendance:** Described as "not the largest" but "filled the greater portion of the city hall"

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Mickey King dr. Jack Tuckeryk                      Boxing  
Mike Bilinsky dr. Bray Willey                      Both men secured one fall in two hours  
Flavelle bt. Jack Decosimo                      Boxing. Disqualification  
Danny LeClair bt. Tuffy Havelick                      Boxing

---

**Date:** 12 April 1929  
**Location:** Winter Fair Arena  
**Promoter:** Tom and Ollie Stark  
**Official(s):** Jim Hanley, Gus Quigley (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00, \$1.50, \$1.00, \$0.25 (boys and school age)  
**Attendance:** 500

**Event Result** (Main Event and Preliminaries)

**Event Details**

Laurie Peppin bt. Al McGovern                      Boxing  
Danny LeClair dr. K.O. Stahan                      Boxing  
Bray Willey bt. Young Walter Miller                      Willey won the second and third falls  
Warren bt. Peterson                      Boxing

---

**Date:** 24 May 1929  
**Location:** Winter Fair Arena  
**Promoter:** Tom and Ollie Stark  
**Official(s):** Art Allen, Art Nixon (referees)  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$2.00, \$1.50, \$1.00  
**Attendance:** Modest

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Herman Ratzlaff bt. Laurie Peppin	Boxing
Wild Bill Cox bt. Ray Miller	Boxing
Bray Willey bt. Young Walter Miller	Two straight falls

---

**Date:** 5 November 1929  
**Location:** Winter Fair Arena  
**Promoter:** Tom and Ollie Stark  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50, \$1.25, \$0.75, \$0.25 (boys under 14)  
**Attendance:** Described as "a good crowd"

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Bray Willey dr. Mike Bilinsky	No falls in 90 minutes
Young Bulmer bt. K.O. Stahon	Boxing
Gene Flavelle bt. Chris Christenson	Boxing
Bill Sebastian bt. Young Hansen	Boxing

---

**Date:** 9 December 1929  
**Location:** City Hall  
**Promoter:** Tom and Ollie Stark  
**Official(s):** Unknown  
**Ticket Price(s):** \$1.50 (ringside), \$1.25 (special), \$1.00 (general admission), \$0.75 (rush), \$0.25 (boys)  
**Attendance:** Unknown

<b>Event Result</b> (Main Event and Preliminaries)	<b>Event Details</b>
Matt Roche bt. K.O. Stahon	Boxing
Bray Willey bt. Vic Jussack	Two straight falls
Stanley Bilinski bt. Jack Patrick	Boxing
Bill Sebastian bt. Jack George	Boxing

---



Note: This list does not represent a complete compendium of all professional wrestling cards staged in Brandon.

All bouts contested according to catch-as-catch-can rules unless otherwise specified

**Terms:**

bt. = defeated

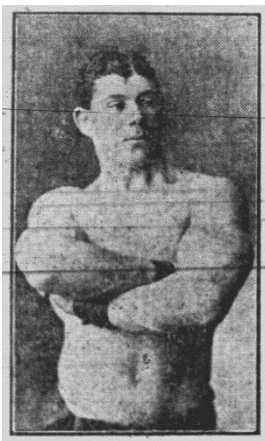
dr.= drew

vs.= versus

**Appendix VI  
Photographs**



Ed McKeown



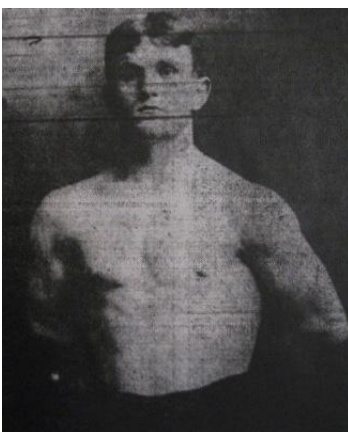
Hume Duval



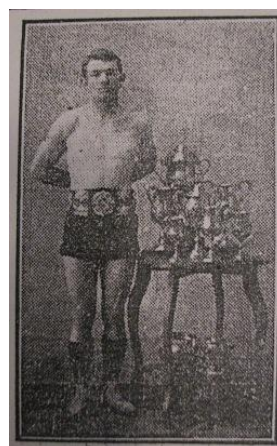
Tom Johnstone



Artie Edmunds



Walter Miller



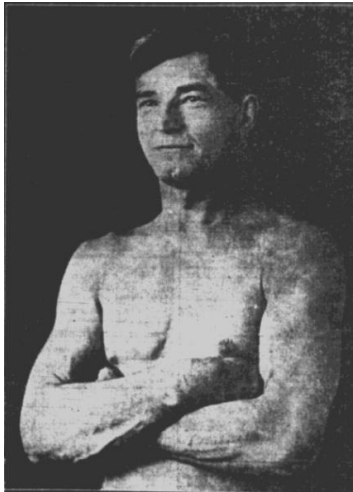
Alex Stewart



Charles Cutler



Ernest Sundberg



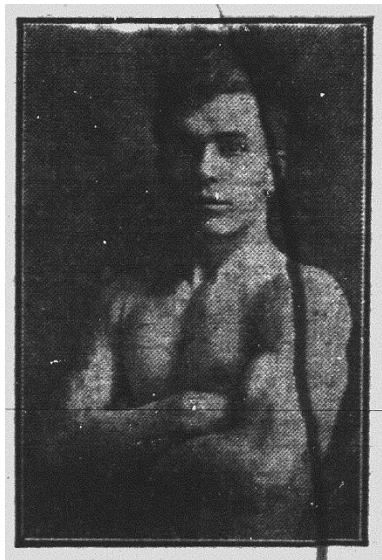
Charles Conkle



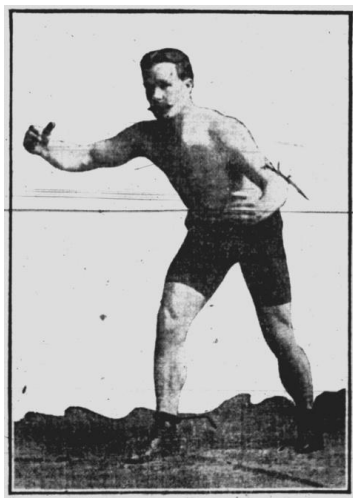
George LePage



Fred McLaglen



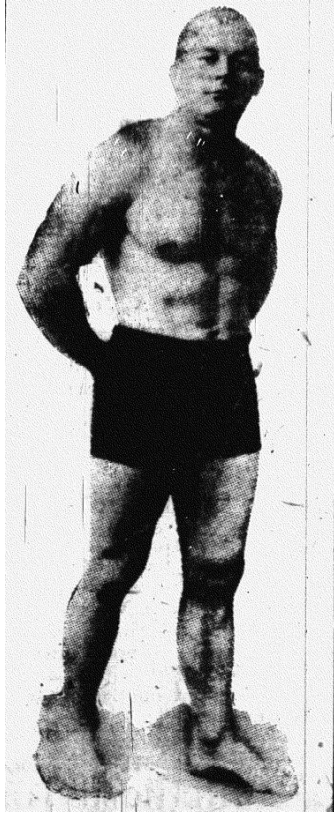
Ernest Sundberg



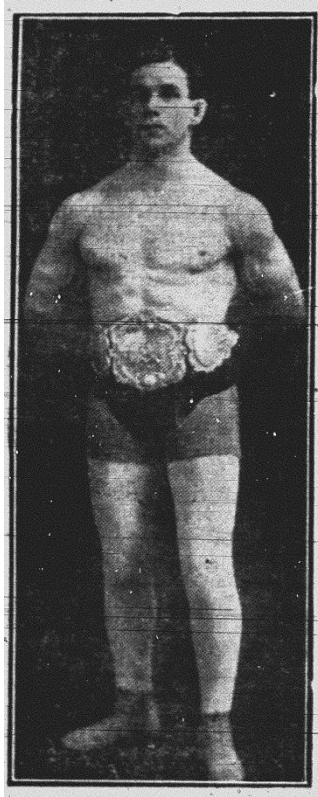
Knute Hoel



James Theran, "The Young Turk"



Charles Olson

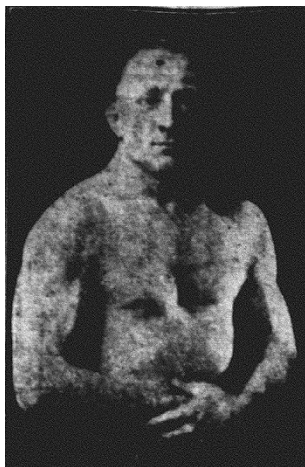


Eugene Tremblay

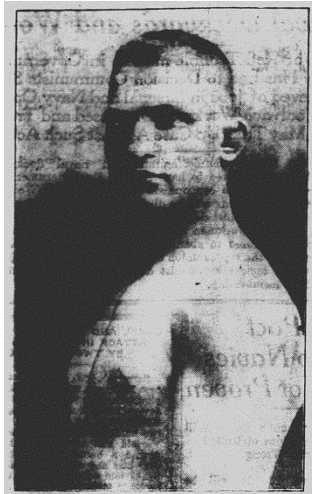


Stanislaus Zbyszko

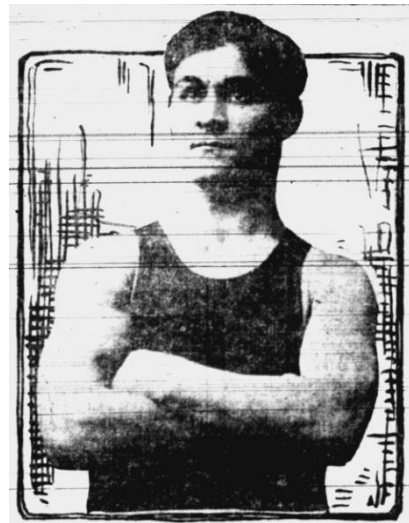
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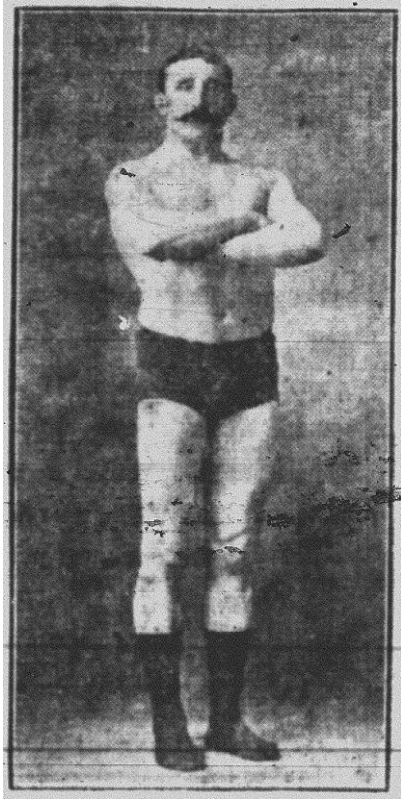
Bray Willey



Mike Bilinsky



Otto Suter



Pat Connelly



Charles Gustafson



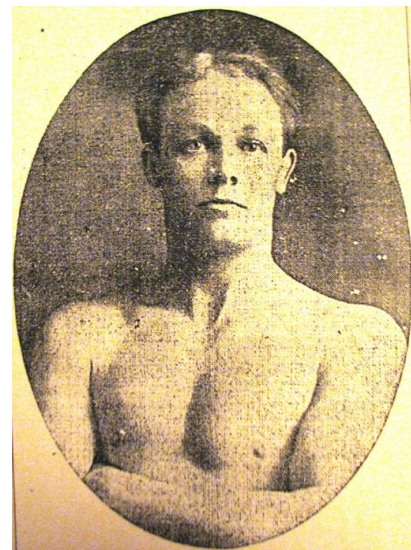
Charles Gustafson



Charles Gustafson



Charles Gustafson



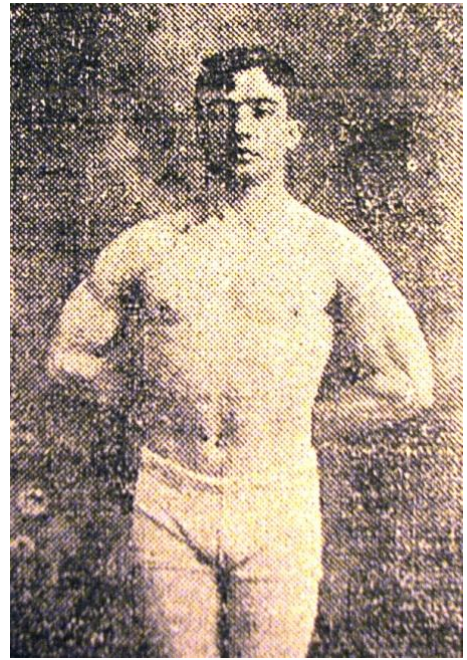
Charles Gustafson



George Akins



Thomas Dickinson



Ben Sielski



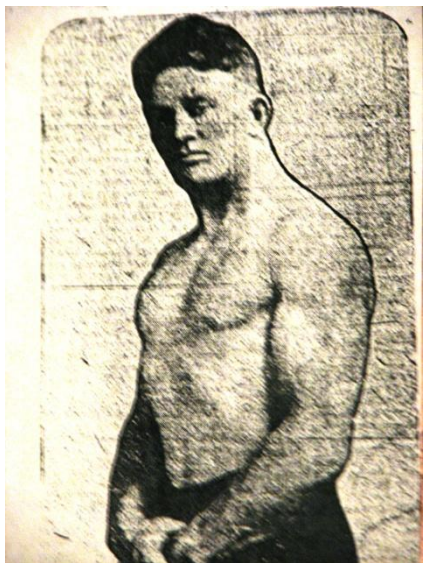
Wladek Zbyszko



Ernie Arthur



Leo L'Heureux



Jack Taylor



Jack Taylor



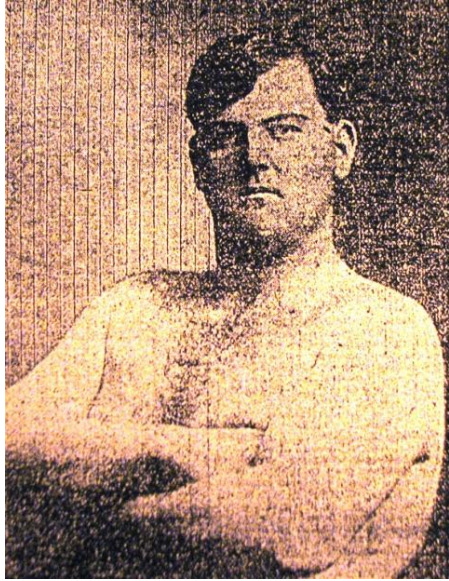
Jack Taylor



Jack Taylor



Emil Maupas



Mont, "The U.S. Giant"



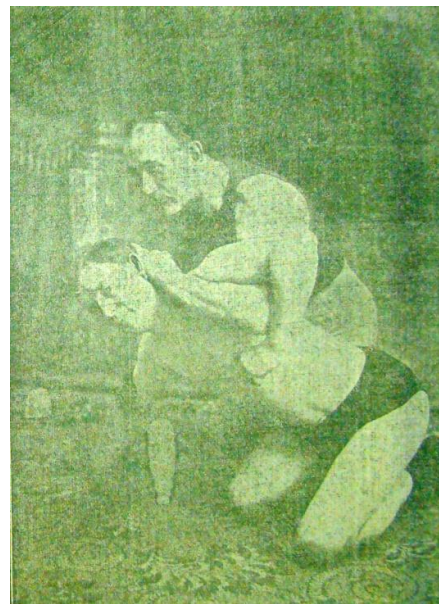
Reginald Siki



Harry McDonald



Charles Dalager



Charles Moth (top)





Yussif Hussane



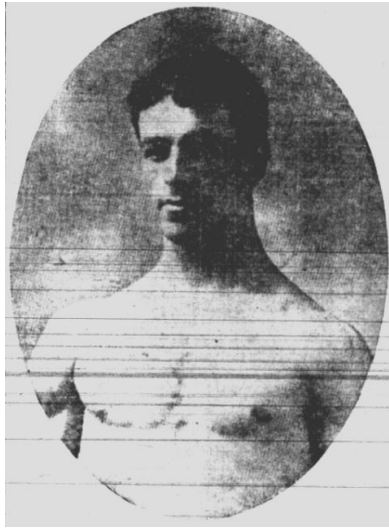
Ernest Barschel



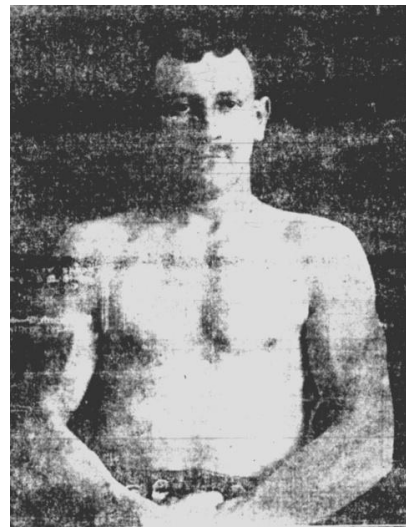
Taro Miyake



Cal Farley



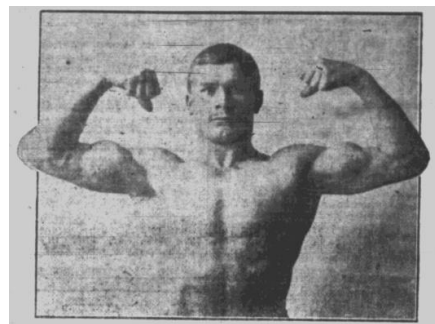
Dick Shepperd



Ferdinand Cook



Charles Dalager



Ole Samson

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Dauphin Herald  
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Edmonton Journal  
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Heimskringla (Winnipeg)  
Klondike Nugget  
La Liberte (Winnipeg)  
La Presse (Montreal)  
Lethbridge Herald  
Le Manitoba (Winnipeg)  
Lloyd’s Weekly News  
Lincoln Daily Star  
Logansport Journal  
Logansport Pharos  
Lowell Sun  
Manitoba Free Press  
Marshfield Times  
Maclean’s  
Medicine Hat Daily News  
Melita New Era and Napinka Herald  
Minnedosa Tribune  
Montreal Gazette  
Montreal Star  
New Church Times  
New Yorker  
New York Herald  
New York Times  
Norwood Press  
Oakland Tribune  
One Big Union Bulletin  
Ottawa Journal  
Police Gazette  
Portage La Prairie Daily News  
Portage La Prairie Semi-Weekly Review  
Port Arthur Daily News-Chronicle

Regina Leader  
Ring Magazine  
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Vancouver Sun  
Voice (Winnipeg)  
Winnipeg Real Estate News  
Winnipeg Sun  
Winnipeg Tribune  
Winnipeg Telegram  
WUB: Western Universities Battalion, 196<sup>th</sup>  
Yukon Sun

Library and Archives Canada:

Canadian Census  
Canadian Expeditionary Forces World War I Attestation Papers (RG 150)  
Department of Militia and Defense (RG9)  
Department of National Defense/Library and Archives Canada Photographic Records  
Records of the Department of National Defense (RG 24)

Manitoba Archives:

Amateur Athletic Union of Canada Manitoba Section Collection  
Edward Ernest Best Collection  
Edward W. Low Collection  
Charles Alfred Peyton Collection  
Frederick Phillips Collection  
George Henry Gunn Collection  
Gerald Painting Collection  
L. B. Foote Collection  
John Balmer's Account of Life in the Red River Settlement  
John Mathewson Ewens Collection  
Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame Collection  
Robert Boyd Russell Collection: One Big Union  
Scottish Amateur Athletic Association of Manitoba Collection  
Winnipeg Boy's Club Files  
Winnipeg Police Association Files  
Winnipeg Young Men's Christian Association Collection  
Winnipeg City Police Court Records

Manitoba Legislative Library:

Statutes of Manitoba  
Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba  
Manitoba History Scrapbooks

Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame:

Billy Hughes Scrapbook  
C.W. Johnstone Scrapbook  
Steve Trojack Scrapbook  
Jim Trifunov File  
Untitled Scrapbooks

St. Boniface Historical Society Archives:

Le Cloches De Saint-Boniface

St. Boniface Museum

Organizations Sportives File  
Ecole Provencheur Archives

University of Alberta Library:

Peel's Prairie Provinces Online Collection

University of Manitoba Archives:

Tribune Collection

Winnipeg City Archives:

By-Laws, City of Winnipeg  
City of Winnipeg Municipal Manuals  
Minutes of Council (Winnipeg)

Winnipeg Police Museum:

Police Commission Books

Other Private Collections:

Randy Rostecki Card File

Other:

Winnipeg Henderson's Directory 1880-1930  
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