

Pedestrian Activities

athletics being 'big business' is no new thing. Early on money was made from athletics by various methods. Firstly, by providing competition and a venue someone could make money. This was usually someone with entrepreneurial blood. Belle Hall and the Blackpool Athletic Grounds Company at Whitegate Lane were examples of this in Blackpool.

A second way money was made from athletics was via betting. Pedestrianisation encouraged betting and the whole scene created around athletics was rather like horse racing today. Certain pedestrians became notorious around the country for victory in particular events. Some of the most famous venues for professional athletics and betting were the Highland Games, Lakeland Games and the Border Games. These games were big venues for throwing and power events. In England Sheffield, Newcastle, Birmingham, Glasgow and Edinburgh became famous venues for high performances and heavy gambling. At Christmas Sheffield staged the Spring Handicap, a star event, which had a £100 first prize - a great deal of money at that time. Famous professional athletes took on cult status. In 1875 Juvens Dailleboot was known as Red Indian when he was billed to take on Wallace Thornaley the Most Extraordinary Runner in the Championship of the World. A famous walker (which was a popular activity in the late 1800s) became known as the Walking Dick. Other famous peds included the Crow Catcher (alias Bill Lang), the Gutshead Clipper (alias Jack White) and the very famous Bearfoot Lang. Alias Louis Bennett, because he was part Red Indian. On a February day in 1894 at South Shore, Blackpool, Bearfoot took on Lightfoot in a foot race which had "substantial" winnings involved. (See Fig. 8).

Of course many of these games were given to increase the amount of attention the race received from the public. The promoters were responsible often for this

use of approach because they were in the business of making money. They made money from the number of spectators that came to watch and the level to which they spent their money betting.

FOOT RACE AT SOUTH SHORE.

On Saturday evening, an important match, which has caused considerable interest in sporting circles in South Shore, was brought to a successful issue. The match was arranged some time ago between two well-known runners, Mr. Wright ("Lightfoot") and Mr. Topping ("Deerfoot"), and both have been in strict training for the event under the able hands of Mr. R. Fenton and Mr. Harry Hodgson respectively. When the men stripped it was noticed that they were in the pink of condition, and did great credit to their trainers, though perhaps a slight reduction in flesh might have improved them. When upon the mark the nervousness of the men was very perceptible, but they got away at the third attempt very evenly, and an exciting race resulted in "Lightfoot" winning by about two feet. The stakes (which were substantial) were held by a local sportsman, and amidst great enthusiasm he handed them over to the winner, whose victory is very popular. It is rumoured that the men are again matched, and that several contests have resulted from the interest aroused in footracing by this particular encounter.

Figure 8.

LOCAL ATHLETICS.

Baker Breaks a Record.

At Rakes Hall, Blackpool, on Saturday, R. M. Baker, American, who a week ago defeated Tom Colquhoun for the world's championship, attempted, for a sole wager of £500, to beat Derby's record (26ft. 4in.), for seven stand spring jumps with weights, made as long back as 1867. A large and enthusiastic crowd gave Baker a hearty reception. Betting was 2 to 1 on Baker, who set the record by 10 1/2 inches. His last jump was measured, and it was 26ft. 5in. Baker went on a second time, and set the record by 1ft. 11 1/2in., the last run being 16ft. 10in. The record now stands at 26ft. 5 1/2in.

Foot Handicap at Rakes Hall.

A foot handicap was decided at Rakes Hall, Blackpool, on Saturday. Details.

130 yards foot handicap—Heat winners: R. Smith, Manchester, 20 1/2; J. E. Newthorn, (Milham, 9; T. Ramsay, Manchester, 21; P. Dunn, Great Harwood, 17; T. (Lancashire, 2; W. Westwell, Accrington, 19; H. Baxter, Kirkham, 24; A. Ball, Blackpool, 20; F. Holden, Preston, 3; W. J. Evans, Blackpool, 22; J. Leeming, Preston, 15 1/2; W. Herdibent, Manchester, 25; F. Leyland, Church, 16. Second round. Heat 1: J. Leeming, 15 1/2; F. Leyland, Church, 16 1/2. Won by a yard. Heat 2: P. Dunn, 17 1/2; W. J. Evans, 22 1/2. A yard and a half. Heat 3: T. Ramsay, 21 1/2; H. Baxter, 24 1/2. A yard and a half. Final heat—Ramsay, 1; Leeming, 2; Dunn, 3. Betting: 3 to 1 on Ramsay, 2 to 1 against Dunn, and 5 to 1 Leeming. Won by a yard; half a yard.

Figure 9. Professional athletics in Blackpool.

The third method by which people made money from athletics was by competing. There were even at this time blatant professional athletes. As the popularity of the sport increased so did the level of prize money. As mentioned before, some races had prize money of over £100, which was a large sum of money at that time. In 1876, Scottish miler J. McLeary was offered £50 and half of the gate profits if he broke the record. (Some gate receipts were in excess of £1000).

So, as can be seen many people made money from athletics. Blackpool had a role to play in this. The sport of athletics developed from two directions remember - the pedestrian end and the gent end. Blackpool lost its upper/middle class image quite early because of the arrival of the railway, and therefore began to cater for a working class type of person while athletics was developing. The area was also free from the influence of any major University, administration centre or regional government. So the pedestrian element of athletics was the sector of athletics Blackpool first developed on a large scale. The major venues for this were Raikes Hall and sometimes areas around the sea front. An event held at Raikes Hall called the Raikes Hall Festival was an example of a professional event aimed at attracting the maximum number of competitors and spectators. The following events were staged and there was prize money freely available; 100 yards, high leaping, putting the shot, quarter-mile volunteer race, throwing the cricket ball, 1 mile race, quarter-mile race, 220 yards hurdle race, 3 mile walk, 100 yards sack race, pole leaping, 4 mile steeplechase and along with this a host of other games were staged.