

FACING THE FALCONS  
The 1920 United States Olympic Team  
by Roger A. Godin

Canada's decision to include the crest of the 1924 Olympic champion Toronto Granites on the alternate jersey of the 2002 team caused a degree of controversy, particularly in Winnipeg. The Manitoba capital was the home of the 1920 gold medal winning Falcons and there were many people, particularly SIHR members, who felt that their crest should be the appropriate one.

The contentious situation grew out of hockey's status at the 1920 Games. The Games had been awarded to Antwerp, Belgium, in order to help that nation recover from the ravages of the First World War. International Ice Hockey Federation vice president Paul Loicq, a Belgian, had convinced Olympic founder Baron Pierre du Coubertin to include both hockey and figure skating. Both competitions were regarded as unofficial (hence the controversy), and were staged between April 20 and April 30. The other sports did not get under way until the traditional summer months.

While the sweater situation is very recent, there was another controversy in 1920 regarding the Falcons' major opponent, the United States. The highest level of organized play in the United States at the time was the United States Amateur Hockey Association (USAHA). However, there was no one team in this league composed entirely of American players that could be selected to represent the nation at Antwerp.

The national governing body for the sport in 1920 was the International Skating and Hockey Union (ISHU) headed by president Cornelius Fellowes of New York. It became apparent to the ISHU that their original idea of staging an elimination tournament among the Boston, Pittsburgh and St. Paul teams and sending the winner to Belgium was unworkable. Such was the case because of the citizenship issue cited above. Interestingly enough, that key issue was not addressed when the ISHU made their formal announcement concerning the United States team on March 9 in Pittsburgh. The statement from the ISHU executive committee said in part:

*"... Within the last few days definite information has been received from Belgium as to the rules that are to govern, and this has changed our original point of view. These*

*rules provide that seven-man hockey is to be played and that each team is to be allowed to carry 14 men.*

*“Our aim in the interest of American victory, therefore, would be to send a team in which the seven substitutes would be the equal of the seven first string men. None of the three competing teams could fill this requirement. (Most teams of this period carried 8-10 players.)*

*“It would be a mistake, indeed, it would be unpatriotic, if in the interest of local pride we sent a team of 14 men abroad knowing that we were leaving better men at home.”*

Concurrent with this announcement, Roy D. Schooley, manager of the Pittsburgh club, was named to that position with the United States team. Schooley was originally from Welland, Ontario, and had been in Pittsburgh since 1901. He had begun his career as a referee and subsequently became manager of Duquesne Garden, where his team played. As manager of the Olympic team, he had full power to select the players. Schooley knew his own team well enough and was afforded the convenience of evaluating both the Boston and St. Paul players when they were in Pittsburgh for games in early to mid March. On March 16 he named his team. Forwards: Joe McCormick, Larry McCormick and Herb Drury of Pittsburgh; Frank Goheen and Tony Conroy of St. Paul; and George Geran and Frank Synott of Boston. Defensemen: Irving Small and Leon Tuck of Boston; and Ed Fitzgerald of St. Paul. Goaltender: Ray Bonney of Pittsburgh. Schooley added these comments:

*“At present the plan is to take only 12 players, although this may be increased to 14. The choice for sub-goaltender has not been made and lies between Weidenborner of St. Paul and LaCroix of Boston. All of the men selected can make the trip and are eligible from the standpoint of American citizenship.*

*“... In the exhibition games ... all of these men will be used. The St. Paul and Boston men will be brought on in order to get the teamwork as near to perfection as possible.*

*“The selection of a captain will be announced in a day or two. While I have a pretty clear idea of what the lineup of the first team will be, I want to give the matter further thought and also confer with the captain of the team before going any further. ”*

At the same time Schooley was making his announcement, William S. Haddock, vice-chairman of the ISHU, unveiled plans to fund the team’s trip to Europe. Approximately \$15,000 was needed and the exhibition games cited above would be the source of the funds. The intent was to play two series of two games each against “worthy” opponents at Duquesne Garden. The first series on March 22-23 would be against the Winnipegs (not to be confused with the Falcons), while an opponent remained to be named for March 29-30 games. All money beyond the guarantee paid to the visitors and “bare overhead expenses” would go to the Olympic team. Haddock urged local fans to think of admission prices not as a charge, “but as a contribution to help send our boys away. ”

One day later Schooley announced the selection of Joe McCormick from his own Pittsburgh team as captain:

*“Joe McCormick was picked to lead the team because he has the respect of every man on it, both as a player and as a man. There is no discounting his hockey ability, which is recognized not only by the public but by his fellow players. ”*

Schooley also announced that the team would assemble in Pittsburgh on March 20 to prepare for the exhibition games against the Winnipegs. The four St. Paul players (Cyril Weidenborner was added as the second goaltender on March 18) did arrive on that date. Conroy and Goheen were inserted into the Pittsburgh line up that very evening in a season ending exhibition game against the Toronto Dentals. Pittsburgh won 3–2, the Pittsburgh Post reported that “the St. Paul players played flashy hockey and they were applauded by the large crowd.”

In the time frame between the announcement of the team’s selection and its assembly in Pittsburgh, questions concerning the citizenship status of certain players were raised in

the Ottawa Journal. In a March 18 story subsequently picked up by the Pittsburgh Post, the Canadian newspaper commented that “the majority of the players on this team are practically all Canadian...” and then recounted the playing careers of Joe and Larry McCormick, “Dinny” Manners, Frank (Ray) Bonney, Ed Nagle, and McCrimmon.

The McCormicks were from Buckingham, Quebec, and had served in the U.S. Army in France during World War I. Herb Drury from Midland, Ontario, had similar service, but no question seems to have been raised about his eligibility, nor that of Frank Synott of Chatham, New Brunswick. Synott had replaced Irving Small who was unable to make the trip. Ray Bonney was born in Phoenix, New York, near Syracuse, and appears to have developed in the Ottawa area, but development was not at issue. Manners, Nagle and McCrimmon were considered for the team, but not selected. On March 19 the Journal further raised the issue of the professional status of George (Gerry) Geran, a Holyoke, Massachusetts, native who had played four games for the Montreal Wanderers in the 1917–18 NHL season.

Reviewing this situation some 82 years later, it appears that one can only accept Ray Schooley’s comment at the time of the team’s selection that “all of the selected ... are eligible from the standpoint of American citizenship.” The Journal had previously reported on March 10 that the military veterans could “become citizens in 24 hours upon presentation of their honorable discharges before any naturalization board in the country.” Bonney’s U.S. birth would have given him citizenship while Synott was presumably already a citizen. As to the others, Conroy, Fitzgerald and Weidenborner were St. Paul, Minnesota, natives while Goheen was from nearby White Bear Lake. Tuck, like Geran, was a Massachusetts native who grew up in Melrose. Thus the team would break out into seven native born and four naturalized players. As to Geran’s professional status, it does not appear to have emerged as an issue. One can only speculate that perhaps the old five-game rule to retain amateur status had an early application in this situation.

Geran, along with Tuck and Synott, who had now replaced Small, arrived on the morning of March 22 in time to work out with the team for the first exhibition game against the Winnipegs that evening. The Winnipegs most notable player was Mervyn “Red” Dutton, who paired with Joe Guilbault on defense. Jim Gibson, center, and Jack

Asseltine, right wing, were key forwards. Dutton would go on to a Hall of Fame career as a player, coach, manager and NHL president.

Despite the late integration of the Boston players into the Olympic team lineup, “the form displayed exceeded the most sanguine expectations,” reported the Pittsburgh Post. Geran and McCormick each had two goals in the 4–3 win as McCormick got the game winner late in the third period. The games were played under six-man rules with 15-minute periods. Almost as noteworthy as the outcome was Drury’s conduct. He was called for roughing in the second period by his teammate Terry McGovern, who was officiating with another teammate, Madden. Drury refused to leave the ice, called McGovern a “vile” name, and the referee hit him. After an unpleasant verbal exchange with city councilman Augustus Oliver, Drury was ordered to the dressing room. He returned to play in the third period and was injured. The magnanimous McGovern carry him off the ice!

The Winnipegs came back the next night, March 23, to edge the Olympic team 3–2. Geran and Drury had the American goals as the New York Times cited the former and Frank Goheen as “the bright stars ... Goheen thrilled the large crowd by his sensational dashes down the ice...” Schooley continued to experiment to try and determine what would be the most effective combination. In this game he moved Geran from defense to center and shifted Drury from center to right wing.

As each team had won a game, it was decided to hold the Winnipegs over for a third contest on March 25. The day before this game, the Pittsburgh Post strongly suggested that Drury “should be taken to task” for his earlier conduct, while both the Ottawa Journal and Boston Globe erroneously reported that he would be dropped from the team. But the “flashy and temperamental player,” as the Post described him, was very much in the line up for final game of the series.

The Winnipegs took the lead at 11:01 of the first period on Jack Asseltine’s five-hole shot on Ray Bonney. But soon thereafter, “Conroy came down the ice like a streak of lightning after shooting three times unsuccessfully(, he) finally managed to pull Tupper away from the net and sent the disc in for the tying score,” reported the New York Times. There was no further scoring in regulation or in the first five-minute overtime, but Joe

McCormick gave the U.S. a 3–1 victory with two goals in the second five-minute overtime.

The Pittsburgh Post reported unofficially on March 26 that any shortfall in funds raised through the three exhibition games and the two that Pittsburgh would play on March 26 and 27 (the March 29-30 Olympic dates had been dropped) would be covered by Duquesne Gardens. Since Schooley managed the facility it would appear that the idea originated with him. The Hamilton Tigers would furnish the opposition for the Pittsburgh game. Though the Post observed that these were not Olympic team games, the Boston players were in the lineup on the first night while Goheen and Fitzgerald officiated. The other Olympians rested. Hamilton, with future NHL players Carson Cooper and Leo Reise in the lineup, won 4–3. Geran had one of the Pittsburgh goals.

The next night it was Boston's turn to rest as the Pittsburgh and St. Paul players gave the Steel City team a 5–0 victory. The Post reported:

*“... During the greater period of the game the forwards who will play on the American team ... were used, this being done for the purpose of perfecting teamwork, and captain Joe McCormick, Goheen, Drury and Conroy gave a fine exhibition of combination play, repeatedly carrying the puck down the ice together (Drury, Goheen, and McCormick scored).”*

On March 29, Schooley announced the final selections to the team. These provided for the addition of Weidenborner and Synott, while omitting Geran. No explanation was given for that decision and Geran was very much on the scene when the team assembled in New York on April 6 for departure on the steamer Finland the next day. Prior to departing for New York, Pittsburgh had played two exhibition games against Kitchener, winning both by 5–4 and 3–1 scores. It was another opportunity for Pittsburgh's Olympians to prepare for Antwerp as all played and Drury scored twice in the first game.

A day prior to Schooley's final announcement, the Pittsburgh Post quoted unidentified Chicago sources as being unhappy with the team's composition. The comments were principally directed at Pittsburgh, “which took three Easterners, some Pittsburgh men, and three recently naturalized Canadians .... Duluth, Detroit and

Cleveland, all having stars of rare prominence, were not given a chance to make the team.” While these “stars” are not identified, Duluth did have forward Gus Olson and goaltender Iver Anderson, while Cleveland had an aging Frank “Coddy” Winters, a Duluth native who might have helped on defense.

The Boston Globe reacted to the final selections in an article headlined “Surprising Shift in U.S. Hockey Team.” The piece observed that only one Boston regular, Tuck, was named, while Synott was to be a “Sub Forward.” Interestingly enough, once again there is no mention of Gerry Geran, but the possibility that Drury might be replaced by Boston player Downing because of the incident in the first exhibition game is reported.

As the Olympians traveled to New York the Post reported that on April 5 Schooley had resigned as manager amid rumors of friction — which he denied. He cited family illness as the reason and he was succeeded by ISHU president Corneilus Fellowes. Whatever the reason for Schooley’s departure, the paper commented with considerable justification that “the absence of the man who organized and coached the Olympiad team since its formation will be a distinct loss to the American team...”

On April 6 the team assembled at New York’s 181st Street Ice Palace at 12:30 for a two-and-a-half-hour workout. The New York Times reported that “the speed, accurate stick work, capable defensive playing and all-around ability of the skaters gave foundation to the belief that the American players will furnish stiff contention for Olympic supremacy.”

The team was seen off the next day from the 17th Street pier by a party which included, among others, Schooley, Fellowes and Gustavus Kirby, president of the United States Olympic Committee. Kirby made a brief speech warning that the team would face its most formidable opposition ahead and expressing confidence that the U.S. was sending its best team. After stressing the need for clean play, Kirby gave way to Fellowes who replied on behalf of the players. He indicated they were “anticipating the hardest fight from the Canadians” and expressed confidence in ultimate victory.

The voyage to Antwerp featured rough weather, but periodic workouts helped keep the players focused. The Finland docked in Antwerp on April 20 and was met by the Belgium Olympic Committee. Fellowes tersely wired back to the U.S. Olympic Committee: “All well. Practice tonight. Seven entries in hockey. Elimination draw.

Thursday. First match Friday. Canada only serious opponent..." After the team worked out at the Antwerp Ice Palace with Canada's Winnipeg Falcons, Allan Cup winners, looking on, they adjourned to their quarters at what the St. Paul Pioneer Press described as a "third class hotel near the waterfront." Fellowes, on the other hand, moved into the first class Grand Hotel.

The tournament was played under the "Bergvall" system of elimination, which employed a unique knockout format between nations in the first round. Those who won went on to compete for the gold medal. Those who lost to the gold medal winner played another knockout series for the silver, and those who lost to the silver medalist played for the bronze. The games would be played in two 20-minute halves with a 10-minute intermission. If there was a tie at the end of regulation play, additional 10-minute periods would be played until the winning goal was scored.

The United States began play on April 24 with a 29-0 crushing of Switzerland. The New York Times reported:

*"Scoring almost at will, the Americans baffled their opponents not only by the cleverest hockey ... but by their adroit skating. From the very outset the Americans took the offensive, scoring the first goal within two minutes.*

*"They finished the first half with the score 15-0, and even though Drury was put out of the game by the referee after the third minute of play in the second half for kicking the puck, the Americans continued to score with six men against their opponents' seven.*

*"Only once was the American goal threatened. That was after Conroy had also been ruled off, and the Americans, playing with five men, were forced to put up a brisk defense for few minutes..."*

When it was all over, Tony Conroy had finished with eight goals, Joe McCormick had seven, Goheen six, Drury six, Fitzgerald one, and Tuck one. As Canada had disposed of Czechoslovakia 15-0, the Americans were now in what for all intents was the gold

medal game. The winner would actually have to play Sweden, who had beaten both Belgium and France, for the big prize, but that outcome was never in doubt.

The North American nations met on April 25 for the epic battle. Canada's Winnipeg Falcons were largely of Icelandic heritage and led by captain Frank Fredrickson, who would find his way to the Hockey Hall of Fame. The other players were Bobby Benson, Chris Fridfinnson, Mike Goodman, Slim Halderson, Connie Johannesson and goaltender Wally Byron. Goodman and Johannesson would later play for Duluth and St. Paul respectively in the USAHA.

Before play got under way, a controversy erupted over the referee — a Canadian named Garoon — who was serving with the American Red Cross. Since he had worked an afternoon game, Canada agreed to accept him on condition that he could be removed if his work was unsatisfactory, presumably because of fatigue. Garoon refused to serve under that condition and was replaced by De Rauch, a Frenchman. The delay was considerable, but once the puck dropped Canada attacked aggressively.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press:

*“... Bonney ... stopped the puck at the goal twice in the first two minutes of play. Goheen ... shot hard for a goal a moment later, and from then on during the first half it was a nip and tuck exhibition, the fast work and cleverness of the men of each team bringing spectators to their feet every minute. McCormick ... tried hard several times for a long drive from near the center of the rink, but each time his try was blocked.*

*“Canada's forwards, Halderson, Fredrickson and Goodman frequently took the puck from the Americans by lightning like tricks, only to lose it again a second later to Conroy, Drury, or Goheen ... (Finally) Fredrickson penetrated the American defense after a long skate in the tenth minute of the second half and scored. In the fifteenth (eighteenth) minute Johannesson also scored. Both the Canadians' goals were shot from scrimmages and after hard fighting. ”*

The 2–0 victory put Canada against Sweden the next day and the result was a predictable 12–1 rout and the gold medal. The United States now had to play the Swedes and Czechs for the silver.

Sweden fell 7–0 on April 26 as Geran scored on three successive long shots within a one minute time frame of the first half to give the U.S. a 3–0 lead. Conroy added two more in that half and two in the second to account for all the American scoring. The next day Weidenborner replaced Bonney in goal against Czechoslovakia as the United States went on another scoring spree in a 16–0 thrashing which clinched the silver medal. The Associated Press:

*“... The Americans had little difficulty in scoring at will in the first half of the contest, although (the) Czechoslovaks showed occasional bursts of speed.*

*“Seven goals were scored in the first period while in the second Larry McCormick made five of the nine scored by the Americans.*

*“The second half was much the same as the first...”*

Medals were awarded on April 29 and the Canadian team, which had been honored by Canadian Pacific personnel in Antwerp two nights previous, returned home to civic fetes in Toronto and Winnipeg. While such honors were certainly not expected for finishing second, the treatment afforded the United States team was deplorable. After the game with Canada, Fellowes gave the players their return tickets and departed for Paris. Bill Hewitt, secretary of the Canadian team, provided assistance to the U.S. players — some of whom were shocked to hear from Fellowes once they arrived in New York. Drury, the McCormicks, Synott and Weidenborner all received a cablegram indicating they each owed him \$1.80. And this after using their own money to pay legitimate Olympic expenses!

In commenting on the Olympic tournament, the St. Paul Daily News concluded that Canada’s one-team approach was the way to go at such an event:



Penalties USA Goheen

SECOND HALF

Canada 2 USA 0 CAN Fredrickson, 11:00

Johannesson, 18:00

Penalties CAN Fredrickson

Fredrickson, major

USA Goheen, major

3. April 27: USA 7 Sweden 0

FIRST HALF SCORING IN GOAL

USA 5 Sweden 0 USA Geran – 3 goals USA Bonney

Conroy – 2 goals SWE Howander

SECOND HALF

USA 2 Sweden 0 USA Conroy — 2 goals

Penalties Unknown

4. APRIL 28: USA 16 Czechoslovakia 0

FIRST HALF SCORING IN GOAL

USA 7 Czechoslovakia 0 USA Unknown – 7 goals USA Weidenborner

TCH Dusek

SECOND HALF

USA 9 Czechoslovakia 0 USA L. McCormick — 5 goals

Unknown — 4 goals

Penalties Unknown

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