

## December 2009

*Can I ask you to settle an argument about shooting at the Olympics. I was told that live pigeons were once used instead of Clay targets at the Olympic Games. Is this correct?*

*Nick Barros, St Kilda VIC*

For over ninety years the events that surrounded the 1900 Olympic Games were shrouded in mystique and controversy. Finally in 1992 the International Olympic Committee put the debate to rest and made the results, and indeed what the events were, public.

It seems there were two shotgun events that were part of the official Olympic Program in 1900. Both involved shooting pigeons. The first event called the "Grand Prix de 'Exposition" where pigeons were held in "traps"(hence the origin of the name 'trapshooting") and released into flight upon the shooters command. There were 52 entries in this competition and Australia's own Donald Mackintosh killed 18 pigeons within the 16 yard boundary to be awarded a Bronze Medal. There has never been any mention of how many birds in total the event consisted of, only that the competitor was eliminated upon his second miss. Leon de Lunden (Belgium) killed 21 birds and Maurice Faure (France) killed 20 birds. It was reported that the prize money, as this was a professional shooting event, was split up amongst the top four competitors and Mackintosh pocketed 20,000 French Francs for his efforts. Not a bad days work I would imagine back in 1900. Next up was a "driven" bird event, presumably where the birds are forced towards the waiting shooter. 166 competitors lined up for this competition called the "Prix Centenaire" and our very own Donald Mackintosh killed 22 consecutive pigeons to gain the Gold Medal.

The circumstances surrounding the Paris Games were very unusual. There was an international Fair called the "Universal Paris Exhibition" being conducted in conjunction with the Games and there were as many as 31 unofficial shooting events as part of this exhibition. It is almost widely accepted that Mackintosh had no idea he was competing in any official Olympic event when he shot in Paris. The fact that Mackintosh was a full blooded professional shooter may explain why the IOC had overlooked his achievements as the Olympics back then were for pure amateurs only. Interestingly the IOC do not mention these events on their web site and have never acknowledge pigeons were ever used, but the Australian Olympic Committees' official historian, Mr. Harry Gordon, is very clear on the facts and circumstances.

1900 was the one and only time animals were killed for sport at an Olympic Games. Shooting was a part of the original "modern" Olympics in Athens, but twice, 1904 in St Louis and 1928 in Stockholm, Shooting was not part of the events contested at the Games.

Donald Mackintosh was born in 1866 and started school at Rockbank in the outer west of Melbourne. He passed away in 1951, long before his Olympic efforts were ever made official. His Olympic Medals and some other of his memorabilia are held in the Gallery of Sport Museum at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

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