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The International Herald Tribune 1887-1918: the symbiotic development of modern sport and an international press

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Various source media, International Herald Tribune Historical Archive 1887-2013



Why did the *Paris Herald – The New York Herald European Edition* to use its original full title – come into being where and when it did? James Gordon Bennett Jr. had taken over his father's *New York Herald* in the late 1860s, dragging a misspent youth and a reputation for impetuosity and risk-taking behind him, which sometimes helped him in his ocean-going yachting challenges and journalistic gambles. However, it also lost him his reputation in polite New York society in 1877, over his mysterious and rumour-ridden broken engagement followed by a duel, which led to his self-imposed exile in France, where, with regular trips back to New York, he spent the majority of his time thereafter. He liked Paris and spoke French, having spent much of his time there from about the age of ten to the age of 15. He had been taken there from New York by his mother, for safety, after she had endured a decade of social isolation and attacks, sometimes physical, on her husband, accompanied by slurs on her own character, by journalistic competitors of the *Herald* and its proprietor's political enemies.

Why 1887? Bennett, now overseeing the *New York Herald* at a distance from Paris by postal telegraphy via the transatlantic cable, became increasingly frustrated by the toll-rate charged by his competitor Jay Gould, owner of the Union Pacific railroad from 1874, of the *New York World* from 1879, and, crucially, of the Western Union Telegraph Co. from 1881. Consequently, Bennett, with William Mackay, founded companies to lay their own transatlantic cable and remove Gould's monopoly on postal telegraphy between America and Europe. At the time of this price war – which Bennett

won – and, one might speculate, as part of it, he founded in 1887 an international newspaper based on communication between America and Europe and aimed at an audience of cosmopolitan travellers on either continent interested in what was happening across the Atlantic. In so doing, he acknowledged a new period of internationalisation, where there was a need for a new kind of newspaper to serve a new community. It was therefore very clearly linked to its founder's eventful life and the idea that a successful modern newspaper defined itself by reference to an audience.

The paper also reflected its proprietor-editor's interests. James Gordon Bennett Jr., like his father, whom one biographer aptly called the "man who made the news",¹ was particularly interested in sport as one of the subjects that his new daily and its new audience could become interested in. The new audience that Bennett had in mind to create was to be introduced to modern sports like football, tennis, car racing and, later, aeronautics. In fact, there were two audiences in mind, one the immediate audience that bought the paper in Paris, and secondly, the mobile international audience of wealthy cosmopolitan readers he gradually built up, who not only bought the paper when passing through Paris, but also off the boat in Le Havre, then later during stays in Deauville, London, the Riviera, and places further afield like Naples, Wiesbaden, Innsbruck, and even Saint-Petersburg. The local Parisian audience was introduced to British 'ex-pat' football clubs and their French imitators playing in and around the city, where the Sunday edition gave practical information such as venues and lists of players

¹ Oliver Carson, *The Man Who Made the News: James Gordon Bennett* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942)

selected, followed by reports of the games on Monday or Tuesday. On the other hand, the social elite travelling to and from their holiday resorts, where some of them would be participating in sport as well as spectating and expecting to meet their social counterparts, would want the news of tennis or golf, yachting or car racing, even polo or winter sports, depending on the social season. For this group, their leisure activities and life-style were intimately linked with modern modes of comfortable travel – railway trains and transatlantic liners, but also sailing yachts, steam yachts and motor cars. For many *Herald* readers travel and tourism, sport and recreation were inseparable and key parts of their social life. Insofar as conspicuous consumption of the latest sports and sports fashions, and of the fastest or most comfortable modes of transport were important to its audience, the *Paris Herald* covered them and advertised related goods and services.

An early item presenting sport as part of seasonable fashionable society gatherings appeared under “Sporting Gossip” on Sunday, January 1, 1888, p.3 – the Cercle des Patineurs was an exclusive private skating club in the Bois de Boulogne:

‘There was another large and fashionable assembly at the Cercle des Patineurs yesterday, the ice being in capital condition and the skaters of both sexes numerous. The visitors were the same as on the previous days and again the question of a night fête was whispered, but this time among the girls and their “Pinafore relations,” for the members have taken the HERALD’s tip and are “mum!” Now young ladies, look out! It is freezing hard, and who knows but what the long-looked-for gala will be soon at hand.’

² ‘Physical Education in France’, *New York Herald European Edition*, Sunday March 25, 1894, 5.

From the ‘society’ angle, some competitive sports results, while being presented in full, could appear distinctly secondary when the main titles were something like: ‘Dinner at Cannes Golf club. Prince of Wales expresses his gratitude to the Grand Duke Michael for establishing the playing of the Royal and Ancient game at Cannes’, the bulk of the report being devoted to the speeches and a list of important guests.

The *Herald* and local Paris sport

Regarding organized sport, the *Herald* covered association football in its earliest days in France – more widely, perhaps, than the standard of play or the number of matches, players and spectators merited, but with the aim of widening the practice of the game and its popularity with spectators and building up an activity proven to be popular elsewhere, in order to create an audience. As some of the following details will suggest, the wide coverage might be explained by some presentiment that this sport too could eventually grow into an international activity. In England and Scotland, where it originated, the two types of football were not only already codified, but association football had been professionalized by the late 1880s, with large numbers of paying spectators. In France, however, it was known only to Anglophiles. The *Paris Herald* covered matches in the city when only three fully constituted club teams, playing friendlies, existed there, two British ex-pat teams – White Rovers (founded 1891) and Standard Athletic Club (1892)² – and Le Club français [sic]. Its coverage gives real insights into how important the support of the press, particularly the *Herald*, for these nascent clubs was in

the development of football in France. When initially a few ex-pats wishing to form a club to be called White Rovers, asked the newspaper for help in recruiting “English players”, the *Herald* printed the appeal (14 October 1891, p.3), but commented the club ought to be “cosmopolitan” in any further appeal (16 October p.3). It went on to advertise and report on the first club meeting, gave details of when its first two practice matches were to be held, and of how to get to the ground, and reported on the matches in some detail, as well as on numbers at its first social gathering (70 members). Subsequently, it publicised its upcoming first and later monthly Smoking Concerts – key parts of the sociability of the club and a revenue stream - and in March 1892 announced and reported on a friendly match against the International College, which the White Rovers won 10–1 in front of 150 spectators. The *Herald* went on to report the next match against the YMCA, 5–1 to the White Rovers, and at the end of the season, their first mixed social, with 230 guests, two-thirds female (30 Oct., p.2., 31 Oct. p.2, 2 Nov. p.3, Nov. 8, p.3, 9 Nov. p.3, 19 Nov. p.3, 16 Dec. 1891, p.3, 14 Jan, p.2, 1 Mar., 25 Mar. p.2, 2 May p.3 1892). The coverage continued after the close season, including another match against the YMCA (10–0) (2 Nov. 1892, p.3). When the next season got underway, the supportive coverage continued: on 2 and 3 November the *Herald* announced and then reported on a match between a new British club, Standard A. C., and La Ligue de l’Education Physique, which it described as the first international Association football match. There follows in November contact details of this new club, and news of a General Meeting and a future match, plus news of social contacts, Standard being invited to a Rovers Smoking Concert and a future club match (2,3, 19 Nov. 1892, 3 Dec. 1892). Another opponent appeared, Galignani,

later described as the Press Club, with mainly British players. To cut a long story short, the Club français entered the arena in January 1893, played against the British clubs, gradually improving up to their level, and very quickly, as the *Herald* reports, football in France took off.

As described above, what happened is that the *Herald*, functioning as a small local newspaper, helped a social network develop to bring together incomers and locals with a new shared interest held together by (male) sociability, and helped them integrate with an existing official organisation. The three main clubs were supported by the *Herald* in their initially unsuccessful attempts to join the major French sports federation, the USFSA, which had hitherto shunned Association football because of its professional links in the UK. However, by spring 1895, at the end of the second season of an organized competition, the *Herald*’s owner donated the first-ever French football trophy – in solid silver and, in shape, somewhat reminiscent of the English FA Cup.

Such was the rapid development of the sport in numbers of clubs and matches that the USFSA was quickly forced to recognise association football clubs. The association code was strongly supported by the *Herald* and quickly advanced by the end of the 1895 season to having eight clubs entering its championship, with only four for the rugby equivalent. By 1900 there was an undisputed USFSA football champion of France, 200 teams playing regularly in the Paris area alone (Hare, 2015), and Le Club français had been chosen to represent France in the international competition at the

Paris Exposition universelle.³ By 1904 most French regions had their own league and at the end of the season the regional champions played in the knockout phase of the Championnat de France to decide the overall national club champion. While appearing at the beginning of the Herald's interest in football in Paris very much like a local affair, nonetheless, in view of what happened later with motor sport and what was already happening with yachting for example, there is an argument for seeing that what interested Bennett and his newspaper in football from a very early stage was the possibility that, with the right support at the right time, it could grow not only into a national sport in France, but also one played between nations.

The *Herald* was not the only newspaper covering football in Paris in the sport's early development in France, from mere kick-about at the beginning of the 1890s⁴ to an organized national game. It did however play a crucial role, from the off, in the importation into France of modern football and has until recently been relatively ignored as a source by sports historians, particularly regarding the role of the British clubs and their officials in Paris in the development of football as a middle-class game. The original British players were generally associated with the British business community and the consular and diplomatic services.

The *Herald* and international sport

Just as James Gordon Bennett Jr., as Commodore of the New York Yacht Club, had involved himself in the

³ 'International football', *NYHE*, Sept. 16, 1900, 3, & Sept., 19, 6. The sports competitions organised in the context of the Paris Universal Exhibition are now generally accepted as being part of the second modern Olympic Games.

early 1870s in the organization of the first defences of the America's Cup, using ocean-going yachting to improve diplomatic relations between America and Britain, we see too in the 1880s and 1890s the *Paris Herald* showing an interest in international sporting encounters, between 1893 and 1897 talking up the Easter visits by Marylebone F.C. and then Folkestone F.C to Paris to play against combined Paris teams as "international matches". The paper even published in 1900 (Oct. 5, p.3) a picture of Miss Margaret Abbott of the Chicago Golf Club, as winner of the Ladies International Championship held at Compiègne as part of the Exposition universelle. However, the international competitions that Bennett and the *Herald* are most remembered for and which were most significant in setting up a model for international sports and their governance were the Gordon Bennett International Automobile Cup Races (1900-1905), followed by the Gordon Bennett International Cup Races for lighter-than-air Balloons (1906 onwards) and the Gordon Bennett International Air Speed Cup Races starting at the Grande Semaine d'Aviation de Reims-Champagne in 1909. Bennett's sponsorship and the *Herald's* coverage of these competitions linked sporting modernity with international media culture and all their newest associated communications technologies (rotary print, Morse's telegraph, transatlantic cable, Marconi's wireless communication). Bennett, with his family origins in Scotland, brought up between the nineteenth century American dream of individual freedom and democracy and French republican values of liberty, equality and fraternity, lived his life among social groups most able to feel and believe in progress,

⁴ 'International football', *NYHE*, Sept. 19, 1900, & Sept. 21, Sept. 23, 5, Sept. 24, 2.

both social and technological. On the threshold of the twentieth century, the *Herald* and its internationally mobile, leisure-rich audience, with their cosmopolitan life style and values, were best able to participate in the century's new relationship to time and space, to speed and mobility.

It was the annual Gordon Bennett races – as they are commonly remembered in the English-speaking world, especially after the tipping point in popularity represented by the 1903 race in Ireland, when the major nations of France, Britain, Germany and America all entered cars – that made Bennett Junior's name in relation to motor sport, and that best represent the link between modern sport, the press and technological progress. In the twelve months preceding the 1900 race, when Bennett was planning the competition and negotiating with manufacturers and national automobile clubs, the *Paris Herald* featured a large variety of articles on the industry and sport of "automobilism" up to a photograph of the winning car on June 13, p.1.⁵ The annual races, initially tagging onto pre-arranged city-to-city road races (Paris-Lyon, Paris-Bordeaux and Paris-Vienna), moved to a closed circuit race in Ireland and from 1904 onto specially built racetracks in Germany and France. Three cars could be entered per manufacturing nation, chosen by each nation's Automobile Club, with the venue and organization being the responsibility of the Automobile Club of the previous year's winner, starting in 1900 in France. The cars had to be built to specifications including a weight restriction, with all parts including spare parts being made in the manufacturer's country.

⁵ See for example: 'The future of automobilism' – full page interview with the president of the Automobile-Club de France (7 March, 1900, 3);

Each competing team was composed of a car, a driver, a mechanic (also riding in the car) and a manufacturer. The driver alone could be brought in from a different country.

The international success of the races by 1906 was such that French manufacturers (the most numerous and successful in Europe), having won the trophy three times successively, were able to lean on the French Automobile Club to retire the (in their eyes) restrictive Gordon Bennett Cup formula and invent Grand Prix racing, with no such limit per nation. Nonetheless the Gordon Bennett races can be recognised as a key stage towards today's Formula 1 motor racing. In 1906 Bennett and the *Herald* set up a biennial international lighter-than-air balloon race for the Gordon Bennett Cup, which is still competed for in the twenty-first century. And in 1908 came the international Gordon Bennett Cup for air-speed racing, with the same aim of using the press to sponsor and publicise international competitions to pit nation against nation in the development of the latest technology of motorised transport, man allied to (flying) machine at the cutting edge of industrial progress. While there were other flying disciplines in the celebrated 1908 Rheims aeronautical week, it is no accident that Bennett and the *Herald* offered the cup in the speed event, and that prize and cup were the most valuable of the week.

A further key aspect of the *Herald's* relationship with sport is that Bennett did not burden the newspaper with any organisational role following the provision of a

'Automobilism in France, its birth and progress' – full page article (19 March 1900, p.5); and Dauncey & Hare (2010.)

trophy. He used the challenge-cup notion to establish a model for sports governance at the international level. The cup came to define the competition, which became a permanent fixture in the sporting calendar, since it was to be put up each successive year to be competed for. The newspaper chose a national club or an existing federation to be responsible for the organization of the competition, the next step being an international confederation for a given sport. In aeronautical sport the Aéro-club de France (AÉCF) came into being in 1898, with an international federation created in Paris in 1905 as the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI). Bennett's largesse in encouraging annual international competitions from 1906 to 1913 gave this new international sports governing body a solid base.

The audience for sport and the *Herald's* audience

The *Herald's* new international audience was a motivating factor in the increasing internationalisation of print culture. Its transnational lifestyle had leisure, recreation and sport at its centre. The *Herald's* owner and director was anxious to be recognized as a part of this new cosmopolitan social class, whose point of convergence was Europe. Sport had, of course, been at the centre of his life from the early days of his return to New York from Paris. His victory in the Great Ocean Race of 1867, had brought him not only the respect of his father, but also international recognition, and social status in New York. But he appeared to have thrown this away in the great society scandal of 1877. However, covering the comings and goings of this internationally mobile elite in the *Herald*, made up as it was of new

American money and old European aristocratic values, indeed making it conscious of itself as a new social class, for whom the term 'life-style' might have been invented, gave Bennett a *laissez-passer* to its core activities. Through his own international sailing successes, he was welcome on board the flagship of the American fleet in the Mediterranean; he also sailed in regattas against J.P. Morgan, the Goelets, the Kaiser, and the Prince of Wales, who presented him to Queen Victoria. The valuable sporting trophies from Tiffany's he donated brought the gratin of American and European society together on the Riviera, where he lavishly entertained them on board his huge luxury yachts. If only a tiny fraction of the *Herald's* Belle-Époque readership ever tasted breakfast milk from the cows kept for that purpose on Bennett's steam yacht *Lysistrata*, they were happy enough to buy the paper to read about and copy the fashions, recreations and sports of this celebrity fast set on their liners, trains, and yachts, and to consume the *Herald's* international news – until the Great War intervened.

After the Great War: The Interwar years and beyond

After the death of Gordon Bennett Jr. in May 1918, and after the end of the Great War, the *New York Herald European Edition*, which would later – well after Bennett's death – be called the *New York Herald Tribune European Edition* (1935)⁶, continued to be interested in sport. Taking the inter-war years as a case study, we are currently investigating how the newspaper's perspectives on sport changed, during the troubled years in France and Europe of the 1920s and 1930s.

⁶ From 20 May 1924 it had sported the sub-title European Edition of the New York Herald Tribune, until the change of main title on 1st September 1935.

Preliminary findings from a survey of the database for 1919–1940 indicate that direct involvement in the actual stimulus of sport waned somewhat, but that reporting and editorial/opinion comment on sport in general and on specific sporting events remained a significant, and even growing element of the newspaper's content and column inches. Such a shift in emphasis in terms of both the overall 'policy' of the newspaper and in terms of the editorial choices was doubtless to be expected as a natural consequence of Bennett's strategy in the previous period: the active setting up of competitions in earlier decades was now replaced with an arguably more 'passive' role of comment and analysis. In this sense, at least, the *European Edition of the New York Herald/Herald Tribune* became more like other general newspapers of the time, accompanying rather than fostering the development of sporting activities of all kinds. The 1920s and 1930s were decades in which French society, economics, politics and culture continued their passion for sport – initially in reaction to the dearth of sport that had been brought about by the years of conflict – during the *Années Folles* of the 1920s, and subsequently during the troubled 1930s, when socioeconomic hardship and political troubles helped create a huge audience in search of distraction through what was known – often pejoratively – as 'le sport-spectacle'. In such a context of burgeoning sport, of the maturity of the competitions it had itself helped to launch, and of unease in some quarters about the moral dissipation from professional sport organised as spectacle and distracting citizens through passion, betting and other vices, it is perhaps not too surprising that the *Herald* took a step back from its more inventive role of before the Great War.

Before the War, from 1887 onwards, Bennett's newspaper had been part of an overall 'model' of relationships between sport, the written press and the sporting goods industries that had been shared by many newspapers, from the very early days of cycling – say – in the 1870s, and for many other sports. Before 1914, the *Herald European Edition* was a stakeholder in this sports-media-industrial complex, but it was a player with ambitions and motivations that differed from those of its colleagues in the press. Much of the motivation behind the drive from the French press to create and report on sports came from competition over readership, and the desire to sell as many copies on a daily basis as possible. Some newspapers were entirely predicated upon sport, such as *Le Vélo* (1892–1904) under Pierre Giffard and *L'Auto* (1900–1946) run by Henri Desgrange, the precursor to *L'Equipe* (1946–) and created, organised and reported sports events, exemplified by the Tour de France launched in 1903 by Desgrange. Other generalist dailies, such as the famous *Le Petit Journal*, were instrumental in launching popular events in professional cycling, pigeon-racing, walking and so on, and more latterly automobile races, but the *Herald* was somewhat singular in its focus on amateur and elite sports. This role of instigator shifted significantly after 1914–18 towards a more 'neutral' reporting role concentrating on coverage of sports in the US, competitions of international significance, and more 'local' French competitions. To take an illustration from baseball, we find an amusing counterpoint in a report of the first US major-league no-hit-no-run game of the 1935 season, plus full results and standings, side-by-side with jocular comments, in the "Sporting Gossip" column (still running), on the line-ups and venue (Stade de la Marche, Garches-Vaucresson, in the Paris banlieue) for

the up-coming baseball game between the Coca-Cola Kids, run by Harry of the New York Bar, and “the Johnny’s White Horse team” at the Annual Outing of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (Monday, September 7th, 1935 issue, p.6).

The *IHT* archive contains precious resources for studying the newspaper's policy towards sports reporting in the inter-war years and during the golden years of France's 'thirty glorious' years of growth and posterity between 1945 and the mid-1970s, and beyond, and it is to be hoped that we and other researchers will avail ourselves of this data in order to further our understanding of how an international newspaper has fostered interest in and understanding of sport over more than a century.

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