

‘Too grandiose, too complicated and too over-organised’

New Zealand anti-Olympism and the embrace of the British Empire Games during the inter-war years

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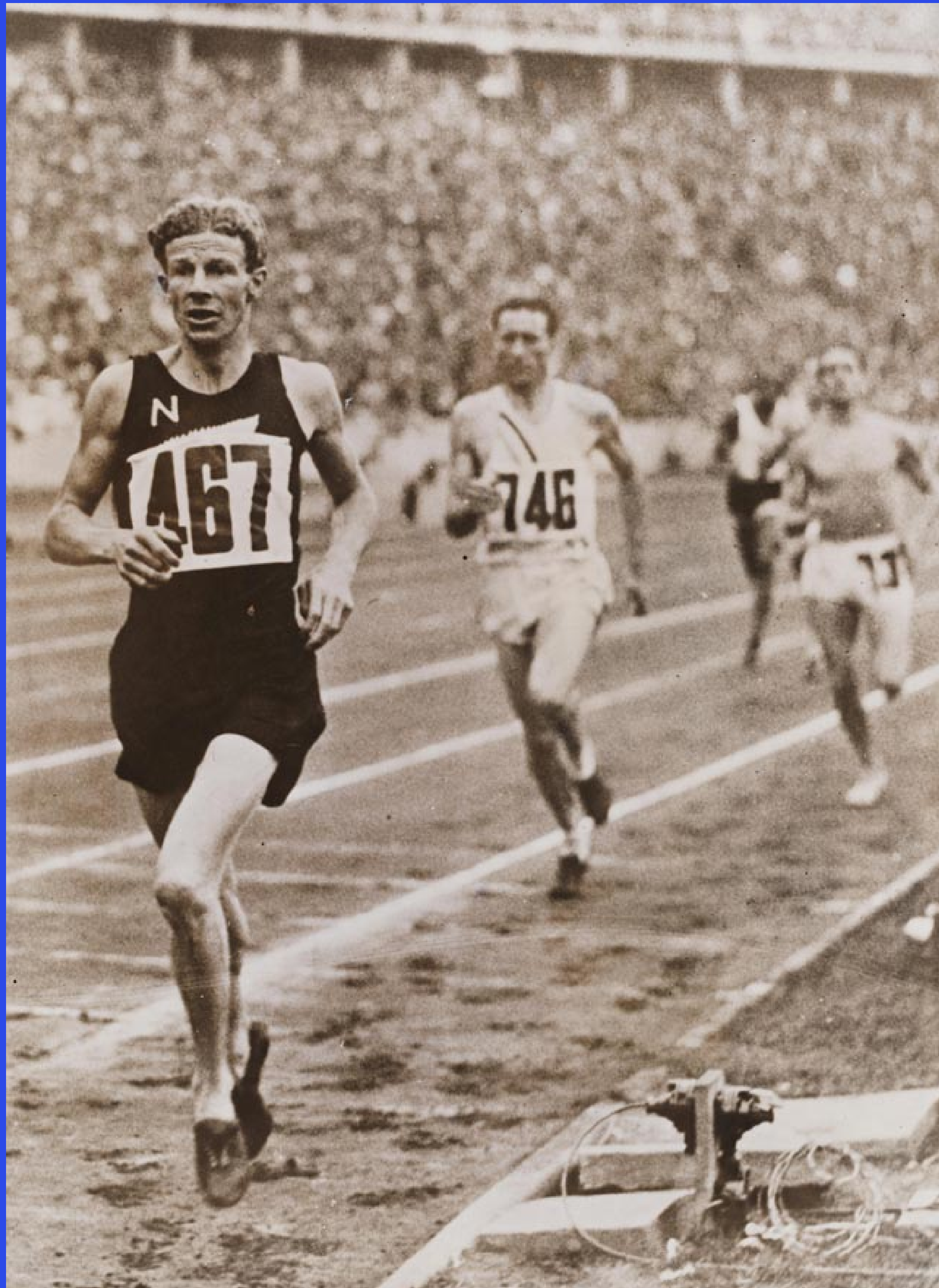


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‘Tom Watson’ wins
bronze medal in
100m, Paris 1924





Jack Lovelock, gold medal,
1500m, Berlin, 1936



At this time of day, we think, we may describe the common, belief that sport greases the machinery of international relations as a delusion. International sport undoubtedly assists to make nations know each other better, and to realise that they are all very much alike, but better acquaintance between nations, as between individuals, by no means necessarily makes for friendship.

‘The more I see of men’, someone has said, ‘the more I like dogs.’ It is a matter of recorded fact that the last Olympic Games left a great deal of ill-will behind them, and New Zealanders are not likely to have forgotten the bitterness which accompanied the last two series of fights for the Ashes.

The Press, 23 March 1922, 6



Responding to *The Times*, 22 July 1924

To count those activities mere games which threaten the peace of the world amounts, clearly to taking our pleasures recklessly.... [T]hese pageants are not what we supposed, gatherings of chivalry, but Armageddons in miniature or in preparation, to which simple Englishmen are lured by sharp-toothed. Frenchmen, for the settling of ancient scores. Either that, or we must suppose that the world has learnt nothing, and forgotten a great deal, in two thousand years. The Greeks, we were told at school, stopped their internecine wars to get on with their games. We stop our peace-making to work off our rages in a stadium

The Press, 24 July 1924, 8



VIII^e OLYMPIADE



• JEVX OLYMPIQVES •

○ PARIS 1924 ○

The Olympic festival in Paris had very disappointing results in so far as the hopes of its promoters went that by friendly rivalry in sport it would be possible to bind together the youth of all nations in a close brotherhood that would serve to eliminate international animosities. The contrary proved to be the case. The games, in practice, served to inflame animosities rather than to allay them.

Poverty Bay Herald, 10 September 1924, 4



There was very much dissatisfaction with the I.O.C., and the executives of the various sports federations. Britishers have made a mistake in allowing the games to be run by the Continentals, who have neither the ability nor the experience to do so. Steps are being taken to have the matter righted. Unless something is done to have a stronger hold on these bodies it is only a matter of time before there will be no more Olympiads.



Harry Amos, New Zealand team manager
Evening Post, 27 September 1928, 6



It seems to me that we are now experiencing some of the troubles that contributed to the cessation of the original games. At first there was only one short foot race, then other events were added to make up a full day's programme. Before many years had passed, chariot races appeared to attract the wealthy, and finally it took several days to decide the various events. Originally the prize was a wreath of olives, but as time went on, this was supplemented by money grants. So far did the games begin to drift from the old ideals that Plato and Socrates denounced them in public. The games conceived in a spirit of religious purity, became the victim of corrupt professionalism.

Unless the International Olympic Committee is prepared to face the situation boldly and to reduce very significantly the present programme, I see little hope of the permanent continuance of the Olympic Games.





Those who fear that the success of the Olympic games might be jeopardised need not be alarmed. Those games take place every four years, and an Imperial Olympiad might very well lie organised for alternate years apart from them. Indeed, it has been argued that the Imperial meeting might assist the Olympic games. But, in view of the emergence of unpleasantness at those games, because of the very wide range of nationalities represented in them, it would seem to be better to concentrate on competitions of somewhat narrower racial range for a time.

New Zealand Herald, 6 January 1930, 8



Bond for Members of New Zealand Empire Games team, 1934

'I undertake –

- a. To play the game for the game's sake.
- b. To remember that I am competing for my country and not for myself.
- c. To carry out all instructions without question or criticism.
- d. To accept the decisions of the referee absolutely.
- e. To win without swank and to lose without grousing.
- f. To lose rather than do anything which is not fair.'



In many parts of Europe sport among the people is a growth of the last few years, with the result that both competitors and spectators have yet to be educated in the finer points of appreciation and participation.

Jack Lovelock, in *Growing Opinions*, 1935

[A]s I feel towards the game these days it is rather impossible that I shall compete for another season.... Big competitive sport on this side of the world has become such a specialised game that it is almost a whole time job, and it is certainly incompatible with medical work.

Jack Lovelock to Harry Amos, 19 July 1936

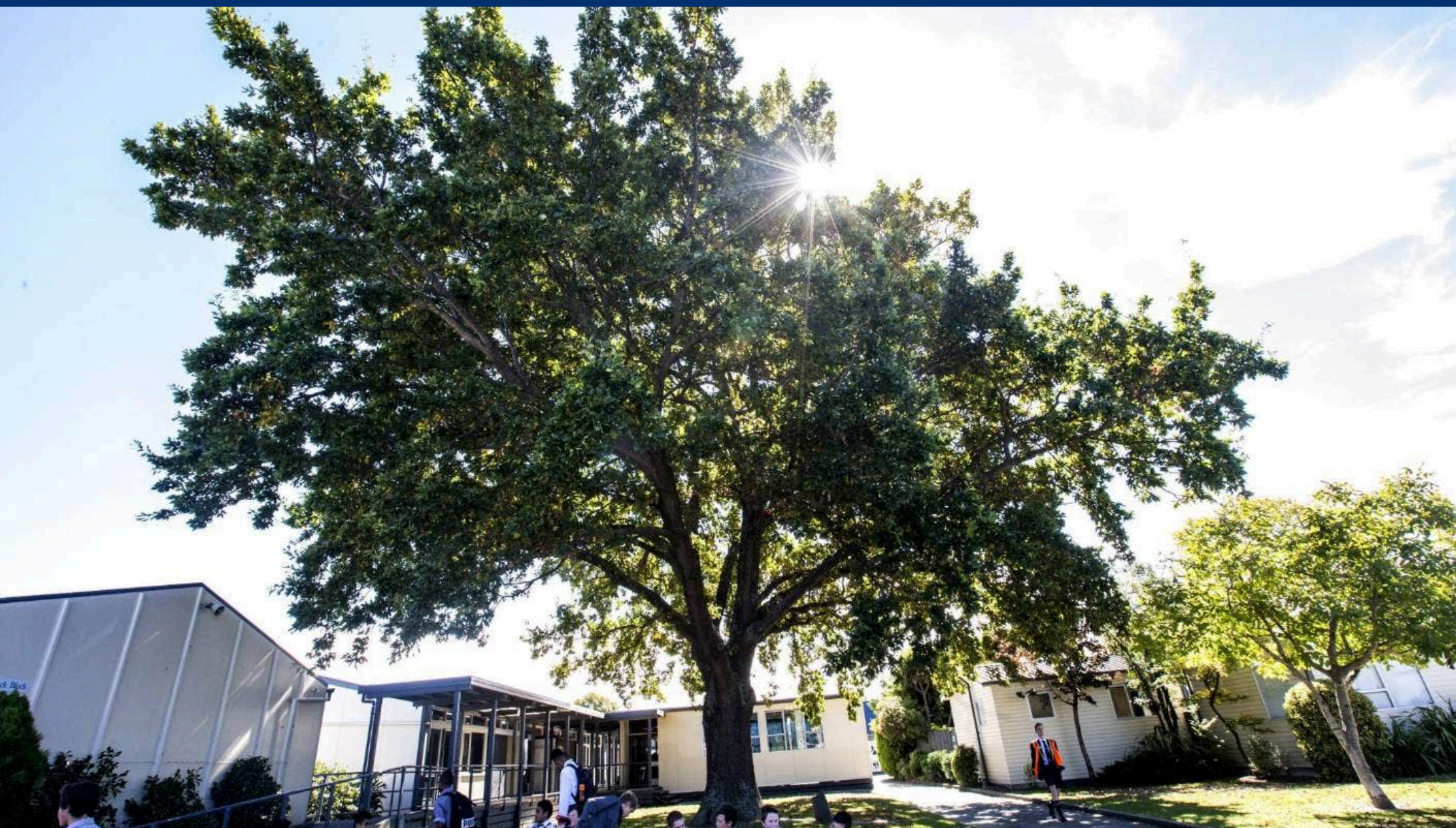




- Remove 'games' as opposed to 'sports'
- Exclude women

I would take the Games to some little country which would not attempt to outdo other countries," said Lovelock. "Only thus could we get back to a proper realisation of the spirit of the games.

Jack Lovelock, 18 August 1936





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