

David Connolly Hall, MD: RI's First Olympic Winner in Paris 1900 Games

Games return to Paris in 2024

MARY KORR
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

In the Olympic Games, seconds – and in this case, perhaps a shoe – matter.

DAVID CONNOLLY HALL, MD,

Brown 1901 alumnus, was the first in Rhode Island to win an Olympic medal, as a track and field competitor during the 1900 Paris Games. The *Jeux Olympiques* were part of a Universal Exposition which celebrated a new century and heralded the modern era. After 1900, Paris again hosted the Olympic Games in 1924 and this summer will host its third Olympiad.

In the 1900 games, Hall was primed for the Gold. In the semi-final heat he set the Olympic record for 1:59:0 in the 800-meter race. But in the finals at the halfway mark a competitor stepped on the heel of Hall's shoe, and off it flew. Hall won the Bronze at 2:03.8, behind Silver medalist John Cregan (US) at 2:03:0, and Gold medalist Alfred Tysoe (UK) at 2:01.2.

As a footnote, the ancient Olympians ran barefoot before running sandals, which increased traction and forward propulsion, became the norm. Throughout his long life, Dr. Hall witnessed the evolution of running shoes, from the 1900 leather and spiked shoe which flew off his foot, to the introduction of the rubber-soled "sneaker" and later iterations.

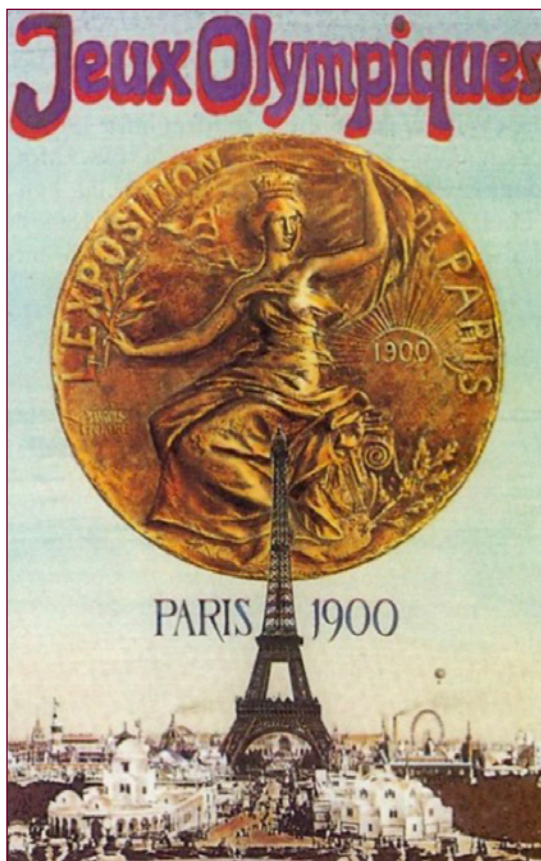
What brings Dr. Hall's story to mind is the return of the summer games to Paris this year, and the recently released movie, *The Boys in the Boat*, directed by George Clooney, and the book on which it was based, by Daniel James Brown.

The book and film capture the true grit and resilience of a band of underdog junior varsity rowers at the University of Washington (UW) in Seattle, who, against all odds, won the Gold in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, under the grueling eyes of Hitler and the Nazis.

No doubt Olympian Dr. Hall celebrated the 1936 victory as only a former champion could – in fact, probably on the spot, as a UW faculty member.



David Connolly Hall during his Brown running days, photo circa 1898–1901. Hall was a 2004 inductee into the RI Heritage Hall of Fame. [RI HERITAGE HALL OF FAME]



Poster of the Paris 1900 Olympic Games, which were part of the Universal Exposition or World's Fair, held over a period of five months. [WIKIMEDIA, IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN]

Background

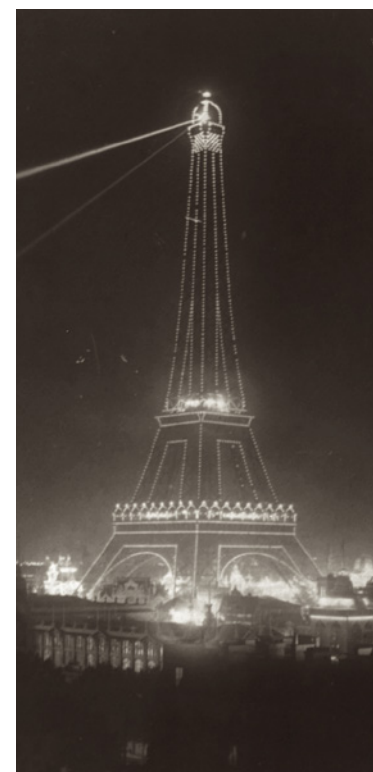
Born in 1875 in Quebec, David Connolly Hall was the only son of Irish immigrant

John Marveau Hall, and his wife, Ellen Augusta Thornton, of New York, whose great-grandfather was a Rhode Islander. At Brown, Hall was a star track and field athlete and was Brown's team captain from 1899–1901. Hall was also a two-time New England champion, and set a national record in the half-mile run.

Upon graduation, he earned a ScM degree from the University of Chicago in 1903, and then an MD from Rush Medical College in Chicago in 1907. In 1908, he took a position at UW as director of physical training and professor of hygiene. Dr. Hall and his wife, Katherine, raised their three children here and spent leisure time mountaineering.

Eiffel Tower illuminated at the Paris Exposition, 1900.

[LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLIAM H. RAU]



His tenure was interrupted during World War I, when he served as a Lt. Col. in charge of an ambulance corps stationed on the Italian frontlines in 1918. Returning after the war to UW, he ultimately became its director of student health services. The David C. Hall Health Center on campus is named in his honor.

Dr. Hall passed away in Seattle in 1972, at the age of 97, after a long life of accomplishments – athletic, medical, civic – and, like the ancient Olympians, competing (half) shoeless to cross the Olympic finish line. ❖



Runners at the Paris 1900 Olympic games. [PINTEREST/NZ, IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN]

At the Bois de Boulogne in Paris, July 16th, 1900, 800-meter winner Alfred Tysoe of Great Britain crosses the finish line to win the Gold.

[WIKIMEDIA, OLYMPEDIA, IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN]