

ATHLETICS

WORLD-FAMED WRESTLERS.

GOTCH MAY RE-APPEAR.

HACKENSCHMIDT AGAIN HOPEFUL.

The meeting some months back between the world-famed wrestlers, Frank Gotch, the American, and George Hackenschmidt, the "Russian Lion," ended so convincingly in favour of the former as to set at rest all doubts as to the champion wrestler of the world. On that occasion, Hackenschmidt, whose aim in life appeared to be to have an opportunity of endeavouring to wipe out the defeat he sustained at the hands of Gotch when the pair first met in Chicago several years back, made a poor showing compared to his previous efforts against the big American, and so completely did he collapse in the Iowa wrestler's embrace that those at the ringside could hardly believe their eyes. Gotch's deadly toe-hold, of course, played a prominent part in the match, but even so, Hackenschmidt gave but a glimpse of his former self in his vain attempts to measure skill with the burly American. The Russian's explanation of his feeble showing was that he was suffering from an injured knee sustained just fifteen days before the match, whilst wrestling with Dr. Roller. That, however, did not alter the fact that the title was retained by Frank Gotch, and he was heralded on all sides as the invincible world's champion wrestler. Indeed, so easily did he account for Hackenschmidt that many of the leading judges aver that Gotch is the best all-round wrestler the world has ever known. This is a flattering comment to make when it is considered the Iowa athlete emerged from a lengthy retirement with a view to specially giving Hackenschmidt a return match, and unlike the majority of athletes—who find the task of "coming back" beyond their capabilities—he demonstrated conclusively that he had lost none of his strength, skill and speed on the mat, the unanimous opinion being that he was in better wrestling trim than even when he met Hackenschmidt the second time.

With his match against the "Russian Lion" over Gotch declared that he was through with the wrestling game, his connection with which has made him a comparatively wealthy man. He has since been repeatedly challenged by aspirants for wrestling honours, but has met all with a deaf ear. Of the wrestlers who are at present in the limelight, Gotch considers Yusef Mahmout the Turk, is the greatest of all, but the fact that the latter has had a defeat registered against him by the world's champion plainly shows the Iowa athlete's undoubted superiority at the grappling game. Zybsco has persistently demanded a match with Gotch since the latter vanquished Hackenschmidt for the second time, but as Gotch had decided to remain firm in his avowal of retirement he refused to entertain the idea of another match. As is nearly always the case with a great athlete who decides to quit his profession, no end of pressure was brought to bear upon Gotch with the object of making him cast aside his resolution and re-enter the wrestling arena in defence of his title. Gotch, however, appeared to have settled down in retirement, until Zybsco's repeated challenges succeeded in making the champion take the first step that may lead to his re-appearance in contests at no distant date, Gotch having notified Zybsco that he will wrestle him provided Zybsco defeats Mahmout first. Although Zybsco will probably find Mahmout a superior wrestler to himself, Gotch's announcement can be taken as an indication that he has not done with the wrestling game just at present, and the return to the mat of so remarkable an athlete is likely to be attended with many interesting developments in the wrestling world.

One result of Gotch's return to the wrestling arena will be a third match between the champion and George Hackenschmidt. The latter who is at present in England whither he specially journeyed to receive a course of treatment to the torn ligaments of his left knee, the external semi-lunar car-

tilage of which was also injured, has not by any means accepted his defeat by Gotch as final. He states that it is the great ambition of his life to beat Frank Gotch, and he is certain he will do it if he has health and strength. "I'm game for another try," said Hack' to a London interviewer early this year, "and Gotch, if he beats me then, can take all the gate money and the picture rights as well. I am not afraid of Gotch: I never was."

Hackenschmidt says that his last defeat well-nigh broke his heart, so much had he set his heart on winning. The training expenses for the match cost Hack £700, for not only did he have Dr Roller and Zybsco as wrestling partners but a number of other leading wrestlers were in attendance at his training camp. When he left England for America, the scene of the combat, the "Russian Lion" was stronger in mind and body than he had ever been before, and he felt, as expressed in his own words "like a giant refreshed with new wine." On arrival in America he injured his knee a fortnight before the match, and he immediately told Jack Curley, who had a large sum of money at stake, that it was all up, and he knew it, and that was the reason he made them cry all bets off.

How bitter that beating in the return match was to Hackenschmidt can well be imagined by those who knew that it was the Russian's one great desire in life to turn the tables on the man who resorted to such questionable tactics in order to gain the decision at Chicago on the occasion of their first meeting. Even during his visit to Auckland Hackenschmidt made no secret of the fact that he counted on fulfilling one great mission, and that was to defeat Gotch, and with that task accomplished he would then be able to bid adieu to the wrestling arena after putting the seal of success on one of the most remarkable careers that ever fell to the lot of any athlete.

In conclusion it is interesting to note Hackenschmidt's reference to his last match when lately speaking to an English interviewer:—

"That second defeat by one to whom I felt and still feel, superior was very hard to bear. It was not the actual defeat; it was the thought of the keen disappointment of all my friends in England and elsewhere who believed in me and expected me to win. I did not come to London, but went straight to the Continent, for I could not face the music in England. But I can face it now, because I believe I shall get my own back yet, and I mean to do it."

THE 1912 OLYMPIC GAMES.

DOMINION'S SCANT REPRESENTATION.

OTHER COUNTRIES' ENTHUSIASM.

It is impossible to view New Zealand's representation at the 1912 Olympic Games at Stockholm in anything but a disappointing light, for all prospects of getting-together a strong team of athletes to represent the Dominion have now been shattered. The increased interest displayed by the various countries who intend sending representatives to this year's international sports has been most marked during the past couple of months, Great Britain, America, Japan, Hungary, and Germany having been particularly busy in their endeavours to secure the best representation possible. Under these circumstances it is all the more regrettable that New Zealand is to be worse off on the score of representative athletes than was the case last year, G. N. Hill, long-distance runner and A. F. Wilding, tennis champion, being the only two representatives chosen by the New Zealand Olympic Council to do battle for the Dominion at the Games in June and July next, for it is improbable Malcolm Champion, of Auckland, will make the trip to compete in the swimming events. Summed up, the position is that Hill will be our sole representative in athletics, for but little interest is attached to the tennis championship, which claims the Dominion's other representative. New Zealand's poor representation can safely be accepted as a general lack of interest in athletics

in this country, for there is no gain-saying the fact that there is plenty of good material still to be found competing at our athletic gatherings. Such fine athletes as G. P. Kedell (Southland), R. Opie (Canterbury), H. Kerr (Wellington), W. F. Harding (Hawke's Bay), and W. Woodger (Wellington) are capable of upholding the athletic prestige of any country. These men have been communicated with by the New Zealand Olympic Committee, Kedell replying that he was unable to make the trip to Sweden, Kerr and Harding failing to reply, and Opie stating his inability to give a definite reply. In the case of Woodger the Council deemed it best not to send him.

It is thus seen that the New Zealand Olympic Council are in no way to blame for the unsatisfactory state of affairs which prevails regarding the Dominion receiving proper athletic representation at the Games. This body have done all in their power to cope with a most difficult situation, for, with limited funds at their disposal, combined with the fact that they received practically no co-operation from the athletes themselves, they have been greatly handicapped in carrying out their duties. It is therefore little wonder that the Council have deemed it fit to send but one representative to Sweden, and even in the case of this athlete it is no secret that the funds in hand fall short of the amount required to pay the expenses of the trip. At the time of writing there is still a shortage of the necessary funds, but it is confidently anticipated the sum required will be forthcoming, and Hill will leave for Sydney to catch the Osterley Grange for London. The Australian representatives will proceed to London by the same steamer, and will on arrival on English soil join forces with the British team for Stockholm. Hill will undergo a special preparation for the 1500 and 5000 metres events, and should arrive in Sweden in excellent form for his engagements.

As mentioned in a preceding paragraph, New Zealanders have only themselves to thank for the absence of a strong team to do battle for them at this year's Games, so trivial an interest have they taken in the matter of having the Dominion properly represented. The whole success of athletics in New Zealand lies in the patronage accorded sports meetings by the public, and we regret to have to say that, though some of the best athletic carnivals on record have been held in the various provincial centres during the past few months, the attendances have been of a most discouraging nature. Athletic bodies in New Zealand are faced with a difficult problem so far as attracting the public is concerned, and it is a well-known fact that one "star" event on a programme will go further towards ensuring a good attendance than all the rest of the events together. Until the real worth of athletics appeals more strongly to the average New Zealander we cannot expect the fame of our runners to spread abroad, and in being poorly represented at the world's greatest athletic carnival a good opportunity of gaining further laurels in the field of sport is thus lost.

Whilst on the subject of this year's Olympic Games it is worthy of note that Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa will not, as at previous carnivals, compete as individual nations, but will enter the Olympiad as one team under the title of "the British Empire

team." This is all the more reason why New Zealand should have sent a strong contingent of athletes to unite with the Britishers, and thus assist Great Britain in making a bold bid for athletic supremacy against the other nations of the earth. America intends to send a team of 150 men to compete in events, and as the Americans carried off the palm at Athens in 1896, again in Paris in 1900, St. Louis in 1904, and London in 1908, they are naturally looking forward to wide success at this year's Olympiad. Germany will be very strongly represented this year, especially in the field games and jumping departments. Hungary will also be well represented, for whereas the Hungarian team for the Olympic Games in London in 1908 numbered 40, the team for Stockholm will be 130, composed as follows:—Football 17, shooting 8 to 10, swimming 12, athletics 20, wrestling 12, fencing 12, lawn tennis 5, gymnastics 22, rowing 13, and cycling 6. The Hungarian Government has contributed 4800 kroner towards the expenses of the competitors. Japan intends to guard her laurels at this year's Olympic Games, in which Japanese representatives will compete for the first time. The Japanese are reported to have some remarkable long-distance runners in their team, Snize Kanakuri, who is credited with time over a Marathon course (25 miles) which has only been eclipsed by Tom Longboat, being looked to to give a great account of himself in the Marathon race.

The State Cabinet of Victoria evidently does not believe in the encouragement of athletics, for it has refused to contribute funds to send a team of athletes to the Olympic Games. The New South Wales Ministry, however, showed a more generous spirit, donating a sum of £500.

This year's Five Miles Cross-Country championship will be decided at Wellington, the winter event being allotted to the different centres annually. The 1911 cross-country race, it will be remembered, was run in Auckland and was won easily by G. N. Hill. Owing to his trip to the Olympic Games, Hill will not be a competitor in the event this year.

Commenting on the Auckland Amateur and Cycle Club's action in nominating A. A. Dormor as one of the New Zealand representatives for the Olympic Games the "Otago Witness" says:—There is a suggestion to send Dormor, of Auckland, to the Olympic Games. This youth is the one "discovery" of the season of 1911-12. He has put up several good times in half-mile races, and won the quarter and half-mile races at the recent N.Z. championships at Invercargill. Dormor set the seal to his New Zealand fame on Saturday by running a half-mile at the Auckland Amateur Athletic Club's meeting in 1min 58 1-5sec (equalling Hector Burk's New Zealand record). Still, this performance is not good enough to justify his being sent to compete at the Olympic Games. Even allowing that Dormor can improve on this, Australia has unearthed a half-miler who the other day at the Victorian championships did 1min 56 3-10sec, beating Wheatley's Australasian best of 1min 56 3-4sec. If Australasia is to be represented in the half-mile at Stockholm, Watson, the new Victorian champion, is the man who should be sent.

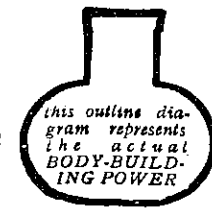
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