

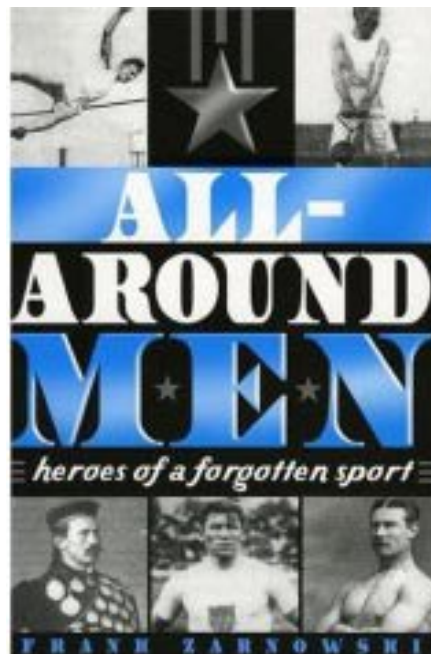
## Frank Zarnowski

The 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games were noteworthy for many things, not least because athletes competed in the decathlon for the first time. (Jim Thorpe, of course, was the run-away winner.) But before the advent of the decathlon, another ten-event competition, known as the “all-around,” was a popular track and field event.

First held in 1884, the all-around comprised (in order) the 100-yard sprint, the shot put, the high jump, the 800-yard walk, the hammer throw, the pole vault, the 120-yard hurdles, the 56-pound weight throw, the long jump, and the mile run. Unlike the two-day decathlon, all-arounders completed the event in one day.

In his new book, “All-Around Men: Heroes of a Forgotten Sport” (Scarecrow Press), Mount St. Mary’s University professor of economics Frank Zarnowski details this brief, but important, chapter in U.S. track and field history. A decathlon scholar and a color commentator for NBC on the network’s Olympic coverage, Zarnowski spent nearly a decade researching the book. He scoured 19th Century magazines, visited the families of former all-around champions, and dug into the early histories of local athletic clubs.

In the book, Zarnowski profiles champions of the all-around from the 19th and early 20th centuries, including the likes of Donald Dinnie (one of the first professional sports stars); George Goldie (credited with inventing the



rowing machine); the Thomson brothers (stars at Occidental College); pole vaulter Bob Richards (known as the “Vaulting Vicar”); and even Thorpe himself, who shattered the all-around points record at a competition following the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games.

Zarnowski writes that Thorpe’s decathlon triumph “spelled the death knell of the all-around.” Today, the decathlon is considered one of sports’ glamour events. Its Olympic champions, including Bob Mathias, Rafer Johnson, Bruce Jenner and Daley Thompson, are hailed as the world’s greatest athletes. As for the all-around, it made a brief comeback after World War II before disappearing in 1977, when the Amateur Athletic Union sanctioned its last national all-around competition.

Recently, SportsLetter spoke with Zarnowski, who runs the Decathlon Association, by phone from his office in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

— David Davis

**SportsLetter:** How did you get interested in the subject of the all-around?

**Frank Zarnowski:** I’m a decathlon scholar. My goal in publishing is to have a complete record of the decathlon, including biographical and statistical data. In my effort to track down where the decathlon came from, I ran across the all-around event. I kept tracing it back, and tracing it back, and pretty soon I’m back to the Civil War.

The impression a lot of people have is that the decathlon started with Jim Thorpe winning the gold medal at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics. In one sense it did, but there was a two-generation history of combined events before Jim Thorpe won the decathlon. All these great champions of the all-around--their names have fallen through the cracks.

**SL:** You trace the origins of American track and field competition to the large number of Scots who immigrated to the U.S. in the 19th century. What was the role of local Caledonian clubs in America and how would you describe the Caledonian Games?

**FZ:** The Scots emigrated all over the English-speaking world, but many of them came to the U.S. and Canada. The Caledonian clubs were designed to promote and retain the culture of emigrated Scots. Every significant town had a Caledonian club. What they did annually was to have a festival, or fair, where they brought out the kilts and played the bagpipes and did a lot of Scottish dancing. They also continued to practice what they called the national games--what we called the Caledonian games. Much of that was throwing heavy implements around. The Scots put a lot of emphasis on strength. These games became very popular. They attracted a ton of people--and what they were were the first track meets.

Then they got the idea to invite some of the great champions from Scotland, like [Donald] Dinnie, who toured extensively in the U.S. and won many Caledonian Games competitions. He was the top sporting attraction in the 19th century, in terms of the number of people who went to see him compete.

**SL:** What influence did the Caledonian Games have on the combined event that became known as the all-around?

**FZ:** The Caledonians were the inventors of the all-around. The events that make up the all-around came right out of the Caledonian Games, including the hammer and the 56-pound weight. The notion of being an all-around champion was so popular that when the amateurs began to gain control of track and field, they started their own all-around event in 1884. And that was taken almost exactly from the Caledonian Games.

The first standard all-around was a nine-event contest offered in 1884. The next year, it was taken over by the NYAC [New York Athletic Club], and they debated for about five years about the order of events and the number of events. I found that one of the events, the 880 walk, was inserted to prevent Malcolm Ford from winning the all-around. Ford was such a good sprinter that they took out the 440 sprint, in retaliation for him leaving the NYAC. By about 1889, they had settled on the order of the ten events, and that never changed.

As for the scoring table, that came about in 1892. Previously, the scoring was done on a points-for-place basis. That was a Caledonian concept,

where you were given five points for first place, three points for second, and one point for third. But if you didn't meet a minimum standard in three events, then your scores got thrown out. It got to be very confusing. So, the NYAC asked Alexander Jordan, a competitor who was retiring at the time, to write a set of tables. These became known as the Jordan Tables. The 1893 meet was the first to use the all-around tables and give a total score. That was a major contribution because now we had a measure of comparison about the athletes.

**SL:** You write that, by the turn of 20th century, the Caledonian Games had faded in popularity. What happened?

**FZ:** In about 1870, track and field and baseball had very similar, large followings. Baseball went from being amateur to professional. Track was just the opposite; it went from being professional to amateur. The Scottish movement was almost exclusively professional. Those guys came over here and won prize money. Also, there was a fairly significant gambling element. But the Caledonian people--the pros--lost the battle to the amateurs, who were very clever in grabbing the attention of the newspapers.

In the late 19th century, there were many weekly sporting papers--The Clipper, The Spirit of the Times, The National Police Gazette. The amateurs got control of the editorship of those papers and systematically ignored the Caledonian people and pooh-poohed their records. For example, William Curtis was the editor of several papers and magazines. In spite of all his other contributions to track, his goal in life was to make sure that people didn't remember the Caledonian Games. He promoted amateur track, and he was a zealot. By the time you get to 1896, the Caledonian Games were a passing phase. The public forgot about them. Unfortunately, we don't give the Scots as much credit as they deserve. They really developed not just track, but the rules of track.

**SL:** Track was very popular at the end of the 19th century, yet you note that the sport failed to take advantage of this. What happened?

**FZ:** In the 1890s, track was reeling and lost a lot of its popularity. It was fading. There were a lot of new sports that were becoming popular, like

football and bicycling. A few things helped to save the sport. One was the Olympics, beginning in 1896. Another was the phenomenal international meet in New York in 1895, when the Americans went on this great recruiting binge and the New York Athletic Club swept the London A.C. This helped create a great deal of interest in track and field.

**SL:** In 1904, Kiely Thomas was credited with winning the first, and only, all-around event contested at the Olympic Games. However, you write that the all-around championships were held a couple of months before the rest of the track and field competitions in St. Louis. How did Thomas get credit for something he didn't accomplish?

**FZ:** I went to Ireland and met with his family to find this out. Thomas was, hands down, the best athlete of his era. He was also a nationalist. In those days, if you lived in Ireland, you had to compete for Britain, and he never would do that. But he did get an invitation in 1904 to come to the U.S. and contest the all-around, which happened to be held in St. Louis with other AAU championships, several months before the Olympic Games were contested. He came, he won, and he went home.

I went through every bit of correspondence--every letter the guy wrote--and he never claimed to have been Olympic champion. He didn't know he was an Olympic champion. Not one publication, from 1904 to the early 1950s, ever claimed that this was an Olympic event. I went through every newspaper in 1904--St. Louis had three daily newspapers then--and they all said the all-around was an AAU championship.

In the 1950s, an Irish journalist took it upon himself to make Kiely an Olympic champion. With a little bit of chicanery, he convinced the IOC and the IAAF that the all-around was actually part of the Olympic Games, when in fact it wasn't. The basis of his claim was that Kiely had an Olympic medal. Well, I found that medal. It's on display in Clonmel, Ireland, in the county library--and it was not an Olympic medal. It was an AAU medal.

**SL:** Why wasn't there an all-around event at 1908 London Olympic Games?

**FZ:** The British never had much of a history of multiple events, and so they didn't offer a combined-event contest. The interim Games in 1906, held in Athens to save the Olympic movement, had a reinvented pentathlon.

**SL:** The decathlon made its first Olympic appearance at the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games. What role did Sweden play in this story?

**FZ:** Some athletes from Denmark in the late 1890s came to the U.S., saw the all-around, took it back to Denmark and offered it as a national championship for a number of years. They changed the name to "tikamp," which is translated as "ten events." The Swedes, the Finns, and the Norwegians saw this and liked it, but they decided to massage the event. They changed some of the events. They took out some of the Scottish weight events and inserted more classical throwing events, like the discus and the javelin. They also took out the 880 walk and replaced it with the 400-meter run.

In 1912, the Swedes were given the opportunity to host the Olympics in Stockholm. At the time, host countries were allowed to insert some events to the Olympic program. The Swedes, having taken this "tikamp" and worked it over for about 10 years, decided to put that in the program. The final form is the same form that we have today--the same ten events, in that order. It has never changed.

**SL:** After winning the decathlon and the pentathlon at the Stockholm Games, Jim Thorpe came home and won the AAU all-around event in 1912. His name isn't listed in the record books. Why not?

**FZ:** It's a clerical oversight by USA Track & Field. When the family got the Olympic medals and Thorpe got his amateur standing back 30 years after he died, the IOC went back and put his name in the Olympic record book. But because the all-around is forgotten, the AAU and its successors haven't put Thorpe's name back on the list of the all-around winners.

**SL:** You write that, after Thorpe's triumph at the 1912 Olympic Games, the decathlon and the all-around co-existed for awhile. Why did the decathlon supercede the all-around by the 1920 Antwerp Olympics?

**FZ:** There was a debate within the AAU as to whether or not one of these events was redundant. Basically, they said: what's the point of offering two events that are similar? On the all-around side were people like Avery Brundage, who maintained that the all-around was much harder and was a better test of versatility, strength and endurance. But he and the others lost out. I think they were at a disadvantage because, in 1914, when [AAU czar] James Sullivan died, the all-around lost its most prominent backer. He was a fan of the all-around, and he would have kept it had he lived.

In 1921, the AAU offered both a decathlon and an all-around for the last time.

**SL:** How would you compare the two events--the decathlon and the all-around --as athletic tests?

**FZ:** The all-around was a harder thing to do. You did it in one day, and there was a limited amount of rest time between events. The rules said five minutes between events, so you had to jump from one event to the next.

There was a lot more strategy in the all-around because you had to learn to pace yourself. You didn't go all-out in every event. In the decathlon, you can go all-out because you have a pretty good rest between events.

**SL:** Why did the all-around make a comeback in the 1950s?

**FZ:** A guy named Bill Jameson, who ran a track club in Baltimore, was paging through the AAU rule-book in the late 1940s and saw the rules for the all-around. He wondered why the all-around wasn't being held anymore. He called the AAU office and asked them if it was okay to conduct the all-around again. He was told that it was okay, as long as it didn't cost the AAU any money.

In the 1950s, the all-arounds were always held in Baltimore. They began to attract a cult of athletes--hammer throwers and walkers. The NYAC started sending people, and when interest ran out in Baltimore in the early 1960s, the NYAC took it over and began to host it again. The last AAU-sponsored all-around came in 1977.

When the all-around made a comeback in the 1950s, it never attracted the top multi-event athletes. Bob Mathias and Rafer Johnson and Bruce Jenner never did the all-around.

**SL:** One interesting point you make in the book is that many all-arounders contributed to other facets of track and field history. For instance, Harry Gill became the famed coach at the University of Illinois and Avery Brundage led the IOC for years. Why do you think that occurred?

**FZ:** Yes, some of them became very good coaches, like Gill and George Goldie, who was an early Caledonian all-arounder and became the coach of the NYAC. He made terrific contributions to track and field. It might have been that they had a knowledge of--and appreciation of--a lot of different events that required many different skills. In those days, a club or a college had one track coach who had to coach every event. Nowadays, you have a sprint coach and a distance coach and a vertical jumping coach.

**SL:** Do you think there's any chance for another comeback for the all-around?

**FZ:** I'm waiting for somebody to say, "We ought to just try this event as an exhibition." I've always wondered what a guy like Dan O'Brien could do.