

Remarks Delivered at the Unveiling of George V. Brown Statue

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In Hopkinton, we say “It all starts here.” That’s true. The world’s most prestigious road race begins here. Once every year the whole world comes to Hopkinton.



Tom Burke and wife Mary Ellen with statue of George V. Brown of Hopkinton, Massachusetts

But that’s not the entire story of Hopkinton and sports. Not at all. Hopkinton has given much more to the world of sport, both in America and abroad, than this storied and legendary race.

It’s more fitting for us to say, “It all started here.” And the man whose statue we proudly unveil this afternoon is the man who began it all, Hopkinton’s First Citizen of Sport, my grandfather, George V. Brown.

Victor O. Jones of the Boston Globe wrote that when famous men die, it is often said that their monument is to be found in the words they left behind them or in the buildings they built.

But of George V. Brown Jones wrote: “He built no buildings and he wrote no books. But his memorials are to be found in the vast number of sporting organizations that he helped to found and then nursed to mature and lasting stature.”

George Brown was a man of the land, here in Hopkinton at Maplewood Farm. He was a man for all seasons of sport. But he was also very much a man for his time in the history of America.

Back in the days when George Brown was growing up, so was our country. America had finally put the long agony of the Civil War and its aftermath to rest. In industry, in military power, in international commerce... America was asserting itself on the world stage as the great nation it has become.

And so it was in the world of sport. We often talk of the founding fathers of our country. Washington, Franklin, Adams, Jefferson and the rest. When we speak of American sport, George Brown, son of Hopkinton, was a true founding father as well.

Here are just some of his peers, his colleagues, his athletes – and his rivals: Walter Camp; Amos Alonzo Stagg; Glenn “Pop” Warner; Lester Patrick; Jim Thorpe; Jesse Owens; Johnny Kelley; Tex Rickard; Avery Brundage. These were giants of their age. He didn’t just know them all. George Brown was one of them.

In the words of Victor Jones:

“If you should sit down and make out a list of the various organizations which have fostered and conducted sports in this country, you’d find that George V.’s name appears on almost all of them and that it has been there, not only recently, but from the very start.

“The Olympics...well, George was a boy around the Boston Athletic Association when that organization was the American standard bearer in the Games’ modern revival in ‘96. He was mixed up with the Olympics ever since, as manager of the marathon team and member of various important committees.

“From this first Olympic Games sprang the BAA Marathon and from the start George V. was behind it down to the day of his death. Both the AAU and the IC4A enjoyed the benefit of George V.’s energy and devotion.

“Football? Well, football is very well established now and its governing bodies move along like well oiled machines. It wasn’t always thus. Brown was one of the country’s first and best football officials and for years served as secretary treasurer of the New England college football officials association.

“College sports generally? Well, George V. was BU’s athletic director back in the days when the Terriers worked out behind the billboards that border Commonwealth Avenue and the gym was a converted loft next to the Arena.

“Though it became George’s business to run professional sports promotions, he never lost his love and interest in the amateur games. To the very end he was a sucker for the amateurs, thinking neither of time nor money when it came to helping out some struggling amateur venture.”

Jones goes on to tell how my grandfather became a promoter and how it was tied up with the sport of hockey, which next to the Marathon was his first love. Both the US and Canadian Hockey Halls of Fame have enshrined George Brown as one of the game’s builders.

Jones writes, “The precursor to the Bruins and all of hockey now played in Boston were the amateur teams. The BAA had such a club and George Brown was its manager. That was the start of Boston hockey, and from the start of the

BAA, Henry Lapham was the team's angel, advancing them money for uniforms etc. When the old Arena burned down, it was George V. who persuaded Mr. Lapham to sink some more money into hockey and help rebuild the Arena.”

There is a whole other story about how the New York wheeler-dealers who built the Boston Madison Square Garden lured away all of the Arena's prime tenants and tried to put my grandfather out of business. Ultimately, though, he and Henry Lapham prevailed. They threw the New Yorkers out, and George moved over to run the Garden as well.

New York against Boston is not just Yankees and Red Sox. It's a fascinating and never-ending saga – and back in the 1930's, the good guys won.

My grandfather's remarkable and full life ended far too soon, at age 57. Hopkinton, with this lovely work of art, is remembering and honoring a man who accomplished much. But it wasn't just George V. Brown's deeds that make him worthy of this honor. It was his humanity and his sterling personal character too.

It makes me even more proud – and at the same time, feeling more humble – to hear stories like the one of his visit to Milford in 1912. It was right after the Stockholm Olympics – the Jim Thorpe Olympics. George Brown was a track coach of that Olympic squad. He brought Thorpe and Pop Warner home to Maplewood Farm that August, and took them down to meet the citizens of Milford. A story recounting that visit said,

“Hopkinton's George Brown and the citizens of Milford were among the relatively few Americans to honor native American Olympic Games winner Jim Thorpe before he was unjustly stripped of his medals...George Brown felt none of the animosity toward Native Americans which other U.S. citizens harbored in those days...As far as Brown was concerned, the measure of a man was not his nationality or race. Rather, Brown expected an athlete to do the best he could in the Olympic Games competition, nothing more, and nothing less.”

A man who had seen him with his athletes at the 1936 games in Berlin wrote, “George was the father confessor to the American athletes. He was the very essence of kindness to the youngsters. He would listen sympathetically when no one else would.”

And Austen Lake of the Boston Evening American wrote: “He held his friends through life. What better epitaph. His word was unflinching. What better wreath to lay on his tomb. He helped the young. What better memorial to hang in his halls.”

George Brown's eldest son, my uncle Walter, was a most worthy heir to his father's tradition. He coached the first American world championship hockey team, kept the Marathon alive through the lean years, and broke the color line in the National Basketball Association with his memorable rejoinder, "I don't give a damn if he's striped, plaid, or polka-dot. Boston drafts Chuck Cooper of Duquesne."

Walter Brown was America's greatest sportsman. He learned his profession well. Most importantly, he learned right from wrong, how to treat others, all that truly matters – from his dad, George V. Brown.

Let us recall the words of President Kennedy – "We must judge a country not only by the men it produces. But by the men it honors. By the men it remembers." In remembering George V. Brown as you have so beautifully done, Hopkinton tells the world, "This is our beloved son. We nurtured him. We sent him forth. By honoring him, we bring honor to ourselves and all that we stand for."

And through the years to come, whenever an Olympic athlete from America ascends the medal stand...whenever our hockey team beats Canada or Sweden or Russia...Boston University wins a Beanpot...the Celtics trounce the Lakers...some college football game is superbly officiated...prejudice and bigotry give way to justice and fairness...and Boston beats New York in anything ...Hopkinton can feel an extra measure of pride and satisfaction.

After all – it all started here. With your son – George V. Brown, Hopkinton's First Citizen of Sport.

On behalf of my family members and relatives here today - grandchildren, great-grand children, and great-great-grandchildren and their spouses and friends – I extend my heartfelt thanks to the citizens of Hopkinton; to Tim Kilduff and the HAA for bringing us together; to the BAA and Gloria Ratti for their help and support; to Michael Alfano and his wife Linda for all the love, passion, and devotion they gave to this wonderful work of art.

I also speak for my mother Margaret, George's youngest child, and her brothers and sisters – Walter, George, Paul, Tom, Betty, and Marion. They too are with us today. They're watching along with George V. and Bessie, up there in the Second Balcony. They now join me in saying,

"Grandpa. You've been gone for a long, long time. Welcome home."