

A QUIET CONTRIBUTION: LOUIS RUBENSTEIN

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Louis Rubenstein was a unique individual with regard to his contributions to Canadian sport. His athletic career was distinguished by his success at and renown achieved in figure skating, but his contributions were diversified among many sporting interests and extended throughout his lifetime. Rubenstein is best described as devoted to sport. In many ways, as an athlete, administrator, benefactor, referee, timekeeper and judge, Rubenstein was at the forefront in the organization of Canadian sport that occurred during the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. The factor that is consistent with known information about the organization of Canadian sport during the late nineteenth century was Rubenstein's birth and permanent location in Montreal.<sup>1</sup> The anomaly of his personal situation was that he was Jewish. Above all, Rubenstein was a world-class athlete who made many significant, albeit unheralded or "quiet" contributions to the development of Canadian sport. This paper represents the findings of three independent researchers. The study examines the nature of and reasons for Rubenstein's athletic accomplishments, with particular emphasis on his skating career leading up to and including his world figure skating championship, and his contributions to Canadian sport.

As Louis Rubenstein continued his long, locomotive trek from Berlin to St. Petersburg, his thoughts must have been prompted by the

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<sup>1</sup>See, Alan Metcalfe, "Organized Sport and Social Stratification in Montreal: 1840-1901" in Canadian Sport: Sociological Perspectives, edited by R. S. Gruneau and J. G. Albinson (Don Mills, Ontario: Addison-Wesley, 1976) and Don Morrow, "The Establishment of an Institution: The Montreal Amateur Athletic Association, 1881-1905" in Proceedings of the Fourth Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education (Vancouver, British Columbia, 1979). Metcalfe has demonstrated clearly, here and elsewhere, that Jews (and Roman Catholics) were conspicuous by their absence in the organization of Canadian sport. For a capsule description of Montreal's "vanguard role" in the history of Canadian sport, see S. F. Wise and D. Fisher, Canada's Sporting Heroes (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Company, Limited, 1974), pp. 13-26.

emotions of fear of the unknown repercussions of anti-Semitism, of anticipation of testing his skill against that of other competitors and, perhaps, of self-doubt about personal preparation that comes to any athlete prior to a major sporting contest. In the latter regard, he could reflect upon his climb to prominence in figure skating in Montreal.

Rubenstein was born into a winter sporting environment. Snowshoeing,<sup>2</sup> outdoor skating<sup>3</sup> and curling<sup>4</sup> were all recognized forms of recreation and sport in Montreal by the early 1860's. The first indoor rink for skating, the Montreal Skating Club, was built in 1859<sup>5</sup>, two years before Rubenstein was born. The influx of garrison officers to the city during the American Civil War and their demonstrated interest in ice skating encouraged the citizens of the west end of Montreal to proffer shares to build the magnificent, red brick Victoria Skating Rink on Drummond Street at the rear of the Windsor Hotel.<sup>6</sup> This rink alone became the most significant rink in Canada in terms of the early history of figure skating, speed skating and ice hockey.<sup>7</sup> Most germane to this study, the Victoria Skating Rink became Rubenstein's home rink. Its 16,000 square feet of ice reflected the impressiveness of the structure:

Inside it is spanned by a semi-circular framed roof rising to a height of 52 feet.... The whole of the arch-grooved principals of the roof rise from the ground. Round the ice ring is a platform of about 10 feet wide for the purpose of promenading.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>See, Don Morrow, A Sporting Evolution: The Montreal Amateur Athletic Association 1881-1981 (Montreal: The M.A.A.A., 1981), esp. pp. 14-25.

<sup>3</sup>See, P. L. Lindsay, "A History of Sport in Canada, 1807-1867" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, 1969), pp. 49-60.

<sup>4</sup>See W. Simpson, "The Influences of the Montreal Curling Club on the Development of Curling in the Canadas 1807-1857" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, 1980), pp. 46-79.

<sup>5</sup>Montreal Daily Star, n.d., loose clippings. The rink was located on Upper St. Urbain Street.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Its influence on the organization of ice skating and speedskating is discussed further in this paper. For its influence on ice hockey, see, Don Morrow, "The Little Men of Iron: The 1902 Montreal Hockey Club" in Canadian Journal of Sport/Revue Canadienne de l'Histoire des Sports, Vol. XII, No. 1 (May, 1981).

<sup>8</sup>Montreal Daily Star, n.d. loose clippings.

Above the promenade, in a horseshoe shape on three sides of the rink there was a gallery with space enough to seat 700 people. At the west end, over the entrance was the bandstand (all music, even in outdoor rinks was provided by bands) and a private gallery for the Rink's directors. Fifty large windows lighted the rink by day and by night "six pendant stars, each having about 50 gas burners"<sup>9</sup> or about 500 jets of gas illuminated the rink. The main point is that the rink was elaborate and certainly an excellent facility in which to nurture skating skills.

Moreover, membership was restricted by a method common to elite sporting organizations throughout the nineteenth century. At the Victoria Rink, during the 1860's" ...blackballing of applicants was a very common thing at each meeting of the directors."<sup>10</sup> Fancy dress carnivals and masquerades made the rink the fashionable meeting place in the city during the 1860's and 1870's. One of Notman's famous and most beautiful composite photographs is a colour reproduction entitled, "The Skating Carnival," 1870,<sup>11</sup> which depicts the interior of the Victoria Rink<sup>12</sup> during a skating carnival. Even in 1890 at one skating event held at the Victoria Rink, the skaters and some 300 spectators were served "a five o'clock tea."<sup>13</sup> Exactly who or what it was that attracted Louis to skating is unknown, but the lure of a facility as prominent as the Victoria Rink with its colourful pageantry and social prestige together with the fact that winter recreation was well established in Montreal must have played an important role. The publication and subsequent popularity of Mary Elizabeth Mapes Dodge's Hans Brinker or The Silver Skates in 1869<sup>14</sup> might have fuelled the young boy's growing interest in skating.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> The Notman firm was world renowned for its photographic excellence. The composite photographs used painted backgrounds on canvas superimposed with individual, hand-painted photographs of hundreds of characters taken in studio in pre-planned poses. The photograph is located in the Notman Archives at the McCord Museum in Montreal. It is reprinted on the cover of Fact and Fiction: Canadian Painting and Photography, 1860-1900 (Montreal: Plow and Watters Ltd., 1979).

<sup>12</sup> The other Notman that shows the interior of the rink is the hockey match depicted in 1893 in Roxborough's One Hundred - Not Out: The Story of Nineteenth Century Canadian Sport (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1966), opposite p. 119.

<sup>13</sup> Montreal Gazette, December 15, 1890.

<sup>14</sup> Soderberg adjudged that the popularity of skating in North America was due to two primary factors: the publication of Hans Brinker

Contrary to popular, published works, primary research indicates that Rubenstein at no time travelled in Europe in the 1870's under the tutelage of Jackson Haines,<sup>15</sup> the man who put ballet on ice in the form of fancy or figure skating. In all probability, Rubenstein was inspired by local influences, most notably that of the Victoria Rink.<sup>16</sup> Although skating in general and figure skating in particular gave way to an intensified interest in the "tramps" and races of snowshoeing in Montreal during the 1870's, Rubenstein nurtured his interest in the indoor sport to the extent that he won the championship of Montreal in 1878 at the age of seventeen.<sup>17</sup> With the advent of the spectacular Montreal Winter Carnivals during the 1880's,<sup>18</sup> ice skating was rejuvenated in public interest. The Victoria Rink adapted to the Carnival spirit and style by building huge "grottos" of stalactite ice within its confines.

The development of Rubenstein's career in figure skating paralleled the growth in popularity of winter sports during this decade. After moderate success in sporadic competitions between 1879 and 1883, Rubenstein captured the Canadian title in the latter year and retained it

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and the formation of the Amateur Skating Association of Canada by Louis Rubenstein in 1869. While both factors are judgments, the second is a glaring error. Rubenstein was 8 in 1869 and the Association was not formed until 1887. Nevertheless it is recognition of Rubenstein's prowess in the sport. See, P. Soderberg, ed., The Big Book of Halls of Fame in the United States and Canada (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1977), p. 410.

<sup>15</sup> N. Howell and M. Howell, in Sports and Games in Canadian Life: 1700 to the Present (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1969), p. 106 cite F. Menke's The New Encyclopedia of Sports (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1947), p. 852 for this assertion about Jackson Haines. Letters written by Rubenstein while he was in Europe in 1890 and published in Montreal press clearly demonstrate that he was unfamiliar with travelling in Europe and with the European style of skating.

<sup>16</sup> An April 18, 1891, article in the Montreal Herald speculates simply and probably most accurately that Rubenstein "loved skating" as a boy and that with "practice and ambition" he developed his skating skills.

<sup>17</sup> Illustrate Police News, February 28, 1885.

<sup>18</sup> The Carnivals were staged over a one week period in January or February every year between 1883 and 1889 inclusive. See any Montreal newspaper account for extensive coverage of the festivities during any one of these years. Huge ice palaces and ice castles were built as foci of attention. The purpose of the Carnivals was propagandistic as tourist attractions that brought royalty and thousands of international travellers to Montreal; festive celebration was certainly a strong underlying, general motivation for the events.

for the next seven years.<sup>19</sup> During these years, Rubenstein excelled at the sport in North America. His major competitors,<sup>20</sup> with the exception of Toronto's H. Robinson, were not in the same class as the Montreal skater. The single factor in Louis' rise to prominence lay in his discipline as a "place" skater. That is, through constant practice he developed an unprecedented ability to trace and re-trace figures on the ice with tremendous accuracy and precision. This skill was the essence of the competitive sport in that era and is comparable to the skill needed for the compulsory figures in contemporary figure skating contests. The following tribute reflects the kind of acclaim that Rubenstein received during this period:

Most Montrealers are acquainted with the champion's style and he went through the list yesterday with all his wonted grace and precision, some of the figures executed being marvels of skill and patient practice while the apparent ease with which he surmounted the difficulties of the cross cut and other intricate movements was a sight worth going to see.<sup>21</sup>

As early as 1884 and again in 1885, his prowess was such that he was invited "at the request of some prominent residents"<sup>22</sup> to give skating exhibitions and take part in competitions in such eastern Canadian centres as St. John, St. Stephen, Newcastle, Bathurst, Chatham, Moncton and Halifax.<sup>23</sup>

Since so little has been written about the early history of figure skating as a sport, it is necessary to describe briefly its nature and evolution as it pertained to Rubenstein during the 1880's. Competitions

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<sup>19</sup> Rubenstein Scrapbook located in the Jewish Public Library in Montreal.

<sup>20</sup> These major competitors included H. Robinson, Toronto; G. Meagher, Montreal; F. P. Food, Brooklyn; G. D. Phillips, New York; J. F. Bacon, Somerville, Massachusetts; and his two brothers, Abraham and Moses.

<sup>21</sup> Montreal Gazette, February 23, 1889. This same article makes reference to Rubenstein's strength as a place skater.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., February 19, 1885. Rubenstein's popularity is highlighted in the article: "He was escorted to the depot by a considerable number of his friends, who gave him a good send-off making the rafters of old Bonaventure ring."

<sup>23</sup> One poster advertising Rubenstein's expected exhibition in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, described his coming as "the event of the season" in 1884. Rubenstein Scrapbook.

were arranged by articles of agreement among the skaters concerned. Often the lists varied because of the lack of standardization in the sport and disputes were common<sup>24</sup> over the composition of the lists. Rubenstein showed a clear bias toward the lists of figures to which he was accustomed and the basis for his bias was clear:

I mentioned the Victoria Skating Club list as the standard for the reason this Club is the most important one in the Dominion, if not on the continent.<sup>25</sup>

The essence of fancy skating involved the use of inside and outside edges, forward and backward rolls, changes, figure eights, figure threes, grapevines, toe and flat foot spins. Because of the prominence of the Victoria Rink, the Montreal Winter Carnivals and the press epithets dubbing Rubenstein as "the finest figure skater in Canada,"<sup>26</sup> Montreal rinks took the leading role in standardizing and organizing the sport. On November 1, 1887, a circular was sent to all rinks in Canada giving 15 days notice of a meeting to form a national governing body, the Amateur Skating Association of Canada, for figure and speed skating.<sup>27</sup> Significantly, the circular was signed by the presidents of the Victoria Skating Club, the Montreal Hockey Club, the Victoria Hockey Club and the Crystal Hockey Club - all Montreal-based organizations. Clearly, then, Rubenstein enjoyed the advantages of his Montreal home.

At the second meeting the executive body of the Amateur Skating Association of Canada established that any amateur skater in Canada could become a member for one dollar although the executive voted on members under a blackball, "two negatives shall reject"<sup>28</sup> system. Regulations to

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<sup>24</sup>See, for example, the disputes mentioned in the Montreal Gazette February 8, 1883, and January 23, 1885. Many of the disputes involved Rubenstein and Robinson (Toronto).

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., February 8, 1883. Rubenstein noted further that this list had governed all the "important competitions" such as those for the Dufferin and Bantlin medals.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., January 26, 1886.

<sup>27</sup>A copy of the circular was printed in the Gazette on that date. The pattern for Montreal-based organizations to establish "national" sporting organizations was repeated on many occasions during the period between 1867 and 1900. The most significant governing body, the Canadian Amateur Athletic Association was established in 1884 in this manner and with similar short notice. See, K. L. Lansley, "The Amateur Athletic Union of Canada and Changing Concepts of Amateurism" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, 1971), pp. 26-27.

<sup>28</sup>Montreal Gazette, January 18, 1888.

govern competitions were formulated and 21 categories of figures for the championship list were codified. The categories were made up of traditional skating figures such as forward skating, edges, threes, rocking turns, eights and locomotive steps with each category containing several varieties of figures. The point values for judging the figures in each category were as low as 2 for locomotive steps and as high as 15 for double eights. The total point value for this championship was 412.<sup>29</sup> Figure skating, therefore, was just as its name implied during the 1880's viz. the tracing and re-tracing of figures on ice and it was the style to which Rubenstein was accustomed and in which he had become extremely skilled.

In 1885, during the winter carnival in that year, Rubenstein competed in fancy skating tournament billed as the championship of (North) America. Rubenstein's advantage was clearly noted in the press: "The Americans were somewhat at a disadvantage owing to their unfamiliarity with the style of skating required by the programme."<sup>30</sup> Rubenstein narrowly defeated Robinson for the championship. In addition to his advantage of location, Rubenstein enjoyed a distinct benefit of time to train, compete and give exhibitions that accounts in large measure for his success in a sport that demanded repetitive and constant practice. He was a partner in the family business of Rubenstein Brothers,<sup>31</sup> a silver, gold and nickel plating and manufacturing firm in Montreal. Because the brothers shared sporting interests,<sup>32</sup> business duties could be shared and exchanged among them. Time and money were never obstacles in Rubenstein's skating career. In 1886 alone, Rubenstein spent five consecutive weeks travelling to and from Picton, Ontario, Detroit, New York and Vermont giving exhibitions and engaging in competitions.<sup>33</sup>

Rubenstein broadened his titular horizons by winning the United States championships in both 1888 and 1889.<sup>34</sup> Without question Rubenstein

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., January 29, 1885.

<sup>31</sup> There were, from best evidence, five brothers and four sisters in Louis' family.

<sup>32</sup> The firm donated medals for skating competitions as early as 1884. See, Montreal Gazette, February 22, 1884. In addition, two of the brothers were accomplished skaters, as noted earlier.

<sup>33</sup> See, The Spirit of the Times, February 27, 1886, and the Montreal Daily Star, February 5, 1886.

<sup>34</sup> Montreal Gazette, January 23, 1888, and January 31, 1889.

was the best figure skater in North America by 1889. Recognition and tribute abounded. The Ottawa press referred to him as "King of the Ice."<sup>35</sup> After a visit to Quebec City, he was presented with a gold pin "set with emeralds and diamonds as a souvenir of his visit to the Ancient Capital."<sup>36</sup> The firm of Barney and Barry in Springfield, Massachusetts, presented Rubenstein with "a pair of the finest skates their celebrated firm can turn out...as a mark of the firm's appreciation and esteem of the world's fancy skater."<sup>37</sup> When news of the St. Petersburg competition, staged to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the St. Petersburg Skating Club, reached Montreal in mid-December, 1889, there was only one choice for the most appropriate and deserving representative to be sent by the Amateur Skating Association of Canada.

Four hundred dollars was raised through private donations<sup>38</sup> to defray expenses. Rubenstein boarded the Cunard royal mail steamer, *Etruria*, in New York, carrying letters of introduction from Canada's Governor-General, Lord Stanley, to the Foreign Office and the British ambassador at St. Petersburg. Clearly, then, Louis was cognizant of the anti-Semitic situation in Russia. The public press in Montreal boasted that "...our skaters can now wait confidently for the cablegram that shall inform us that the redoubtable Louis has either carried off the championship in triumph or is snugly incarcerated in the Troubetskoi Bastion."<sup>39</sup> An interview with a reporter from the London Sporting Life held in Queenstown, Ireland, when the *Etruria* anchored in its harbour<sup>40</sup> reflected Britain's knowledge of and interest in Canada's representative to the skating championships.

January 19, 1890, W. C. Hodgson, the renowned "home" player for the Montreal Lacrosse Club during that team's heydays of the late 1860's and early 1870's, sat on the platform of the Friedrichstrasse Bahnhof (northernmost train station) in Berlin, Germany. Only one minute behind schedule, the "10:42 express" from Flushing, Holland, pulled into Berlin.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, February 23, 1889.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, January 15, 1889.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, March 7, 1888, brackets ours.

<sup>38</sup> A complete breakdown of the amount and sources of the donations is given in the *Montreal Gazette*, January 3, 1890.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, December 30, 1889.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, January 30, 1890. The interview was reprinted in this issue of the *Gazette* and was part of the extensive newspaper coverage that Louis received during his two and a half month absence from Montreal.



Louis Rubenstein descended from the train to greet Hodgson. It was to be a twenty minute station stop and Hodgson represented Louis' last reminder of his home city of Montreal. During that short interval, the two Canadians paced the platform while Rubenstein kept Hodgson in fits of laughter with his usual witticisms. All the while, Louis kept one eye on the gladstone that contained his precious skates. Hodgson noted that Rubenstein glanced repeatedly at one Russian passenger taking note of his traditional garb as if "...making plans for its reproduction"<sup>41</sup> at one of Montreal's famous fancy-dress skating carnivals. It was a three and a half day journey from London, England, to St. Petersburg (Leningrad) where the unofficial world figure skating championships would be held. Louis Rubenstein had travelled from his home in Montreal, was hailed as the North American "fancy" or figure skating champion and was intent on the championship medal offered for the St. Petersburg event.

Rubenstein, by virtue of his skating talent and in spite of his Jewish faith, was about to enter Czarist Russia as the train pulled out of Berlin and he signalled a last farewell to Hodgson. It was the era of the infamous "pogroms" or organized anti-semitic attacks and practices. Rubenstein entered the country fully aware of the pogroms and yet, characteristically, he seemed prepared to deal with the anomalies of the situation. He brought with him a small supply of the virtually worthless Russian Kopecks. His apparent intention was to use them to joke with Russian porters, guards etc. Similarly, when Rubenstein was interviewed by a Montreal Gazette reporter on the return train trip into Bonaventure Station, Montreal, in March, the reporter asked him for his preconception of Russia:

Well before I went there I had an idea that Russia was a country somewhere in Europe but I did not exactly know where its boundaries began or left off; that one end of it was somewhere near India and the other near Constantinople; and the principal productions of the country were Nihilists and nitroglycerine, and that it was governed by a man whose family name was Romanoff and whose business it was to get up every morning and light the sun.<sup>42</sup>

Upon his arrival in St. Petersburg, Rubenstein registered at the Grand Hotel d'Europe. He used the four weeks he had before the contest to familiarize himself with the outdoor conditions under which he would have to compete.<sup>43</sup> Chief among these was the nature of the ice which he described as feeling "like stone" and, therefore, very difficult on which to trace figures. Above all, the skating standards under which he had enjoyed such

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<sup>41</sup>Montreal Gazette, February 5, 1890.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., March 15, 1890.

<sup>43</sup>There were no indoor rinks in Russia at this time. Wind and extreme cold were the most common problems confronting skating competitors.

an advantage in Montreal were much different in Russia:

...instead of what we call our list in Canada there are three separate competitions in Russia. The real figure skating or what we call list skating goes under the name diagram skating in Russia. Then there are two other departments - special figures and specialties - and in these there is a tendency to acrobatic work, which would not be recognized as fine skating in Canada.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, apparently the skating in Europe was closer to the modern form of figure skating that comprises both compulsory and free style components of skating. The International Skating Union was not established until 1894.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, there was no standardizing agency at the time of the St. Petersburg competition.

As if the pressures of different conditions and styles were not enough to challenge Rubenstein, the expected and inevitable problems of anti-Semitism soon engulfed the Canadian athlete. Within a few days of his arrival, Louis was required to go to the St. Petersburg police office. He was asked about being a Jew and he responded affirmatively. His passport was withheld and a few days later he was taken from skating practice to another police station and instructed to leave the country within 24 hours. When he asked for the reason, he was told:

You are a Jew, and there is no necessity to further discuss the matter. We cannot permit Jews to remain in St. Petersburg.<sup>46</sup>

Rubenstein made his plight known to the British ambassador, Sr. R. Morier who, in turn, intervened on Louis' behalf. Ultimately, the prefect of police had Rubenstein roused from sleep to meet with him. He was told that he would be allowed to compete but that he must leave Russia immediately after the contest. Rubenstein's passport was returned with the words "British subject" crossed out and replaced by "L. Rubenstein, Jew."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., March 14, 1890. Rubenstein's avowed distaste for "acrobatics" in skating was once noted in a characteristically humorous comment he made about skaters doing a spread eagle: "he expressed the belief that it was a physical impossibility for some men to look directly north and compel the toes of the right foot to point exactly east, and the toes of left foot exactly west...." Montreal Daily Star, February 10, 1891.

<sup>45</sup> Montreal Gazette, January 30, 1895.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., February 14, 1890.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

As Rubenstein went on with his business of practising for the event, his skill was quickly recognized by other skaters and coaches who came to watch him. Questions arose about the competency and qualifications of the nine local judges and there was some confusion expressed in the press when Louis was awarded the championship, then had it rescinded and finally re-awarded.<sup>48</sup> Finally, it was acknowledged that he had defeated all the other skaters from Vienna, Stockholm, Norway, Finland, Moscow and St. Petersburg.<sup>49</sup>

Rubenstein returned in triumph from St. Petersburg. He was besieged by reporters in both New York and Montreal, but a death in his family kept his homecoming welcome subdued. He retired from competition in the sport in 1892 after finishing in a tie for first place in the 1891 United States championships.<sup>50</sup> Canada was to wait another fifty-seven years before Barbara Ann Scott captured a second world title in figure skating.

Rubenstein's success in St. Petersburg is significant for both its world-class status and for the adverse conditions under which he competed. Of significance also is the fact that the St. Petersburg affair is the only documented example of anti-Semitism found during his career. Less spectacular than the circumstances surrounding the St. Petersburg competition are the contributions Rubenstein made as an athlete and/or administrator in other sports and sporting organizations. His excellence achieved in and devotion to skating during the 1880's tempt one to think in terms of contemporary sport specialization. In point of fact Rubenstein was involved in many other sports during that decade and long after. His quiet contribution arises from this myriad involvement in sport as well as from his relatively inconspicuous skating accomplishments.

The major vehicle by which he became involved in a variety of sports was the multi-sport organization of the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association. He joined the M.A.A.A. in 1882, one year after its formation. His early interest with the Association was rooted in the Montreal Bicycle Club<sup>51</sup> (M.B.C.) which was itself representative of a novel interest in the

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<sup>48</sup> See the accounts given by cablegram in the Montreal Gazette, February 14-18, inclusive.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., February 17, 1890. Rubenstein was accredited with the world championship title by securing first place in two of the three "departments" in the competition.

<sup>50</sup> B. Postal et al., Encyclopedia of Jews in Sport (New York: Block Publishing Co., 1965), p. 341.

<sup>51</sup> Formed in 1878, this Club was one of the first three founding clubs of the M.A.A.A.

penny-farthing type of bicycle. Rubenstein was not a racer of bicycles. Consistent with his gifts of patience and willingness to spend long hours in sport, he was part of a group whose interest was in accumulated mileage. Between 1883 and 1886, he placed consistently within the top seven cyclers in the Club in accumulating the most mileage during any given season.<sup>52</sup> His total in 1885 alone was 452 miles and that was achieved at a time of high wheelers and poor roads. By 1887, he was a member of the M.B.C. organizing committee, was a second lieutenant on the road committee of the Club and he donated a mileage prize to the M.B.C. By 1890 he began to officiate as a scorer at bicycle races and in the same year he was elected to a committee within the M.A.A.A.'s Montreal Toboggan Club.

Rubenstein's contributions to cycling consisted primarily of committee work, officiating and elected roles. His committee work involved issues of bicycle storage, travel, "Cyclists Rights" movements, and campaigning for various competitions. He officiated as a scorer, starter, timekeeper, handicapper, course charter and judge. He served as Montreal's delegate to the meetings of the national bicycling body, the Canadian Wheelmen's Association (C.W.A.), between 1893 and 1900. He became president of the C.W.A. in 1899<sup>53</sup> and retained that title or that of honorary president for the next 18 years. During the late 1890's he travelled all over eastern Canada to promote the formation of bicycle clubs and their affiliation with the C.W.A.<sup>54</sup> When Montreal was awarded the World Bicycle Meet in 1899, the year Rubenstein was elected president, by acclamation, of the C.W.A., all confidence was placed in him for its conduct. His own club, the M.B.C. formed a group called "Rubenstein's Greatest Canadian Bicycle Band" and the band travelled with him on occasion to play selections from Wagner and Beethoven at bicycle races.<sup>55</sup> Rubenstein was involved in every phase of the World Bicycle Meet and the meet with its races (held on a special third-of-a-mile board track constructed at Queen's Park), masquerade parades, moonlight tours and banquets was a tremendous success. Rubenstein, in cycling alone, exemplified a tireless devotion to the promotion and conduct of the sport.

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<sup>52</sup> Annual Reports of the M.A.A.A., 1884 to 1887. The reports of the M.B.C. actually contained lists of total accumulated mileage for its members and the number of committee meetings attended. In 1887, Rubenstein placed fourth in the greatest number of rides attended and he was present at 21 of 25 committee meetings. Between 1883 and 1893, Rubenstein's annual mileage ranged from 298 to 623 miles placing him between second and eighth place within the M.B.C. If nothing else, cycling must have served as an adequate off-season conditioning activity between skating seasons.

<sup>53</sup> Montreal Gazette, April 1, 1899.

<sup>54</sup> Morrow, A Sporting Evolution, p. 47.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

During the winter months of the 1890's, Rubenstein played billiards at the M.A.A.A., engaged in curling at the St. Andrew's Curling Club and bowled. In the latter regard, published statistics in the Gazette for the period 1892 to 1900 inclusive show that he bowled 129 games (ten-pin) and averaged 173 points during that nine year period. Once again it is to be noted that he engaged in sports requiring precision, patience and practice. He was elected president of the Canadian Bowling Association in 1895<sup>56</sup> and later that same year he was voted honorary secretary of the Amateur Skating Association of Canada.<sup>57</sup> In that latter capacity he pulled "the labouring oar" for the World Speedskating Championships held at the M.A.A.A. Grounds in 1897.<sup>58</sup> By 1901, in a series entitled "Veterans in the Field of Canada Sports" published by the Montreal Star, it was remarked:

...but the work which he Rubenstein has done since then in the interest of athletics far exceeds in value even the reputation which he gained for Canada in winning the world's skating championship.<sup>59</sup>

While this statement probably reflects journalistic hyperbole, it does indicate that Louis was well respected and noticed by the public press.

Within the M.A.A.A., Rubenstein assumed a low profile position between 1900 and 1906. Although he was elected vice president of the M.A.A.A. in 1898-99, a position that normally pointed toward the presidency, his national and international cycling activities prevented him from pursuing the highest office within the M.A.A.A. In skating during the early years of the twentieth century, he was active as a judge and official in the

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<sup>56</sup> Montreal Daily Star, February 6, 1895.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., December 12, 1895.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., February 20, 1897. For his work in connection with this meet, Rubenstein was presented with a beautiful diamond pin by the Amateur Skating Association of Canada. The gift was incorrectly interpreted as a diamond "pie" by Young and Rosenberg in "Louis Rubenstein - His Contributions to Canadian Sport" (Paper presented at the Third International Seminar on Physical Education and Sport in the Jewish History and Culture, Wingate Institute, Israel, June 28-July 3, 1981), p. 11. The Montreal Gazette, February 20, 1897, clearly shows that it was indeed a pin and not a whole diamond pie.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., November 7, 1901, brackets ours. A few months later the Star published a series of photographs of Rubenstein in a high-collared suit, wearing a bowler hat performing several skating manoeuvres for the edification of its readers. See, ibid., January 11, 1902, p. 18.

United States.<sup>60</sup> In 1907 he was instrumental in forming the International Skating Union of America in opposition to the strictures imposed on amateur skaters in both the United States and Canada.<sup>61</sup> Two years later Rubenstein was elected president of the new Union.<sup>62</sup> A contagious quest for his administrative services seemed to follow Rubenstein. In 1910 he was elected third vice president of the newly-formed Montreal branch of the Royal Life Saving Society.<sup>63</sup> One year later, in typical fashion, he became president of this Society<sup>64</sup> and held this post for two years.

Having retained his involvement in several committees of the M.A.A.A., Rubenstein finally sought the presidency of the Association in 1913. He had worked on the property and buildings committees and even served as Association auditor in 1912.<sup>65</sup> Little can be inferred about Rubenstein's direct contribution to the M.A.A.A. during his two year term as president. In that office, he was the figure-head of a board of directors made up of committee chairmen. Most of the work of the M.A.A.A. was vested in those chairmen. Yet, he did provide leadership and stability in the Association's decision to support the War effort.<sup>66</sup>

At no time in his adult life did Rubenstein retire from involvement in some kind of sport. He was in constant demand during the 1920's as an official at various sporting contests such as track and field and swimming. During the War he campaigned for and worked hard to complete an indoor swimming pool in his ward. In tribute to his efforts, the 50,000 dollar Rubenstein Baths was officially opened in 1916.<sup>67</sup> One year later he was elected president of the Young Men's Hebrew Association, a position which he retained until his death in 1931.<sup>68</sup> For a similar period, 1914 to 1931,

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<sup>60</sup> According to Rubenstein, figure skating was "virtually dead" in Montreal at this time. Montreal Star, February 7, 1906. This may have been due to the tremendous impact that ice hockey had on Montreal between 1893 and 1902. See, Morrow, "The Little Men of Iron."

<sup>61</sup> Montreal Daily Star, February 2, 1907.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., February 6, 1909.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., March 9, 1910.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., June 24, 1911.

<sup>65</sup> Annual Report of the M.A.A.A., 1912-1913.

<sup>66</sup> See, "Empire First" in Morrow, A Sporting Evolution, pp. 88-96.

<sup>67</sup> Montreal Daily Star, January 5, 1916.

For a similar period, 1914 to 1931, Rubenstein represented the St. Louis ward in Montreal as Alderman.<sup>69</sup>

### Conclusions.

Louis Rubenstein's contributions to sporting endeavours were many and varied. Certainly he brought prestige, fame and recognition to himself, Montreal and Canada with his world victory in figure skating in 1890. Some of the reasons for his dominance in this sport between 1882 and 1891 have already been discussed. Free time and the circumstances surrounding the organization of figure skating in Montreal were definitely in his favour. Yet he devoted a great deal of time to honing his skill, the product of which is best evidenced from his international victory in 1890 under adverse and unfamiliar conditions. He probably was a "perfectionist," as Collard noted,<sup>70</sup> in figure skating. Without question he brought meticulous attention and concentrated effort to any sporting endeavour. The fact that he was a bachelor, free from the time constraints of family involvement, added considerably to his success in and contributions to sport.

Was he an administrator? His talents of devotion, dedication, patience and practice brought him personal athletic success in sports such as figure skating, cycling, bowling and billiards which all placed a premium on such qualities. Personal interviews with people who knew Rubenstein in his later years indicate that Rubenstein was not a trained or practising administrator. Of course he enjoyed the experience he gained in his business firm in management, financing, bookkeeping and decision-making. Rather than any managerial or administrative qualities, it would seem that it was his integrity, colourful personality and an inherent drive to serve others through sport that combined to account for his vast contributions to sporting endeavours. Rabbi Charles Bender labelled him as unselfish, honest, humanistic, generous, colourful, trustworthy and as a man of integrity.<sup>71</sup> He was a giver and a worker, Methuselah-like in the length of time he was involved in some aspect of sport.

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<sup>68</sup>One may wonder at the reason he was not elected earlier. The Y.M.H.A. did not receive its charter to become an official organization until 1910.

<sup>69</sup>Wise and Fisher, Canada's Sporting Heroes, p. 214.

<sup>70</sup>Montreal Gazette, August 14, 1976. Collard wrote that he carved exact figures on skates as though working on a draughting board. His skill is not to be overlooked in that he was innovative in introducing at least two new figures to the sport, the Maltese Cross and the Rubenstein Star. Montreal Star, February 14, 1899.

Rubenstein literally skated around anti-Semitism<sup>72</sup> and was accepted in all social circles. Foremost among these was the circle of influence and contact made with the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association. The M.A.A.A. was the single most important organization that affected Canadian sport between 1881 and 1909.<sup>73</sup> From this institutional milieu, Rubenstein emerged as a leading figure in the organization of several Canadian sports at a time when Montreal and the M.A.A.A. were at the forefront of Canadian sporting organization. It is suggested that Rubenstein was both a product of and contributor to this organizational process.

Similarly, Rubenstein enjoyed the advantages of renown, established renown, through the Montreal press. The greater the level of success he attained as an athlete or contributor to sport, the greater the attention and publicity that came to him in the Montreal newspapers. He became an attractive and accommodating sporting personality for whom many organizations sought his name and talents. In short, he was a charismatic leader. His zeal, determination and ability or willingness to work to promote sport were dominant features in his contributions to Canadian sport.

Today there exist numerous commemorative tributes to Louis Rubenstein. In 1949 he was inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame as a figure skater.<sup>74</sup> It was announced recently that he will be instated in the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame in Israel.<sup>75</sup> The Y.M.H.A. in Montreal has

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<sup>71</sup>Personal interview with Rabbi Charles Bender, December 19, 1980. Rubenstein was constantly feted by his friends. As early as 1888 "a much deserved tribute was paid to Messrs. Louis and Abraham Rubenstein last evening, when a number of their most intimate friends entertained them to an oyster supper in the Hope Coffee house." Montreal Gazette, February 29, 1888. On such occasions Louis often was asked to sing or recite verse many of which were comic in tone. "McCracken's Dancing School," "Only a Cat" and "Pay no Rent" were some of his favourite comic songs and recitations. Montreal Gazette, August 1, 1888. "Smokers" or male social gatherings were popular occasions for such activities (see, for example, Montreal Gazette, March 17, 1898).

<sup>72</sup>This statement was made by Mr. Joe Rubin in a telephone interview, December 18, 1980.

<sup>73</sup>See, Don Morrow, "The Powerhouse of Canadian Sport: The M.A.A.A. Inception to 1909", Journal of Sport History (Vol. 8, No. 3, Winter, 1981), 20-39.

<sup>74</sup>Soderberg, The Big Book of Halls of Fame, p. 671.

<sup>75</sup>Montreal Gazette, December 2, 1980.



many of his medals and a pair of his skates on permanent display and the museum at the Chateau de Ramezay preserves his penny-farthing bicycle. There are several outstanding Notman portraits of Rubenstein housed in the McCord Museum, Montreal. Frank Andrew's Rejoice we Conquer provides a poetic account of his 1890 championship.<sup>76</sup> On the corner of Mount Royal and Park Avenues in Montreal is a memorial drinking fountain erected in tribute to Rubenstein in 1939. Living testament to his public respect was provided with the thousands of mourners who attended his funeral cortege in 1931.<sup>77</sup> Glamour was not his hallmark; Rubenstein's achievement was by way of a quiet contribution to Canadian sport.

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<sup>76</sup> F. Andrews, Rejoice We Conquer (Toronto: New Line Fraternity, 1960), pp. 13-14.

<sup>77</sup> Montreal Gazette, January 6, 1931.