

Volume 26

2015

# Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia



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ISSN: 0815-998X. The Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia is a refereed annual publication. Views expressed by the authors in this journal are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or the NAA.

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Digital preparation and layout by Openbook Howden Design & Print, St Marys, South Australia.

*Front cover:* Sirinos/Pyxoes, incuse stater c540-510BC (not to scale). See article "An incuse stater from the series 'Sirinos/Pyxoes'"

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# Bobsleigh in a warm climate: Pre-war Australian identity on the slide

Max Everest-Phillips



Figure 1: the 1938 Four-man Bobsleigh World Championships plaque is the only major Nazi winter sports medal won by an Australian. Reproduced, with permission from the curator of the Philip M. Treves collection, Sidmouth, Devon, UK.

## Abstract

*This article examines the 1938 enamelled plaque awarded at the 6<sup>th</sup> World Championships in bobsleigh, and outlines its historical importance for Australia in winter sports and as a rare sporting triumph over Nazi Germany before World War II. The recipient was Frederick McEvoy, the first Australian to win a Winter Olympics medal – albeit in the British bobsleigh team. McEvoy, who in total won three gold and two silver World Championships medals in the sport, was a renowned playboy and close friend of Errol Flynn, complicating the plaque's significance for Australia's sense of nationhood developed through sport.*

## Keywords

[Bobsleigh] [McEvoy] [Nazi Germany] [Winter Olympics] [World Championships]

## Introduction

Sports are a national passion in Australia and, as a country noted for sunshine, her sense of nationhood has been influenced by summer events. An unsigned 70x87mm uniface octagonal-shaped silvered bronze, enamelled plaque (Fig.1), however, offers an important qualification to that generalisation. Awarded in Nazi Germany, the medal bears the swastika of the Third Reich. Since that insignia had been kept off the 1936 Olympic prizes, this is the only exonumia for a major international bobsleigh competition to carry explicit Nazi imagery. The piece is dated 1938, the highpoint for Hitler's diplomatic triumphs and the year before the outbreak of World War II.<sup>1</sup> It carries the legend WELTMEISTERSCHAFT IM VIERERBOB (*World Championships in Four-man Bobsleigh*) above an image of the dangerous sport (Fig. 2).<sup>2</sup>

Presented in an unmarked red case, the legend on the award states the location of the event, GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, a town nestling in the Bavarian Alps of southern Germany. Although without any maker's stamp, it was probably made by the medallists Carl Poellath of Schlobenhausen. Poellath was the company that had produced the official enamel badges and plaques for the Winter Olympics held two years earlier at the same venue. The 1938 award partly re-used the imagery from those 1936 designs, as well as reworked the style of the award medal for the 1933 Bobsleigh World Championships, held in Germany at Schreiberhau. That item does carry, on its reverse, the Poellath company maker's mark (Figs. 3 and 15):



Figure 2: Surrealist postcard, dating from 1913, on the dangers of tobogganing.

- 
- 1 Hitler staged the *Anschluss* in March to take over Austria, and at the Munich Conference on 29 September, 1938 persuaded British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his French counterpart to give international backing to compelling Czechoslovakia to cede the German-speaking Sudetenland to the 'Greater German Empire'.
  - 2 Even though in its origins in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the sport had been (and hence one of its attractions) a leisure activity in which women fully participated. Only in 2002, seventy years after men, was women's bobsleigh finally accepted (still only on two-person sleighs) as an Olympic sport.



Figure 3: the Alpspitze on the 1938 medal, the 1936 Olympics car grille plaque, and postcard.

The 1938 award depicts a four-man bobsleigh team, dressed in red, speeding down the Olympic course under a cloudless blue sky. The scene is set against the backdrop of the iconic north face of the 2628 metres high Alpspitze mountain which dominates the town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen lying in the valley below (Fig. 3).

To the left, the award carries the *Reichsadler*, the ancient eagle symbol of German statehood but with a swastika on its chest (Fig. 4). This was the emblem of the *Deutscher Reichsbund für Leibesübungen* (until 1938; thereafter the *Nationalsozialistischer Reichsbund für Leibesübungen*, the *National Socialist Reich's League for Physical Exercise*). This organisation was the Nazi Party's mechanism for 'coordination' (*Gleichschaltung*, that is, control) of sports under the Third Reich. Its mandate was to promote the regime's ideology and image, as it did at the 1938 Bobsleigh World Championships (Figs. 5 and 6).



Figure 4: the Nazi sports association emblem on the medal.



Figure 5: the swastika emblem prominently displayed beside the course, built for the 1936 Winter Olympics, and on the flags along it at Garmisch-Partenkirchen in 1938.



Figure 6: British news film coverage, with the swastika flag along the run, Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1938.

This award is important in the history of Australia. Won by an Australian, it gave an antipodean dimension to a sport hitherto dominated by Europe. Moreover, winter sports had a particular significance in Nazi thought. The mountains of the Bavarian Alps were portrayed as the spiritual home of Hitler. Their glory underpinned his megalomaniac vision centred around the lands lying in their shadow, his nearby birthplace on the Austrian border, and his political base in Munich, the city which was, for the Nazi Party, the *Hauptstadt der Bewegung* (*the Capital of the Movement*).<sup>3</sup>

The World Championships, therefore, being staged nearby his country home, the *Berghof* at Berchtesgaden with its famous views across the mountain peaks, received extensive media coverage, including in newsreels of the event shown around the world (Fig. 6). For by 1938 bobsleigh had become an Olympic sport with a global following.

Nowadays nicknamed ‘the Formula One race on ice’, bobsleigh racing in either its two-man or four-man form involves the crew, from a standing start, sprinting down the first fifty metres of icy track on foot to get their sleigh going as fast as possible before boarding or ‘loading’. Once the other members have given the explosive push at the start, the ‘pilot’ or driver sitting in front takes full control and the rest of the crew climb aboard and are passengers for the descent (although the two ‘pushers’ in the middle shift their weight for maximum effect, while the brakeman at the back plays an active role at key turns and stopping at the end). The sleigh’s speed then depends on its weight, aerodynamics, runners, condition of the ice and, above all, the skill of the pilot. With the crew seated only a few centimetres from the ground, the pilot steers the sleigh by turning the front axle either with ropes or by a wheel linked to the axle by cables, on timed runs down

<sup>3</sup> A. Mitchell. 2007. Hitler’s Mountain: The Führer, Obersalzberg and the American Occupation of Berchtesgaden. London, pp.22-3.

narrow, twisting, banked, iced tracks, sharp turns and straight sections at speeds often over 100 kilometres per hour. It is the pilot's ability to read the course, extracting maximum speed on the straight sections of any run and finding the fastest 'line' on the bends that makes the narrow margin of difference for victory in most races.<sup>4</sup>

Each major competition is organised the same way: four heats are held on two consecutive days, the timings over the four runs are then added together and the winning sleigh is the one with the lowest aggregate time.<sup>5</sup> The rules were fluid at first. Even how many people should be on the sleigh was not fixed for the early Winter Olympic Games: in 1924 it was a four-man event, changed in 1928 to a five-man, and then for 1932 reverting to what it has remained ever since, a four-man crew. During the 1932 Games, important regulations were also introduced governing the push start. Safety equipment including the ridged, padded leather crash helmets seen on the medal (Fig. 7) became compulsory, but the design of the sleigh continued to evolve in the quest for ever faster speeds (Fig. 8).



Figure 7: detail of the 1938 medal.



Figure 8: the front of a bobsleigh from c.1910; another from c.1922.

### Early Bobsleigh medals

The 1938 event was only the 6<sup>th</sup> World Championships for the four-man bobsleigh. The sport had originated fifty years earlier among the luxurious surroundings of the finest hotels at Davos and St. Moritz. These Swiss alpine resorts proved popular at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Europe's aristocracy who, having originally gone there for

4 M. Seth-Smith, *The Cresta Run – A History of St Moritz Tobogganing Club*, Slough, 1976.

5 Race timings remained somewhat haphazard until the watchmaker Omega was appointed to act as the Official Timekeeper for all the bobsleigh races at the 1936 Olympic Winter Games.

their health, discovered the dangerous thrill of tobogganing.<sup>6</sup>

The rivalry between the two holiday towns led St. Moritz's enterprising hotelier Caspar Badrutt (1848-1904) and his son Alphonse, owners of the Kulm Hotel, to promote hurtling down mountainsides across ice and snow on toboggans as one way to enhance the reputation of their hotel as Europe's leading winter holiday destination (Fig. 9).

The result was that, from tobogganing down from the gardens of the Kulm hotel to the village of Cresta in the valley below, no fewer than four 'sliding' sports (the two- and four-man bobsleigh; the skeleton; and the luge)<sup>7</sup> evolved into Olympic events. The respective governing bodies for these sports also all emerged from the Kulm by way of the St. Moritz Tobogganing Club, formed in 1887 at the hotel's bar. That venue still remains the head office of this nowadays venerable institution.<sup>8</sup> There too, a decade later, the world's first bobsleigh organisation, the St. Moritz Bobsleigh Club,<sup>9</sup> was established. It started defining the rules of the sport and in 1904 built the world's first bobsleigh run. Starting from the grounds of the hotel,<sup>10</sup> that 1722-metre course remains

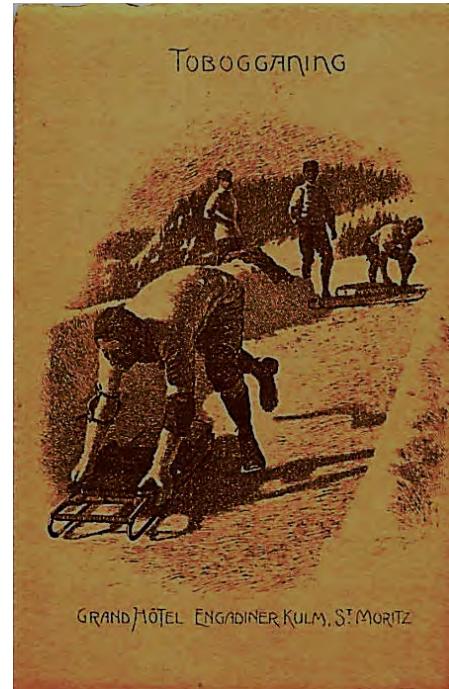


Figure 9: tobogganing at the Kulm Hotel, c.1910.

- 
- 6 Davos initially led the way: in 1883 English writer John Addington Symonds organised the first toboggan race there, and in 1900 the pioneering bobsleigh course from Schatzalp to Davos was built; but the backing of the Kulm Hotel proved decisive in rapidly establishing St. Moritz as the centre of the new sport: see S. Barton. 2008. *Healthy living in the Alps: the origins of winter tourism in Switzerland, 1860-1914*. Manchester University Press, pp.49-61.
  - 7 All these derived from the 'toboggan' which, like sleigh or sled, is usually a generic term but technically has no runners so slides directly on the snow, whereas a sleigh runs on skis or slide-bars. The luge (one- or two-man, sitting up, feet-first) has been an Olympic sport since 1964. The skeleton (one-man, face down) first appeared in the Winter Olympics at St. Moritz in 1928. The bobsleigh officially is made of a hull, or cowling, in two separate sections, each mounted on two runners (all single solid pieces of steel) with a cowled front but open at the rear, a frame, and front and rear axles.
  - 8 This in turn had developed from the outdoor amusements committee of the Kulm Hotel. Set up by five guests in the winter of 1884/85, it built the first Cresta Run.
  - 9 Nickoll, K. 1925. The history of the St. Moritz Bobsleigh Club. London: Printed for Private Circulation.
  - 10 Krause, W. 1946. *Schlittensport: Rodel, Bobsleigh, Skeleton; mit den Rennbestimmungen gemäß den internationalen Verbänden*. Verlag Neues Leben.

the basis for the Olympic bobsleigh run at St. Moritz, and is the only natural-ice track still used for international competitions (Fig. 10).<sup>11</sup>



Figure 10: the rare silvered 50mm medal made by the Swiss medallists Huguenin for the Kulm Hotels St. Moritz to award for bobsleigh triumphs on its course. The reverse of this example is inscribed: "2er Bob-1. Sieger Wiese u. Hinrichs Bahnrekord 1.23° 29.1.1936 (2-man Bobsleigh – 1<sup>st</sup> placed Wiese and Hindrich set a course record of 1 minute 23 seconds, on 29 January 1936)".

The sport spread rapidly, and its international governing body, the *Federation Internationale de Bobsleigh et de Tobogganing* (FIBT, the International Bobsleigh and Tobogganing Federation) was founded in 1923 by delegates from Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Canada and the United States, in time for the four-man bobsleigh to be included as one of the original sports of the first Winter Olympic Games, held at Chamonix in 1924.<sup>12</sup> The FIBT commissioned two medals to mark that event. The 50mm signed bronze medal for the four-man bobsleigh event was designed to be inscribed on the reverse and awarded to the team members (Fig. 11):

11 The other eleven international competition runs are shorter (between 1,200 and 1,600 metres long): a one-mile standard was established in 1934 for all subsequent tracks. The average slope is around 11 percent, with some fifteen turns per course, including hairpin bends built up to 6 metres high with an overhanging lip of ice to prevent the sleighs from flying off the track.

12 The original Winter Olympic sports being cross-country skiing, figure skating, speed skating, ice hockey and four-man bobsleigh. Two-man bobsleigh was added in 1932. Bobsleigh has been a part of every Winter Olympics since, except for the 1960 Games held in California where it was dropped on grounds of the prohibitive cost of building an appropriate course.



Figure 11: Edouard Blin (1877-1946) designed the series of 50mm bronze award medals for presenting to competitors, judges and organisers in each of the sports at the 1924 Winter Olympics, including this one for bobsleigh.

And a variant was made, with the Olympic torch on the reverse, for presenting to the umpires and organisers (Fig. 12):



Figure 12.

After the next Winter Olympics, held at St Moritz in 1928, the FIBT decided to organise the first four-man bobsleigh World Championships, held at Caux-sur-Montreux in Switzerland in 1930. Its success led to the first two-man bobsleigh World Championships being staged the following year, at Oberhof in Thuringia in Germany (Figs. 13 and 14); while the four-man bobsleigh World Championships that year were again at St. Moritz).



Figure 13: postcard of Oberhof hosting the 1931 World Championships.



Figure 14: The uniface bronze 50x65mm medal for the 1<sup>st</sup> Two-man Bobsleigh World Championships. Its legend reads: Weltmeisterschaft Zweier-Bob 1931 Oberhof – Thür[ingen] (World Championships Two-man Bobsleigh 1931 Oberhof, Thuringia). Drilled for mounting as a car grille badge, it is not in the standard catalogue of Third Reich badges: R. Tieste. 2012. *Tagungs- und Veranstaltungsabzeichen 1930 – 1945*. Berlin.



Figure 15: The 80mm uniface bronze and enamelled medal (crudely holed for mounting on a car grille) for the second World Championships held for the two-man bobsleigh in 1933, stamped on the reverse with the maker's mark (Carl Poellath / Schrobhausen) and evidently in the same style and same manufacturer as the 1938 Four-man World Championships medal won by McEvoy: Tieste, *op. cit.*, item 33-01.

The 1932 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid included the two-man bobsleigh for the first time and, being an Olympic year, no World Championships were held.<sup>13</sup> The next World Championships took place in 1933 for the two-man event in Germany, at Schreiberhau (now Szklarska Poręba in Poland) in the mountains of Silesia (Fig. 15), while the four-man was cancelled (Fig. 16); but in 1934 was again held in Germany at Garmisch-Partenkirchen (and the setting for the Winter Olympics two years later) for the four-man (Fig. 17), and at Engelberg in Switzerland for the two-man bobsleigh (Fig. 18).<sup>14</sup>

The winners' and participants' medals for all these early championships are nowadays extremely rare, not least because, in the fashion of early motoring, many were mounted by their recipients as decorative badges on car grilles or bumpers (Figs. 14 and 15).<sup>15</sup>



Figure 16: 1933 French magazine cover on the four-man World Championships captures the thrill.



Figure 17: The 60mm uniface bronze and enamelled medal for the 1934 Four-man Bobsleigh World Championships is unsigned but in the same style and therefore presumably the same maker (Carl Poellath of Schrobenhausen) as the 1933 two-man and 1938 four-man medals, with the legend: *Weltmeisterschaft Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1934 (World Championships Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1934)*, here mounted on a 77mm bronze, silver-plated plaque, and below *Mitarbeiter* (*official*). Not in Tieste, op. cit.

13 The Lake Placid 1932 (and 1980) Olympic bobsleigh run was entered on the USA's National Register of Historic Places in 2010.

14 No medal or badge for this event is recorded in Tieste.

15 M. Triet (ed.). *100 Jahre Bobsport (A Centenary of Bobsleighing)*. Swiss Sport Museum, Basel, 1990.



Figure 18: The 50x80mm uniface bronze and enamel medal for the 1934 World Championships held for the two-man bobsleigh, with its Swiss maker's mark on reverse.



Great Britain, for the first time, won the world fourmen bobsleigh championship at St. Moritz. Above is F. J. McEvoy, an Australian, who captained the winning team.

Figure 19: Australian newspaper coverage of bobsleigh (*The Northern Star*, 10 March 1937).

### The only Bobsleigh Champion from the Antipodes

The Australian recipient of the colourful and intriguing 1938 medal won from Nazi Germany (Fig. 1)<sup>16</sup> is nowadays little remembered in the country of his birth. Yet Frederick Joseph McEvoy<sup>17</sup> (12 February 1907 – 7 November 1951; Figs. 19–21) was one of the great sportsmen of his era and, in his game, of all time. A pioneer in a dangerously exhilarating sport, he won a medal at the 4<sup>th</sup> Winter Olympics in 1936, making him the first Australian to win a Winter Olympics medal – albeit not for Australia. Over the next

- 16 At the Summer Olympics of 1936, Jack Lovelock won gold for New Zealand in the 1500 metres, and Jack Metcalfe won bronze in the triple jump for Australia which for the first time had also sent an entrant to the Winter Olympics – Kenneth Kennedy, whose best result was 29<sup>th</sup> in 500m speed skating: see I. Jobling, 1982. Australia at the 1936 Olympics: Issues and Attitudes. *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education* 13: 18–27; and for general context, D. Large, 2007. *The Nazi Games*. New York; and G. Walters, 2006. *Berlin Games*. London, pp.76–7.
- 17 Frederick James Aloysius McEvoy, according to the *Straits Times*, 21 June 1954, p.5.

three years, while captaining the British team and piloting the bobsleigh,<sup>18</sup> he went on to win the World Championships two years running, in 1937 taking gold for Britain for the first time. He led the team to triumph again in 1938, defeating the ‘master race’ teams in front of their home crowd in Nazi Germany, and took silver the year after that.<sup>19</sup> In all he won three gold and two silver World Championships medals in the two different forms of the sport, the four-man and two-man sleighs, and was the first ever competitor (along with his partner in the two-man bobsleigh) to win gold in both events in the same year. He set at least one lasting international course record, in 1939 covering the 1554 metres of the Italian World Championships run at Cortina d’Ampezzo in a new fastest time of 1 minute 20.75 seconds.

The outbreak, six months later, of World War II put an end to his short sporting career.<sup>20</sup> He nevertheless remains the only sportsman from the Antipodes to receive the top international awards in any of the five founding sports of the Winter Olympics.<sup>21</sup>

Sport was, however, but one aspect, albeit perhaps the only honourable one, of his forty-four years on earth. His reputation was variously as an unprincipled playboy, suspected spy, alleged smuggler, dubious adventurer and unhealthily close associate of one of Hollywood’s most iconic but least reputable stars. He was one of the few Australians about whom that standard phrase in obituaries, “he led a full life” is an understatement.<sup>22</sup> When McEvoy died in typically dramatic circumstances, *Time* magazine at least avoided

<sup>18</sup> H. Gordon. 1994. *Australia and the Olympic Games*. University of Queensland Press, pp.388-90.

<sup>19</sup> The sport’s reputation for danger, given the risks at high speed, was well founded: for example, Reto Capadrutt, who had piloted the Swiss bobsleigh that, by taking the silver medal in 1936 Winter Olympics pushed McEvoy’s Great Britain team into third place (and had also won three World Championships medals in 1935 and 1937), was killed racing at the 1939 World Championships just after McEvoy had set the new record course time.

<sup>20</sup> Not least for his failure to enrol during World War II: see in M. Stern. 1953. *No Innocence Abroad*. New York, chapter 1, *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> The next Winter Olympic medal to be won by Australia was nearly sixty years later, in 1994. No other Australian has won a medal in bobsleigh World Championships, nor indeed won the Olympics or World Championships for any of the other four sports represented at the first winter Games of 1924—curling, ice-skating, Nordic skiing and ice hockey. British teams have not fared much better, although in 1964 GB took gold in 2-man bobsleigh (see footnote 35 below), and won the women’s silver medal in the skeleton at the 2006 Winter Olympics and gold at the 2013 World Championships.

<sup>22</sup> For general background, see National Library of Australia item 42656138 *Biographical cuttings on Fred McEvoy, former playboy*. McEvoy appears in the novel *Gestapo Lodge* by Carlos Mundy (2011) based on his father’s unpublished memoirs as a British Secret Service agent in the 1930s; and in *Un Pedigree* (2005), a novel by the French Nobel laureate writer, Patrick Modiano. A sensational account of McEvoy’s life, later serialised in the Australasian Post in 1954, emerges from Stern, op. cit. McEvoy’s friendship with Errol Flynn is covered in varying detail in the many biographies of the actor, such as Charles Higham’s *Errol Flynn: The Untold Story* (1980), or David Bret’s *Errol Flynn: Gentleman Hellraiser*. Aurum Press, of 2014; and was a popular topic for 1950s men’s magazine articles like *The Golden Playboy: Freddy McEvoy, mystery man of the sunshine coasts*, by George Frazier in *Esquire*, February 1954, Vol. XLI, 2, No. 243.

deploying that platitude. Instead it published an obituary that did, however, begin with a cliché:

*... everybody who was anybody knew Freddy McEvoy. Born to obscurity, the tall, handsome, 44-year-old Australian had the gift of making friends, news, money, and marrying heiresses. His feats of derring-do on the high seas, in the game-filled jungles of Africa and on the icy ski runs of Switzerland gave the international set a vicarious sense of adventure, and earned him the nickname 'Suicide Freddy'.<sup>23</sup>*

McEvoy had been born in Melbourne. His father, a local businessman, died in 1913 when McEvoy was only six years old. He was then sent off to be educated in England where he attended the famous Jesuit boarding school, Stonyhurst College. Quite how from there he gravitated towards high society and the bobsleigh is unclear, but before World War II, the two were intimately linked.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 20: Freddy McEvoy, 1950.



Figure 21a: McEvoy sitting at the front as pilot, during the 1936 Olympics.

23 Op.cit., *Morocco: Death of a Playboy*. 19 November 1951. The playboy image of bobsleigh was not entirely due to McEvoy. One of his close friends was Jack Heaton (1908–1966) who won bronze in the US crew at the 1932 Winter Olympics and married four times, to Gwendolyn Robinson de Alzaga Unzue in 1937, Denise Paule Genest in 1950, Heidi Von Lauer Mundchofen in 1959 and Beatrix Bayer in 1965.

24 This remained the case until the early 1950s, when it became less amateurish, not least with the ex-USSR and the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe (notably East Germany and Romania) taking up the sport. Furthermore in 1952, a critical rule change limiting the total weight of the crew restored the athleticism of the sport by which a strong push at the start, along with the quality of driving or 'piloting' was decisive.

The aristocratic socialite Claus von Bülow recalled his schoolboy admiration for McEvoy's suave manners in Switzerland in the late 1930s: The 'It' Man—that glamorous, dashing and wealthy gentleman, is a dying breed. *Sunday Times* (London), 20 October 1996, p.4.

## The 1936 Winter Olympics

The 1936 Winter Olympics were held at Garmisch-Partenkirchen. The British Olympics Committee awarded McEvoy what is usually the highest national team honour of the event, the right to carry the flag at the opening ceremony.

The 1936 Games being held under the Nazi regime, however, this distinction was made controversial by the presence in the stadium of Adolf Hitler, who saluted each flag as it passed his podium (Fig. 21b).<sup>25</sup>



Figure 21b: Hitler gives the Nazi salute at the opening of the 1936 Winter Olympic Games.

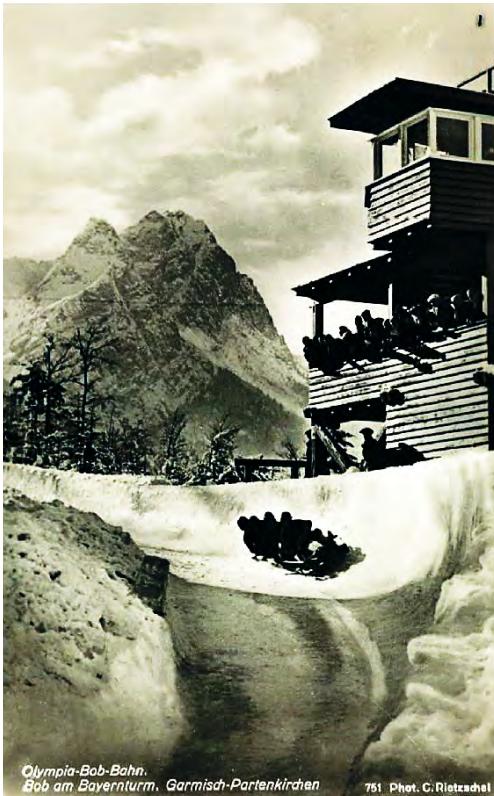


Figure 22: spectators at a sharp bend, and line the finishing section of the bob run at the 1936 Olympic Games.

<sup>25</sup> Some in the team therefore avoided courting controversy by failing to attend the ceremony. These even included the team's manager Sir Arnold Lunn and his son, the skier and later senior British intelligence officer Peter Lunn (1914-2011). McEvoy and others who did participate were involved in the dispute over whether the team had given the (confusingly similar) Olympic or Nazi salute as they filed past the Führer.

A few days later, in front of a crowd of 32,000 spectators (Fig. 22), McEvoy captained and piloted the British four-man bobsleigh team<sup>26</sup> to third place (Fig. 23).



Figure 23: the British Olympics bobsleigh team, 1936.

Over four runs their overall time totalled 5 minutes 23.41 seconds, barely half a second behind the Swiss winners of the silver, and only four seconds, or on average one second per run, behind the other Swiss team that took gold.<sup>27</sup> McEvoy also captained and piloted the two-man bobsleigh, finishing fourth in that competition.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 24: McEvoy's bronze 1936 Winter Olympics medal: note the bobsleigh below the chariot, left.

26 Team mates James Cardno (1912-1975), Guy Dugdale (1905-1982), and brakeman Charles Green (1914-1999) were more conventional, all pursuing professional careers.

27 Jean Dauven, who was in the French crew that finished ninth, wrote one of the few books on the sport called *Bolides des glaces* published in 1944, subtitled *Récits de descentes à St. Moritz, Villars de lans, Garmisch*. In 1968 Paul Bonneau composed *Bobsleigh Rapidity* for the piano.

28 with Cardno.

The 100mm bronze medal presented to McEvoy and to each of his three team-mates on the Great Britain four-man bobsleigh depicts a victorious charioteer above the symbols of the winter sports, including the bobsleigh, with the legend GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN below, while the reverse carries the Olympic rings surrounded by the text: IV OLYMPISCHE WINTERSPIELE 1936 (cf. Fig. 24 and the accompanying certificate at Fig. 25).

The bobsleigh team's success was one of only three medals that Great Britain won at Garmisch-Partenkirchen.<sup>29</sup> The official report on the Games praised McEvoy, concluding: Great Britain was fortunate in having such an experienced and daring driver.<sup>30</sup> In 1937 at the FIBT two-man bobsleigh World Championships at Cortina d'Ampezzo in Italy, he achieved his first gold medal in the sport.<sup>31</sup> McEvoy received the 90x60mm Cortina d'Ampezzo World two-man Bobsleigh Championship 1937 competitors' commemorative plaque, silver plated and enamel on bronze (Fig. 26).

The design depicts a two-man bobsleigh, a map of Italy as background and a red arrow pointing to the location, inscribed 'Federaz. Italiana Sports Invernale CONI Cortina d'Ampezzo/ Campionato del Mondo di Bob a Due' (the Italian Winter Sports Federation Two-man Bobsleigh World Championships, Cortina d'Ampezzo: The Italian International Olympic Committee), and dated 30-31 January 1937 - XV (that is, year 15 of the 'fascist revolution' commencing with Mussolini's 'March on Rome' of 1922).



Figure 25: McEvoy's Bronze medal award, Winter Olympics, 1936.



Figure 26: the 1937 Two-man Bobsleigh World Championships plaque.

<sup>29</sup> Along with gold in ice hockey, silver in women's figure skating. 1936 was the first year Australia sent an athlete to compete in the Winter Olympics – see footnote 16 above.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in: Gordon, *op.cit.*, p.414.

<sup>31</sup> Partnered by Brian Black (1912-2040): an Oxford 'Blue' in rugby and member of the England team, he joined the RAF and was killed when shot down during the Battle of Britain.



Figure 27: 1937 World Championships 50mm prize medal by Edmond Becker (1871-1971). Space left on the reverse for the winner's name to be engraved.

Then in the four-man championships staged at St. Moritz, McEvoy again piloted the GB bobsleigh to winning the gold medal (Fig. 27). Thus McEvoy and his partner Brian Black for the first time in the history of the sport had won both the four- and two-man World Championships in the same year.<sup>32</sup> Few have achieved that feat since.<sup>33</sup>

At the same event in 1938, held in Garmisch-Partenkirchen as part of the 'International Winter Sports Week' (Figs. 1 and 28a and 28b), the four-man team (McEvoy, along with David Looker, Charles Green, and Chris Mackintosh) won once again.<sup>34</sup> McEvoy, Looker and Green are the only members of any British team ever to win the World Championships twice. Since then no British (or Australian) team has won gold in the four-man



Figure 28a: 1938 poster.

<sup>32</sup> The team was McEvoy, Black, 1936 Olympic team-mate Charles Green (1914-1999), and David Looker (1913-1995) who served in the RAF during the Battle of Britain.

<sup>33</sup> The greatest bobsleigh competitor, Italy's Eugenio Monti managed it twice in 1960 and 1961; and Wolfgang Zimmerer and Peter Utzschneider for West Germany in 1974.

<sup>34</sup> Three of the four-man team returned to defend their title. Chris Mackintosh (1903-1974) replaced Brian Black. Mackintosh was an all-round sportsman who represented Oxford University at athletics, rugby football, and skiing; and played rugby for Scotland in 1924. He worked for Sir Henry Lunn's Alpine travel business and was Chairman of the company from 1931-44.

bobsleigh (and, in the two-man bobsleigh, only one British team has taken gold again, in 1965).<sup>35</sup> Silver and bronze in 1938 were won by teams from the host, Germany. That year the two-man bobsleigh World Championships were held at the origin of the sport, St. Moritz. McEvoy and his partner Charles Green won the silver medal.

In 1939 both men partnered again at Cortina d'Ampezzo (McEvoy as pilot, Green as brakeman) and, alongside their two new 'pusher' team-mates, Peter Howard (1908-1965) and J. Critchley, won silver in the four-man event.<sup>36</sup>

### The 'Big Dame Hunting' Playboy and the National Icon

'Suicide Freddy' (or 'Freddie') was a "larger than life" character.<sup>37</sup> Indeed almost singlehandedly he gave bobsleigh a 'devil may care' raffish air.<sup>38</sup> His contemporaries either admired his bravery, romantic gallantry and recklessness, or loathed him as a shameless rascal who ruthlessly exploited his good looks.<sup>39</sup> He scandalised high society



Figure 28b: 90mm silvered bronze participants' award for competing in the 1938 International Winter Sports Week, stamped "Poellath Schrobenhausen".

<sup>35</sup> Robin Dixon and Tony Nash won Britain's first and so far only Olympic gold in the two-man bobsleigh event, at the Innsbruck 1964 Winter Games. They also won three medals in two-man bobsleigh events at the FIBT World Championships; gold in 1965, and two bronze in 1963 and 1966. Now Lord Glentoran, Dixon has been President of the British Bobsleigh Association since 1987. See Sebastian Coe's article on the British amateurishness still then: *Bobsleigh: Secret of Britain's gold run*: Daily Telegraph, 13 January 2002. The previous year, Great Britain won a first and, so far, only gold in the four-man bobsleigh at the Olympics: B. Belton. 2010. *Olympic Gold Run: Britain's Great Bobsleigh Victory!* London.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Howard captained the England rugby team. His autobiography *Ideas Have Legs*, including his account of the World Championships, was reviewed in *The Australian Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1947), pp. 113-117.

<sup>37</sup> Although often spelt even by contemporaries as *Freddie* (eg. *The Courier Mail*, 14 February 1935), the evidence is clear that he himself used *Freddy*: see Fig. 34.

<sup>38</sup> The pre-war social exclusivity of the sport, due to its origins, the costs of equipment and training locations, was reflected among the extraordinary bobsleigh competitors of the 1920s and 1930s, including the Marquese Antonio Brivio-Sforza (1905 – 1995) who won the Mille Miglia (1936) in an Alfa Romeo; as a bobsleigh pilot, he won a bronze medal at the 1935 World Championships. In the 1950s, Alfonso Antonio Vicente Eduardo Angel Blas Francisco de Borja Cabeza de Vaca y Leighton, Marquis of Portago, was a somewhat similar dashing aristocrat, competing in Formula One Grand Prix, and piloting the Spanish bobsleigh to 4<sup>th</sup> position in the 1956 Winter Olympics. He died in a car racing accident soon after.

<sup>39</sup> He was described by the *Straits Times* of 21 June 1954 as "husky and athletic, blond, tanned and good-looking" but with "unashamed opportunism" and a "mania for money." For a representative benign portrayal of McEvoy, see Andreas Zielcke's 1994 biography of diplomat and racing driver Porfirio Rubirosa entitled *Der letzte Playboy (The last Playboy)*, Berlin; for a typically hostile depiction, see C. Bennett. 2014. *Hitchcock's Partner in Suspense: The Life of Screenwriter Charles Bennett*. University Press of Kentucky, pp.144-151.

and fascinated the readership of gossip columns in equal measure. A debonair socialite, he courted infamy as one of Hollywood's self-styled *Hellfire Club* or 'Three Musketeers' (along with Errol Flynn, and Bruce Cabot, of 'King Kong' fame).

Usually characterised by newspapers as a 'handsome gigolo' or 'popular playboy', the 'big dame hunter' married three times. His first wife, Beatrice Cartwright, crippled and twice his age, was the granddaughter of an oil magnate and offered the security of fabulous wealth.<sup>40</sup> The marriage lasted two years. After divorce in 1942, McEvoy promptly married another heiress, this time one half his age.<sup>41</sup> That second marriage also barely survived two years. Then in 1945, McEvoy began a long-running affair with Barbara Hutton,<sup>42</sup> another extremely rich woman who was divorcing her third husband, the actor Cary Grant. For several years Hutton funded McEvoy's 'super affluent' lifestyle.<sup>43</sup>

Besides his attraction to rich women, the source of McEvoy's social success was his lasting close friendship with a fellow Australian, the actor Errol Flynn (1909-1959).

Flynn and McEvoy had much, besides country of birth, in common, including good looks, a ruthless charm, and a passion for sailing. McEvoy was 'Best Man' at Flynn's third marriage in 1950 (Fig. 29), while the previous year Flynn had served in that capacity at McEvoy's third wedding, in Miami to French fashion model Claude-Stephanie Filatre (Fig. 30).<sup>44</sup>



Figure 29: Errol Flynn and McEvoy at Flynn's third wedding in 1950.

<sup>40</sup> This derived from her grandfather Henry Huttleston Rogers, one of the original founders of Standard Oil. For their married life in Cap d'Antibes, see M. Emerson. 2015. *Living and Loving on the Riviera*. London.

<sup>41</sup> The 18-year-old Irene Wrightsman, daughter of the president of Standard Oil of Kansas.

<sup>42</sup> Grand-daughter of the creator of the Woolworth retailing fortune.

<sup>43</sup> Their affair was front-page news: eg. *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 13 April 1946.

<sup>44</sup> When McEvoy and his third wife drowned, Flynn told the Australian press that he was willing to adopt McEvoy's five year old step-daughter Romaine, Mrs. McEvoy's daughter from her first marriage, who was then attending a Swiss school with Stephanie, McEvoy's daughter by his second marriage: the *Adelaide News*, 9 November 1951, p.8.

Although now officially labelled as one of Australia's 'national icons'<sup>45</sup> the Hollywood star embroiled McEvoy in many of the more insalubrious episodes that dogged his controversial career.<sup>46</sup> The most infamous event occurred in January 1943 when McEvoy was the key defence witness for Flynn, found not guilty of statutory rape the previous year at McEvoy's house of a seventeen year old girl.<sup>47</sup>

Apparently as a result, soon afterwards McEvoy was invited to play minor uncredited parts in two Hollywood productions, the 1943 films *Thank Your Lucky Stars* starring Humphrey Bogart, Bette Davis and Errol Flynn (Fig. 31), and *The Desert Song* (starring Bruce Cabot).

### A rogue, but at least an Australian rogue?

While McEvoy represented Great Britain at the fourth Winter Olympics, he was proud of his Australian origins. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, in reporting on Flynn's third wedding, erroneously declared: Sydney Man To Be Best Man for Errol Flynn.<sup>48</sup> Although his connection was to Melbourne not Sydney, McEvoy certainly strongly identified with the land of his birth. He called his last yacht *Kangaroa* and entered major motor-races under Australian colours. McEvoy's ambiguous nationality reflected the age of empire and Australia's colonial ties to the 'Motherland', as the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted in February 1937 when he won the World Championships in



Figure 30: McEvoy and third wife, in 1949.



Figure 31: Errol Flynn in the scene from *Thank Your Lucky Stars* in which McEvoy, although unattributed in the credits, also appears (right).

<sup>45</sup> Formally classified as such: see [http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/national\\_icons.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/national_icons.html)

<sup>46</sup> According to Bret, *op. cit.*, however, McEvoy saved Errol Flynn's career by weaning him off an opium addiction: p.138.

<sup>47</sup> *Lewiston Daily Sun* 27 January 1943.

<sup>48</sup> 20 October 1950: Australian businessman Mr. Fred McEvoy, formerly of Sydney, ...now lives aboard his schooner, Black Joke, in Cannes Harbour.

Italy: Great Britain, represented by the Australian, P. McEvoy, and the South African, B. H. Black, won the world's two man bobsleigh championship with four runs.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 32: McEvoy driving under the Australian flag, in 1936.



Figure 33: McEvoy's entry to the race as an Australian explains the country's flag alongside those of the US, France, Great Britain, and Italy on the event's programme cover.

Bobsleigh competitors of the 1930s prided themselves on three inter-related pursuits: dangerous sports, daring women, and dubious money. McEvoy's skills at the first facilitated his success with the second, who usually provided the third. Besides bobsleigh, he courted danger through a passion for the finest and fastest sports cars, and in the same year as he was attending the Olympics in the British team, he was motor racing under the Australian red ensign flag (Figs. 32-3).<sup>50</sup> McEvoy's first major motor race was in 1935 when he participated in the arduous 1,000 mile (*Mille Miglia*) competition in Italy. The following season, McEvoy won three thousand dollars by finishing fifth in the 1936 George Vanderbilt Cup. Driving a Maserati along the 300-mile course, in what was then "probably the most severe test for man and car in the world", he covered seventy-five laps at the new Roosevelt Raceway on Long Island at an average speed of just over sixty miles per hour, in front of a crowd of fifty thousand spectators.<sup>51</sup>

49 Op.cit.

50 He was an Australian too, when *The Western Argus* of Kalgoorlie on 20 October 1936 reported he had come fifth in the 1936 Vanderbilt Cup – see below.

51 *The Western Argus*, 20 October 1936, p.28.

That same year he entered eight European races, with his best result being fourth place at both the XII *Picardie* and the *Coppa Acerbo*. In 1937 he set a record time between Paris and Nice of 9 hours and 45 minutes in a Talbot Lago coupé and won the \$10,000 prize for being the first driver to arrive on the Riviera from the capital in less than ten hours (Fig. 34). It was from the world of motor racing that his main rival as the 'world's most successful playboy' emerged: the diplomat and motor car racing driver Porfirio Rubirosa (1909-1965) who married great wealth while also having affairs with many of Hollywood's most beautiful actresses including Marilyn Monroe, Ava Gardner, Rita Hayworth, Joan Crawford and Judy Garland, as well as with Eva Peron.<sup>52</sup>



Figure 34: inscribed photograph of his Talbot Lago coupé car: note his spelling of 'Freddy'.



Figure 35: the NSKK (*Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps*, or Nazi Motoring Corps) Wintersportkämpfe Innsbruck-Igls 1941 37mm zinc badge and uniface 60mm medal, both made by Poellath of Schrobenhausen, feature the bobsleigh at the bottom.

<sup>52</sup> Stern, *op. cit.*, p.34; also see footnotes 38 and 39 above.

## Nazi Spies

Meanwhile McEvoy attracted attention in other ways. Suspecting him and Flynn during the 1930s and war years of being spies, the US authorities monitored their activities.<sup>53</sup> The FBI investigated claims, in part due to his link with Germany through bobsleigh (Fig. 35) that McEvoy was a covert agent of the Third Reich. The ‘Feds’, however, eventually concluded that he was merely “an international pimp who is interested in his own well-being and probably not engaged in activities detrimental to the interests of the country.”<sup>54</sup>

Other governments were also keeping an eye on his activities. In 1939 the French police suspected McEvoy of involvement in a ‘high society’ fraud. Sir Delves Broughton, who a couple of years later was the main suspect in the ‘Happy Valley’ murder in Kenya of Lord Erroll in 1941, could ill-afford the international lifestyle he desired. The police suspected that when Broughton reported his wife’s pearl necklace, insured for the then colossal sum of £17,000, stolen in Cannes, McEvoy had in some way colluded with Broughton in arranging its disappearance, in return for a share of the insurance payout.<sup>55</sup>

Later, during the war, when his second marriage did not provide the wealth he had been hoping for, McEvoy was suspected by the US authorities of smuggling black market goods from Mexico into the United States.<sup>56</sup> At the time of his death in 1951, the Daily Express of London claimed that British intelligence had been tracking McEvoy as a suspected illegal arms dealer and smuggler of contraband between Tangier and France. When his yacht sank off the coast of Morocco, allegedly on board had been £15,000 worth of diamonds and forty cases of whisky, while two members of her crew had apparently been expelled from France for smuggling.<sup>57</sup>

## ‘Suicide Freddy’ on the slide

With such a reputation, legends grew from the spreading of rumour: the ‘world famous mystery man’<sup>58</sup> had killed a man in a bar brawl in Marseilles; had once won \$25,000 gambling in Monte Carlo and then immediately rushed out with his winnings to buy a

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53 T. McNulty. 2004. *The Life and Career of Errol Flynn*: McFarland. pp.167-9.

54 Nevertheless, some biographers of Flynn still however allege the pair were Nazi spies: see, for example: C. Higham. 1981. *Errol Flynn: The Untold Story*. London, p.134.

55 J. Fox. 1983. White Mischief: The Murder of Lord Erroll. London, pp. 133-5, 222-4: McEvoy’s surname is wrongly given as ‘McIlvray’.

56 When in Mexico City he stayed with Countess Dorothy di Frasso, another of his generous patronesses. The Countess (1900-1985), born Dorothy Taylor in New York, married Count Carlo di Frasso, thirty years her senior, and became a socialite famed for her elaborate parties.

57 *Op. cit.*, 18 November 1951, pp.10-11.

58 Straits Times, op.cit.

new Maserati; and that he was supposedly an expert at big game, as well as 'big dame' hunting, in Kenya.

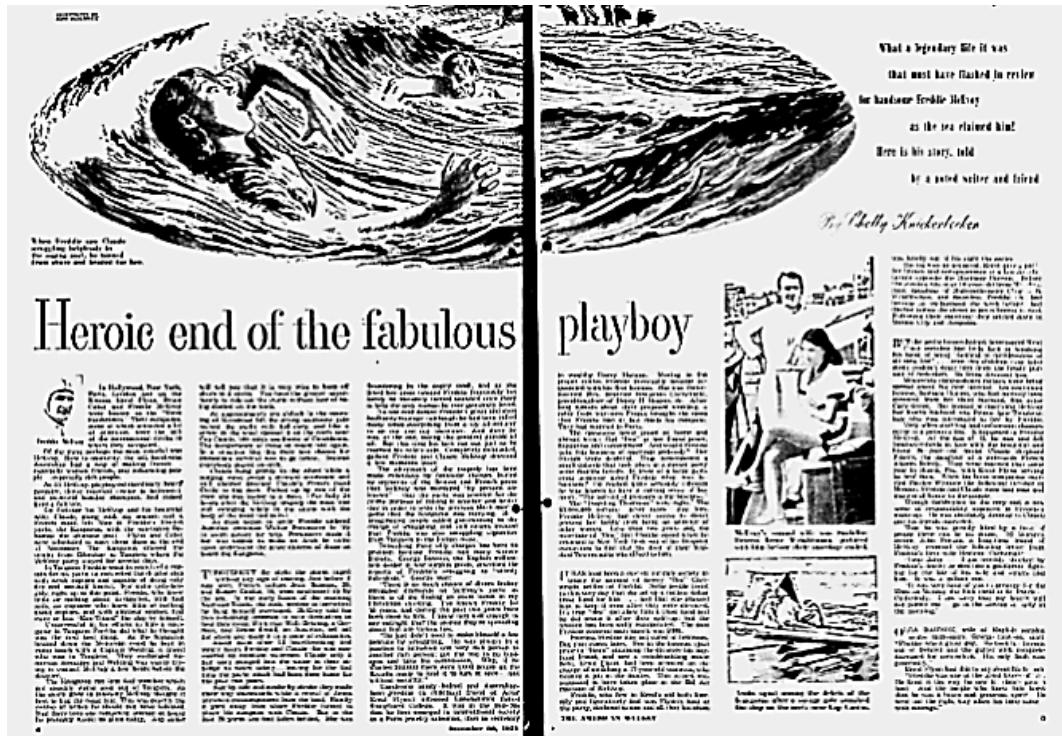


Figure 36: sensationalist media coverage of McEvoy's death

If all this was not more than enough for a 'full life', his death was also suitably mysterious (Fig. 36). In November 1951, sailing from Tangier to the Bahamas, his yacht sank in a storm off the Moroccan coast. It seemed odd that experienced sailors like McEvoy and his crew had, by day, struck rocks that were both visible and well charted. Had they been engaged in gun-running, diamond smuggling or shipping contraband whiskey when the storm struck? Another puzzle was why McEvoy, a strong swimmer, had drowned apparently helping his wife (who also perished, along with four others), yet three crew members had reached the shore without difficulty.

Then it transpired that one of the surviving crew had been living under a false name, and was wanted for murder:

*A sinister figure in the inquiries at this stage is Walter Praxmarer, an Austrian wanted for questioning regarding the murder of a Berlin woman. His real name is said to be Manfred Lendner. He was arrested by French authorities soon after the tragedy. He is described*

*as grim, sombre, and a bearded figure engaged by wealthy, jovial handsome McEvoy at Cannes as an engineer and makeshift second officer of the vessel.*<sup>59</sup>

Errol Flynn noted in his autobiography: *I had been close to him for twenty years and his passing was a hard blow to me. I could have understood if he went out like a cheat, a gambler, a ne'er do well – but not in that gallant way.*<sup>60</sup> The Australian Department of External Affairs examined the case but, over sixty years after McEvoy's death, the papers still remain secret.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps they contain unflattering information about a 'national icon'?

### **Conclusion: Sport and National Identity**

Artistic in design, masterly in execution, and won in Nazi Germany under the looming threat of war, the 1938 bobsleigh medal is important in the history of Australia for three reasons.<sup>62</sup> First, in the country's sporting history, it is a singular accolade. This is the most important winter sports medal win by an Australian in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>63</sup> Lacking extensive snow-capped mountain ranges, Australia did not enter a national team in bobsleigh at the Winter Olympics until 1988 and the country's best result was ranking a mere 20th in 1994; in the four-man bobsleigh World Championships in 2013, Australia finished 33<sup>rd</sup> out of thirty-four; and came 22<sup>nd</sup> out of thirty national team entries in the 2014 Winter Olympics.<sup>64</sup>

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59 *Mirror* (Perth) 24 November 1951, p.15. The Sydney Morning Herald of 14 November 1951 reported that Austrian police only became aware of the suspect's alias and whereabouts when they saw his photograph in European newspaper coverage of the shipwreck. To the evident disappointment of the press, it was soon apparent that Lendner had no hand in McEvoy's or his wife's death.

60 *Op cit.* p.383.

61 Files A1838, 1543/1/133 Part 1; and A3211, 1963/3764 Part 1 *Ships–yacht Kangaroa–Mr F J. McEvoy and crew.*

62 The medal was acquired from Frederick McEvoy's estate in Cannes in the 1950s by the British antique dealer and collector of curios, Tom Crispin, winner of the CINOA Prize in 1991, author of several seminal studies on English antique furniture, including on 'bible boxes' and on the history of the Windsor chair for both of which, as a student nearly forty years ago, I helped undertake research.

63 The other contenders for this accolade being Malcolm Milne's skiing world cup medal in 1969 and Zali Steggall's bronze in slalom at the 1998 Winter Olympics and World Championship gold medal in 1999.

64 The sport's popularity is growing and New Zealand, Jamaica and Japan are among the other non-traditional bobsleigh countries increasingly attracted to the sport.

The second reason is that McEvoy's bobsleigh triumph in Nazi Germany represents not just an Australian achievement in an unusual sport from a different era. In the run-up to World War II, the success of an Australian-British team carried political significance. It marked a triumph for the democratic ideal over the Third Reich's totalitarian ideology and the 'master race'.<sup>65</sup> Its win offered a psychological boost to the British Empire in the lead up to World War II (Fig. 37). Nazi propaganda sought to claim the German people trained the body in the service of the State and so international sporting success supposedly demonstrated the might of the 'new Germany', thereby apparently justifying its claim for *Lebensraum* and racial supremacy. The victory gripped the popular imagination (Fig. 38), increasingly interested in the sport.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 37: a contemporary cigarette card honouring the 1938 team.



Figure 38: 1930s metal Bobsleigh toy shows the increasing general interest in the sport.

<sup>65</sup> On the role of sport in Hitler's Germany, see: G.A. Carr. 1974. Sport and Party Ideology in the Third Reich. Canadian Journal of the History of Sport and Physical Education, vol. 5, pp.1-9.

<sup>66</sup> For example, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, on 5 March 1938, reported how the bobsleigh featured in an act at the London Coliseum.

When World War II broke out, however, all major international sporting fixtures were suspended until it ended six years later. McEvoy never competed again. Nevertheless, in that short career spanning only four years, McEvoy's total medal tally—one Olympic and five (three Gold and two Silver) World Championship medals – still puts him among the greatest bobsleigh athletes of all time. McEvoy was certainly a remarkable bobsleigh champion in the early years of that sport. He remains the only Australian ever to win an Olympic medal in bobsleigh.<sup>67</sup> If World War II had not broken out, given his consistent good form in the World Championships during the years after 1936, he might have surpassed his achievement at the next Winter Olympics planned for 1940.

Admittedly the sport was more amateurish then, but the low tech, high spirited achievements were in some ways all the more impressive for that. Nostalgia is perhaps warranted for the dilettante nature of bobsleigh before World War II. Nowadays the FIBT's Rulebook stretches to seventy-four pages, including pedantically specifying that:

*At official FIBT Championships, the FIBT awards gold, silver and bronze medals to the athletes of the first, second and third placed teams. The athletes of the fourth, fifth and sixth placed teams receive commemorative medals.*<sup>68</sup>

Is nostalgia justified, however, for the daring ambition and ruthless determination of McEvoy and his like during the 'golden age of the playboy'?<sup>69</sup> Was he the perfect gentleman, handsome and with a gift for lively conversation, a charismatic personality with limitless tact for pleasing rich women? At the time of McEvoy's death, Errol Flynn told the newspapers that his friend had been: *one of the great livers of life, a brave and generous spirit who didn't give a damn.*<sup>70</sup> Lacking a personal fortune of his own, McEvoy successfully lived off the wealth of others through a combination of cunning, charisma and charm: as Flynn concluded: *My friendship with Freddie was deep – a real sporting relationship. He made life appear a thing of gaiety ... He made a fortune, married wealth, he raced cars, he was a leader in his set. People like me had to work. Freddie didn't in order to live high. There was a certain gift which not many have.*<sup>71</sup>

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67 The forgotten story of ... those magnificent men and their flying bobsled. The incredible tale of how the 1932 Winter Olympics brought together four fascinating men to win gold and a place in history. *The Guardian*, 25 February 2010.

68 FIBT. The 2013 International Rules, p.26.

69 J. Queenan. 2011. Requiem for a Dream: The 'international man of mystery' ain't what he used to be. *The Weekly Standard*, v.16, no.44, 8 August, pp.3-8.

70 Daily Express, op. cit.

71 E. Flynn. 1960. *My Wicked, Wicked Ways: The Autobiography of Errol Flynn*. New York, p.383.



Figure 39. Advertisement for the sensational account of the life of the Famous Australian International Playboy.

The final reason for the medal's importance in Australia's history is that, in the 1930s, the country's emerging national identity was moulded by sport.<sup>72</sup> McEvoy was part of that process. By forming, defining and evolving an 'otherness' through sporting differences between 'metropole' and colony, a separate and distinct sense of Australian citizenship developed. McEvoy was not just competing in, but also helping to shape the sport and, as the pilot, he was critical to the victories won.

Yet, while the decade before World War II was a period that did much to form the dominion's sense of egalitarian distinctness from the 'mother country', the 1938 medal was also, literally and metaphorically, a badge of the social exclusivity that all winter sports represented during the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore McEvoy gave bobsleigh a risqué image. This was posthumously reinforced in various articles in the Australian newspapers in the years following his drowning.<sup>73</sup> In March 1954 the

<sup>72</sup> J. van Duinen. 2013. Playing to the 'imaginary grandstand': Sport, the 'British world', and an Australian colonial identity. *Journal of Global History*, vol. 8, pp 342-364; T. Ward. 2013. *Sport in Australian National Identity*. London.

<sup>73</sup> Eg. *The Truth* (Sydney, NSW), 2 December 1951, p. 15 and 30.

*Australasian Post* ran a lengthy, heavily advertised sensational series on this *Famous Australian International Playboy* (Fig. 39). Based on Michael Stern's 1953 book about McEvoy and his social circle, *No Innocence Abroad*, it described his life thus: *Freddie McEvoy lived like a millionaire on his good looks, good luck and irresistible charm. A cad, who died a hero, he pursued pleasure, easy money and beautiful women.* That book briefly gave him posthumous notoriety around the world. In June 1954 the *Straits Times* of Singapore, for instance, published a 'special feature' article, offering unattributed plagiarism and embellishment of Stern's account of the 'playboy mystery man'.<sup>74</sup>

So, although a great sportsman, was McEvoy, in the final judgment, an immoral rogue, an unscrupulous rascal and an inveterate gambler with other people's money? How far did he collude in the shocking failings of one of Australia's 'national icons'? Was the Australian media's fascination with McEvoy a reflection of the country's vicarious pride in a national self-image of charming adventurers defeating totalitarianism (Fig. 40), or an expression of the embarrassment felt by a young society shaking off a stereotype of a land of ne'er-do-wells, however brave and dashing? In preserving the paradoxes of McEvoy's enigmatic life for posterity, the swastika-emblazoned 1938 bobsleigh medal captures the complexity of judging as 'heroes' or 'villains' many of the 'icons' that shaped the emerging identity of Australia as a new nation.

## Author

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Figure 40: the German 1936 Winter Olympics bobsleigh stamp.

<sup>74</sup> 21 June 1954, p.5. It suggested that he had first met Flynn in Australia in the 1920s when they were both supposedly working as clerks at the Dalgety wool-brokers' office, in Melbourne.