

**If Scotland achieved independence**, would it enter separate Olympic teams?

The answer: it already has: in the cycling event in the 1912 Olympics at Stockholm. As England, Scotland and Ireland were registered individually with the Union Cycliste Internationale (the writer is unaware of the situation of Wales), the three nations pleaded with the Swedish organisers to be allowed to enter distinct teams. So despite objections from the French, there appeared in Stockholm twelve riders (the maximum allowed) representing England, twelve Scotsmen and nine Irishmen.

There were no Track Cycling events in Stockholm, as the city's only track had been ripped up to make way for the main Olympic Stadium. The organisers rejected the idea of Cycle Polo and "Figure Cycling", and considered a Road Race unsafe, so the only option for cyclists was a Time Trial.

Bradley Wiggins and his fellow 2012 Olympic time-triallists would have had severe misgivings about the 1912 event. It was almost 200 miles long, over a route which the organisers had admitted was made up of "dusty, rut-marked and hilly highways". The roads were available for routine traffic: one cyclist collided with a lorry a few hundred metres after the start and was hospitalised. The racers were urged to "keep to the left" (the Rule of the Road in Sweden at the time) and were required to "ring bell or other signal" to alert other road users. At the far-point of the course, they would have to dismount to sign a form to prove they had reached it; if delayed at one of seven named canal bridges they would receive a time allowance (but if held up at a rail level-crossing, tough luck).

As with any Time Trial, the competitors started at intervals (two minutes in this case), but because of the number of entrants, the first rider had to start at 2.00a.m. (yes, a.m.). The event winner was Rudolph Lewis of South Africa in 10 hours 42 minutes: early starts clearly did not distress him, as he was second rider away. Second place went to Frederick Grubb of England; even a combined British team would not have won any team medals.



The actual finish line was outside the stadium, but competitors (including winner Rudolph Lewis, shown here) were expected to ride on into the Stadium and cover half a lap of the track.

But how about this quotation:

“Strictly speaking, cycling does not really belong to the Olympic Games, and its right to a place on the programme is more than doubtful. In our opinion, *cycling ought not to be included in future Olympic Games*” . (Official Report of the 1912 Olympic Games, their italics).

Sir Chris Hoy and his colleagues might possibly not agree!