

Wellington Training School will not allow a team coached by a professional to be beaten by an amateur squad.³⁰

The report is followed by a commentary, signed 'F. Milner', on 'The Gymnastic Contest'. The point of real issue, as he saw it, is again stressed:

The conclusion is forced home upon one that an amateur squad cannot be allowed to score a victory in the sacrosanct pale of professionalism. Our own squad were practically self-trained, as our College possesses no gymnastic coach.³¹

No coach other than Frank Milner: the amateur leading the amateurs! And then outraged pride and a strong sense of conviction swept away any discretionary restraints:

The judges cannot explain the situation by reference to any *finesse* of execution on the part of the Wellington boys in the face of the craggy contour of their legs and up-turned toes. What fine points their squad collectively possessed were of such a refined and attenuated character as to be invisible to the grosser gaze. The result is a convincing demonstration of the utter futility of such competitions where practically everything depends not on the individual efforts of the competitor, but on the arbitrary and adjustable standards of the judge.³²

The aftermath was serious. Wellington College suspended *sine die* all athletic relations with Nelson. The annual football matches were not resumed until 1925 (the war years 1914–18 made a natural gap). The editorial pages of the *Nelsonian* later offered a kind of apology, without recanting as to principle:

The Principal of Wellington College failing to obtain what he considers an adequate apology for our comments on the recent gymnastic contest has broken off all connections with us. We are very sorry that he has taken this step. We do not think that the remarks in question afford any justification for taking up this attitude. We regret we cannot accept the judges' verdict on that occasion as an unbiased valuation of the work of the two squads.³³

And in the spirit of Hotspur, which in moral rather than martial terms ran in his blood, he threw down his gauntlet:

In view of the facts of this case we must say that it would be a hard thing to reconcile a meek acquiescence in the verdict with one's duty to the gymnastic squad and the school it represents.

In the eyes of the headmaster, Mr Fowler, his first assistant was rashly adding fuel to the flames. Moreover, for him the management of the *Nelsonian* had become in other ways all too independent. In a letter to the Council of Governors dated 18 July 1906 Fowler remarks: