

Other 1908 athletics events



In other Games



| Event type

# Marathon, Men

**Date** 24 July 1908 — 14:33

**Status** Olympic

**Location** White City Stadium, London

**Participants** 55 from 16 countries

**Format** 42,195 metres (26 miles, 385 yards) point-to-point.

The race started by the East Terrace of Windsor Castle. It has been written (including by our group) that this was done because it was under the windows of the nursery, to allow the Princes a good view of the start, but this is certainly false, and has been shown to be so by Bob Wilcock, in his article in the *Journal of Olympic History*, "The 1908 Olympic Marathon" (March 2008, Vol 16, No 1; 31-47), and David Davis, in his book ***Showdown at Shepherd's Bush - The 1908 Olympic Marathon and the Three Runners Who Launched a Sporting Craze***.

In fact, notices in *The Sporting Life* as early as November 1907 note that the Organizing Committee was attempting to receive permission to start the race at Windsor Castle, with no requests from the Royal Family to do so. By April 1908, it was noted that the starting point was confirmed as "on or near the East Lawn below the east terrace of the Castle", although it was still subject to the King's consent. It was suggested that this was done to avoid any public interference with the start of the race.

The race was started concurrently by Lord Desborough and Jack Andrew, secretary of the Polytechnic Harriers, after they had been given a signal by Princess Mary, which was transmitted to their car. The distance to the finish in front of the Royal Box in the White City Stadium was precisely 26 miles, 385 yards (42,195 metres), and this rather arbitrary distance, which had no particular historical or athletic significance, eventually became the internationally accepted distance for the marathon footrace, declared so by the IAAF in 1921, and used at the Olympics again since 1924.

With a field of 55 runners from 16 nations, this was by far the most international field yet assembled for a marathon, and the British, quite unrealistically, entertained hopes of considerable success, but eight of the 12 British starters failed to finish the race. Another fancied runner who also dropped out was the Canadian Tom Longboat, who was competing in the face of American protests. The Americans claimed that Longboat was a professional, but the Organizing Committee eventually allowed Longboat to compete. Other starters included Georg Lind (19th), a London-based Russian from Estonia who became the first Russian to compete in an Olympic track & field event, and the English-born Canadian George Goulding (22nd), who would win the 10 km walk at the 1912 Games. All of the runners were accompanied by two attendants on bicycles, many of them Olympic cycling competitors, who met them at the Crooked Billet Inn, at the six-mile mark.

It was a very warm day for long-distance running, the temperature eventually reaching 78° F (26° C). Scotsman Tom Jack led for the first five miles but dropped out shortly thereafter. Fred Lord and Jack Price, both British, then ran together in the lead through 10 miles. At that mark, Price pulled away, closely followed by the English-born South African Charles Hefferon, who had always been near the lead. Tom Longboat was in second as far out as 17 miles, but he withdrew by 20 miles. After the excessive heat had taken its toll, the race came down to three runners by the 20 mile mark: Hefferon, the American Johnny Hayes, and Italy's Dorando Pietri. Hefferon had control of the race from 15 through 25 miles, leading Pietri by over 3 minutes at 20 miles.

A little more than one mile from the finish, Pietri moved into the lead, passing Hefferon. However, the effort cost him dearly, and Pietri entered the White City Stadium in an advanced state of exhaustion. He stumbled and fell, but doctors and attendants revived him, administering stimulants, and helping him to his feet. He then fell four more times over the final lap, each time being helped by his handlers. He eventually staggered across the finish line, while

surrounded by officials, doctors, and attendants. John Hayes crossed the line, unaided, more than 30 seconds later and, after Pietri had been disqualified for receiving assistance, the American was rightly declared the Olympic champion.

The official statement read, "That, in the opinion of the judges, M. P. Dorando would have been unable to finish the race without the assistance rendered on the track, and so, therefore, the protest of the U.S.A. is upheld, and the second man, Mr. J. Hayes, is the winner, the protest being made by the South African team being withdrawn." Pietri quickly recovered from his ordeal and returned to the Stadium the next day to receive a special award from the Queen.

Gynn and Martin described the assistance given Pietri, "The assistance given to Pietri was primarily by Jack Andrew, the Honorary General Secretary of the Polytechnic Harriers and the key organizer of the race. He followed instructions of the medical officer for the race, Doctor Bulger. He [Andrew] reported, in the August, 1908, issue of The Polytechnic Magazine, 'As regards the actual finish, most of the reports of same are absolutely erroneous regards my assisting the winner - the doctor's instructions were emphatic, carrying them out caused disqualification; as the animated photographs show, I only caught Dorando as he was falling at the tape. What I did then I would do again under similar circumstances.'"

After the Olympic Games, both Hayes and Pietri turned professional, and Pietri won each of their four subsequent encounters in New York and San Francisco. To this day, Dorando Pietri is better remembered than the Olympic champion, Johnny Hayes. Born 16 October 1885, in Mandrio, Reggio Emilia, Italy, Dorando Pietri is the most famous loser in Olympic history. However, he had an excellent career as a marathon runner. He won his first marathon in 1906 in Rome, but failed to finish the 1906 Olympic marathon a month later. He had won a 40 km marathon in Carpi, Italy, only 17 days before the Olympic marathon. As a professional marathoner, he won seven of 12 of his professional races. He retired in 1911, having won 38 of 59 amateur races and 50 of 69 professional races.

Although the 1908 Olympic marathon is best remembered for the disqualification of Pietri, this does less than justice to Johnny Hayes, who was correctly determined to be the champion, and was an excellent marathon runner in his own right. He had been born in America soon after his parents emigrated from Ireland, and his initial success came when he took third place in the 1907 Boston Marathon. Later in the season, he won the Yonkers Marathon. Then, by finishing second in the 1908 Boston race, Hayes won a spot on the Olympic team.

After his Olympic victory, Hayes paid a brief visit to his grandparents in Ireland, and then returned to New York, where Bloomingdale's had plastered their department store with photographs of Hayes and announced that their employee, who had been rumored to train on the store track on the roof, had been promoted to manager of sporting goods. Years later, Hayes laid to rest this oft-repeated bit of Olympic lore. He never did actually work at Bloomingdale's, or train on the roof. He drew a salary from Bloomingdale's but most of his time was spent training at a track outside Manhattan.

Hayes was interviewed on the night of the race, "I took nothing to eat or drink on the journey. I think to do so is a great mistake. Before starting I partook of a light lunch, consisting of two ounces of beef, two slices of toast and a sup of tea. During the race I merely bathed my face with Florida water and gargled my throat with brandy.

"I ran my own race throughout, covering in almost mechanical fashion the first five or six miles at a rate of six minutes a mile. After that I went as hard as I could to the finish. Ten miles from home I was ten minutes behind the leader, and then I began to go through the field. I passed Hefferon on nearing the Stadium, but saw nothing of Dorando until I entered the arena. I do not smoke and I drink only in moderation."

Hefferon also commented, "The conditions of the race - weather, roads, &c. - suited me exactly, and I should have won the event. Two miles from home, however, I accepted a draught of champagne and this mistake cost me the race. The drink gave me a cramp a mile from the finish and then I lost my lead."

The tragic sight of Dorando Pietri attempting to finish the 1908 marathon race, despite a body that had betrayed him, touched many people. One of those people was a young, aspiring songwriter who wrote a song about Pietri. Entitled simply "Dorando", it was one of the first of many hits for Irving Berlin.

Three months after this race, the Evening News sponsored a race from Windsor to the Stadium for professional athletes. The first seven finishers ran faster than the Olympic champion, with the winner, 20 year old Frenchman Henri Siret, crossing the line in 2:37.23. This was 17 minutes faster than Hayes, though it has to be mentioned that the October weather was more convivial to distance running.

| Pos | Competitor       | NOC | Time        |        |    |
|-----|------------------|-----|-------------|--------|----|
| 1   | Johnny Hayes     | USA | 2-55:18.4   | Gold   | OB |
| 2   | Charles Hefferon | RSA | 2-56:06.0   | Silver |    |
| 3   | Joe Forshaw      | USA | 2-57:10.4   | Bronze |    |
| 4   | Roy Welton       | USA | 2-59:44.4   |        |    |
| 5   | William Wood     | CAN | 3-01:44.0   |        |    |
| 6   | Fred Simpson     | CAN | 3-04:28.2   |        |    |
| 7   | Harry Lawson     | CAN | 3-06:47.2   |        |    |
| 8   | John Svanberg    | SWE | 3-07:50.8   |        |    |
| 9   | Lewis Tewanima   | USA | 3-09:15.0   |        |    |
| 10  | Kalle Nieminen   | FIN | 3-09:50.8   |        |    |
| 11  | Jack Caffery     | CAN | 3-12:46.0   |        |    |
| 12  | Tommy Clarke     | GBR | 3-16:08.6   |        |    |
| 13  | Ernie Barnes     | GBR | 3-17:30.8   |        |    |
| 14  | Sidney Hatch     | USA | 3-17:52.4   |        |    |
| 15  | Fred Lord        | GBR | 3-19:08.8   |        |    |
| 16  | Bert Goldsbro    | CAN | 3-20:07.0   |        |    |
| 17  | James Beale      | GBR | 3-20:14.0   |        |    |
| 18  | Arnošt Nejedlý   | BOH | 3-26:26.2   |        |    |
| 19  | Georg Lind       | RUS | 3-26:38.8   |        |    |
| 20  | Willem Wakker    | NED | 3-28:49.0   |        |    |
| 21  | Gustaf Törnros   | SWE | 3-30:20.8   |        |    |
| 22  | George Goulding  | CAN | 3-33:26.4   |        |    |
| 23  | Julius Jørgensen | DEN | 3-47:44.0   |        |    |
| 24  | Arthur Burn      | CAN | 3-50:17.0   |        |    |
| 25  | Emmerich Rath    | AUT | 3-50:30.4   |        |    |
| 26  | Rudy Hansen      | DEN | 3-53:15.0   |        |    |
| 27  | George Lister    | CAN | 4-22:45.0   |        |    |
| DQ  | Dorando Pietri   | ITA | [2-54:46.4] |        |    |
| DNF | Victor Aitken    | ANZ | —           |        | 1  |

| Pos | Competitor             | NOC | Time |    |
|-----|------------------------|-----|------|----|
| DNF | Tom Longboat           | CAN | —    | 2  |
| DNF | Fred Appleby           | GBR | —    | 3  |
| DNF | Nikolaos Kouloumperdas | GRE | —    | 4  |
| DNF | Jack Price             | GBR | —    | 5  |
| DNF | Anastasios Koutoulakis | GRE | —    | 6  |
| DNF | Jack Tait              | CAN | —    | 7  |
| DNF | Bertie Thompson        | GBR | —    | 8  |
| DNF | Arie Vosbergen         | NED | —    | 9  |
| DNF | François Celis         | BEL | —    | 10 |
| DNF | Harry Barrett          | GBR | —    | 11 |
| DNF | Fritz Reiser           | GER | —    | 12 |
| DNF | George Büff            | NED | —    | 13 |
| DNF | Alex Duncan            | GBR | —    | 14 |
| DNF | Umberto Blasi          | ITA | —    | 15 |
| DNF | Tom Jack               | GBR | —    | 16 |
| DNF | George Blake           | ANZ | —    | 17 |
| DNF | Joseph Lynch           | ANZ | —    | 18 |
| DNF | Wilhelmus Braams       | NED | —    | 19 |
| DNF | Albert Wyatt           | GBR | —    | 20 |
| DNF | Eddie Cotter           | CAN | —    |    |
| DNF | Fred Noseworthy        | CAN | —    |    |
| DNF | James Mitchell Baker   | RSA | —    |    |
| DNF | Johan Lindqvist        | SWE | —    |    |
| DNF | Seth Landqvist         | SWE | —    |    |
| DNF | Tom Morrissey          | USA | —    |    |
| DNF | Mike Ryan              | USA | —    |    |
| DNS | Lajos Merényi          | HUN | —    |    |
| DNS | Augusto Cocca          | ITA | —    |    |
| DNS | Alfred Mole            | RSA | —    |    |

| Pos        | Competitor        | NOC | Time |
|------------|-------------------|-----|------|
| <b>DNS</b> | G. E. Stevens     | RSA | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Alexander Thibeau | USA | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Jimmy Lee         | USA | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | James O'Mara      | USA | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Willem Theunissen | NED | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Felix Kwieton     | AUT | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Sam Stevenson     | GBR | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Paul Nettelbeck   | GER | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Thure Bergvall    | SWE | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Ivar Lundberg     | SWE | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Georg Peterson    | SWE | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Fred Lorz         | USA | —    |
| <b>DNS</b> | Hermann Müller    | GER | —    |

### Did you know?

Boxer Paea Wolfgramm won a silver medal for his tiny island nation Tonga at the 1996 Olympics after upset wins in the quarter-finals and semi-finals.

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