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THE ULTIMATE RACE FOR SERIOUS RUNNERS

It's History

A marathon is a long-distance footrace that usually covers about 26 miles. It got its name from a stirring event in Greek history. Here's the story: In 490 B.C. the Athenian army defeated the Persian army at the Battle of Marathon. The leader of the Athenian forces called on a famous runner named Pheidippides to bring news of the victory to Athens.

Pheidippides ran the entire distance—about 23 miles—nonstop. He gave the good news to the elders in the marketplace and then dropped dead of exhaustion!

Going for the Gold—The Olympic Marathon

The marathon was featured in the first modern Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896. In that race, 25 runners raced approximately the same route and distance as

Pheidippides. The winner was a Greek shepherd, Spiridon Loues. He won a gold medal, 365 free meals, and the hand of a Greek millionaire's daughter. He couldn't marry the young woman though, since he already had a wife.

The first woman to run the Olympic marathon was a Greek woman named Melpomene. She ran the entire course in about 4 1/2 hours in 1896. But her participation didn't count! Even though she ran the race, she wasn't officially

entered in it. Officials thought that women couldn't stand the grueling pace. They didn't change their minds until 1970. The first woman to win a gold medal in the women's Olympic marathon was Joan Benoit Samuelson at the 1984 games in Los Angeles.

On the Fast Track

There are many other big marathons in addition to the Olympic races. Here's a look at four famous ones:

Marathoners HALL OF FAME



Wanda Panfil

There have been many great marathoners in history. Below are seven of the best.

★*Abebe Bikila*—This champion marathoner from Ethiopia won his first Olympic gold medal in the 1960 Rome Olympics. Bikila ran the course barefoot in a little over 2 hours, 15 minutes, setting a world record. At the 1964 games in Tokyo, Bikila wore running shoes, won another gold medal, and beat his earlier record by 3 minutes, 5 seconds.

★*Harry Cordellos*—Although blind since birth, Cordellos has run in several marathons. In 1980, he finished the Boston Marathon in under three hours. Cordellos, an American, runs with a sighted partner.

★*Wanda Panfil*—Born in Poland, Panfil finished the 1991 Boston Marathon in 2 hours, 24 minutes, and 18 seconds—the second fastest women's time in Boston history (Joan Benoit Samuelson finished in a little under 2 hours, 22 minutes, and 43 seconds in 1983.).

★*Frank Shorter*—He won the gold medal for the U.S. at the 1972 Munich Olympics. In the

The *Boston Marathon* is the oldest continually-run marathon. That means it hasn't skipped a year since it began. It was started in 1897 by members of the Boston Athletic Association, who saw the Olympic Marathon in Athens the year before and decided to sponsor a race of their own. It's held each year on Patriots' Day, the third Monday in April.

The *New York City Marathon* first took place in 1970, when the New York Road Runners Club

sponsored a race in Central Park. In 1976 the race's starting line was moved to Staten Island. Today runners race from there through all five New York boroughs before finishing in Central Park. In 1990 there were 25,012 official entrants in the New York City Marathon.

The *Comrades Marathon of South Africa* is one of the most difficult marathons in the world. It covers 53 miles and follows a route that includes many steep hills. *Comrades* was started

in 1921 by a group of World War I veterans in memory of their comrades who died in battle.

The *Honolulu Marathon* was started in 1973 and attracted only 162 runners—almost all of them from the Hawaiian Islands. By 1978, the December event featured 7,111 entrants from around the world. Runners start the race at 6 A.M. to avoid the tropical heat and humidity.

—Deborah G. Felder

1976 Montreal Olympics, he was beaten by East German Waldemar Cierpinski, but Shorter won a silver medal and bettered his 1972 time.

★**Grete Waitz**—Born in 1953 in Oslo, Norway, this schoolteacher first ran sprints instead of distance races. In 1978, she entered the New York City Marathon and beat favorite Christa Vahlensieck, who did not even finish. Waitz won again in 1979, setting a world record of 2 hours, 27 minutes, and 42 seconds. She's put in a great performance every year since then, too!

★**Douglas Wakiihuri**—This young runner grew up in Kenya and trained under a Japanese coach. He won the gold medal at the 1987 World Championships in Rome and the silver medal at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. In 1991 Wakiihuri won the New York City Marathon with a time of 2 hours, 12 minutes, and 39 seconds.

★**Johnny Kelley**—This Boston Marathoner is over 80 years old—and *still* going the distance. He's won two Boston races and finished in the top ten 19 times. Kelley has also made three Olympic teams. No wonder he's been inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame!



Doug Wakiihuri

Marathons

1. How far does a person run when competing in a marathon?
2. In the first modern Olympics in 1896, who won the marathon?
3. In what year were women allowed to run a marathon in the Olympics?
4. Who won the marathon in 1972 Olympics?
5. What is the oldest run marathon?
6. In 1990 how many official entrants were in the New York City marathon?
7. Which marathon is considered one of the most difficult?
8. Who started the Comrades marathon?
9. Why did the runners start at 6:00 a.m. in the Honolulu marathon?
10. Which runner was inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame?