

The 1904 Olympics - What the fuck happened

(ask some stupid questions about the olympics - do u have a favorite event, athlete, etc?)

So, we all know by now that the Olympics originally came from the Greeks, waaaaaay back in 776 B.C. Which means absolutely nothing to me considering I don't quite understand the whole B.C vs AD vs whatever 2021 is.

But, the first modern olympics were hosted in Athens, Greece in 1894. In the opening ceremony, King Georgios I and a crowd of 60,000 spectators welcomed 280 participants from 12 nations (all male), who would compete in 43 events, including track and field, gymnastics, swimming, wrestling, cycling, tennis, weightlifting, shooting and fencing. History. Fun!

At the turn of the 20th century, the International Olympic Committee revived the Olympics to make it a little more modern, with the intention to repeat the games every four years as a massive international spectacle. This wasn't proving to be very successful for them, as shown in the 1900 Paris Olympic games, where they were overshadowed by the World's Fair which was simultaneously occurring in the city as well. It was a nightmare. Hurdles were built from broken telephone poles, and swimming events took place in the Seine River (which made the swimmers achieve superhuman times due to the current of the river).

Sierra, what the hell is the World's Fair?

Oh I'm so glad you asked. The World's Fair is a large international exhibition designed to showcase the achievements of nations. These exhibitions vary in character and are held in different parts of the world at a specific site for a period of time, ranging usually from three to six months.

So, since the 1900 Olympics were such a flop, the IOC thought it best to let someone else try. Who was that someone else? America! Let's see how bad we can fuck this one up!

QUIZ QUESTION: Where did the IOC award the 1904 Olympics to?

Chicago!!!!!!

Let's talk about this for a second. The 1904 World's Fair was being held in St. Louis. The organizers for the world's fair were nervous about a neighboring city, Chicago, also hosting an giant international party would hurt the attendance at the fair. So, everyone in St. Louis started plotting on how to take the Olympics from Chicago. Inner-state beef. We love to hear it.

So after some thought, St. Louis secured \$6M crisp buckaroones in funding and began to persuade the Amature Athletics Union to have their National Track and Field Championships in St Louis that summer. No one really gave a shit about the Olympics in 1904, so they knew that the AAU Championships would draw athletes away from the Olympics.

Chicago, with it's back against the wall, asked the founder of the IOC, Baron Pierre de Coubertain, what they should do. Baron buckled under the pressure from St. Louis and tied both the World's Fair to the 1904 Olympic Games. What could go wrong????

A lot. Like a LOT.

First to start was the World's Fair, opening in April of 1904, a few months before the Olympics would begin in July. They had all sorts of crazy shit at the World's Fair for people to gawk at. Here's a few:

- The world's largest organ!
- The wood cabin that Abe Lincoln grew up in
- A whole ass whale skeleton
- Cotton candy!
- Waffle cones!

So like an amusement park, with more whale bones and probably the same amount of racism.

Sooner or later, the Olympics would begin in St. Louis.

Here's some perspective: Rio hosted the Olympics in 2016. There were more than 11,000 athletes from 270 countries.

QUIZ QUESTION: How many countries competed in the 1904 Olympic Games?

12. It was 12.

Here's why: Missouri sucked. It absolutely sucked. And getting there was even worse. You had to either get across the Atlantic Ocean, or take trains from neighboring states, with some having to cross or travel on the Mississippi river. So there was no incentive for other athletes from other countries to come and visit. Sounds boring. No thank u.

Of the around 650 athletes that participated in the 1904 Games, 150 were from outside of the US. Half of those 150 were Canadian. Not even the FOUNDER OF THE IOC wanted to come to Missouri. Due to the low athlete count, literally anyone off the street could join certain games at any time.

At this point the games were just more of a sideshow to the World's Fair than anything else. The fair even had its own sporting events. So you can say that the Olympics were absolute garbage.

But the most special part of this giant dumpster fire of events was the Marathon.

Let's talk about my favorite marathon to ever exist. Ever.

On August 30, at precisely 3:03 p.m., David R. Francis, president of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company, (World's Fair) fired the starting pistol, and the men were off.

- Heat and humidity soared into the 90s, and the 24.85-mile course—which one fair official called “the most difficult a human being was ever asked to run over”.
- There were seven hills, varying from 100-to-300 feet high, some with brutally long ascents.
- In many places cracked stone was strewn across the roadway, creating perilous footing, and the men had to constantly dodge crosstown traffic, delivery wagons, railroad trains, trolley cars and people walking their dogs.
- There were only two places where athletes could secure fresh water, from a water tower at six miles and a roadside well at 12 miles. James Sullivan, the chief organizer of the games, wanted to minimize fluid intake to test the limits and effects of purposeful dehydration, a common area of research at the time.
- Cars carrying coaches and physicians motored alongside the runners, kicking the dust up and launching coughing spells.

Americans Sam Mellor, A.L. Newton, John Lordon, Michael Spring and Thomas Hicks, all experienced marathoners, were among the favorites. Another American, Fred Lorz, did all his training at night because he had a day job as a bricklayer, and earned his spot in

the Olympics by placing in a “special five-mile race” sponsored by the Amateur Athletic Union. Among the leading oddities were ten Greeks who had never run a marathon, two men of the Tsuana tribe of South Africa who were in St. Louis as part of the South African World’s Fair exhibit and who arrived at the starting line barefoot, and a Cuban national and former mailman named Félix Carbajal, who raised money to come to the States by demonstrating his running prowess throughout Cuba, once trekking the length of the island.

Fred Lorz led the 32 starters from the gun, but by the first mile Thomas Hicks edged ahead.

William Garcia of California nearly became the first fatality of an Olympic marathon when he collapsed on the side of the road and was hospitalized with hemorrhaging; the dust had coated his esophagus and ripped his stomach lining. Had he gone unaided an hour longer he might have bled to death.

John Lordon suffered a bout of vomiting and gave up.

Len Tau, one of the South African participants, was chased a mile off course by wild dogs.

Félix Carvajal trotted along in his cumbersome shoes and billowing shirt, making good time even though he paused to chat with spectators in broken English. On one occasion he stopped at a car, saw that its occupants were eating peaches, and asked for one. Being refused, he playfully snatched two and ate them as he ran. A bit further along the course, he stopped at an orchard and snacked on some apples, which turned out to be rotten. Suffering from stomach cramps, he lay down and took a nap.

Sam Mellor, now in the lead, also experienced severe cramping. He slowed to a walk and eventually stopped. At the nine-mile mark cramps also plagued Lorz, who decided to hitch a ride in one of

the accompanying automobiles, waving at spectators and fellow runners as he passed.

Hicks, one of the early American favorites, came under the care of a two-man support crew at the 10-mile mark. He begged them for a drink but they refused, instead sponging out his mouth with warm distilled water. Seven miles from the finish, his handlers fed him a concoction of strychnine and egg whites—the first recorded instance of drug use in the modern Olympics. Strychnine, in small doses, was commonly used as a stimulant, and at the time there were no rules about performance-enhancing drugs. Hicks' team also carried a flask of French brandy but decided to withhold it until they could gauge the runner's condition.

Meanwhile, Lorz, recovered from his cramps, emerged from his 11-mile ride in the automobile. One of Hicks' handlers saw him and ordered him off the course, but Lorz kept running and finished with a time of just under three hours. The crowd roared and began chanting, "An American won!" Alice Roosevelt, the 20-year-old daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt, placed a wreath upon Lorz's head and was just about to lower the gold medal around his neck when, one witness reported, "someone called an indignant halt to the proceedings with the charge that Lorz was an impostor." The cheers turned to boos. Lorz smiled and claimed that he had never intended to accept the honor; he finished only for the sake of a "joke."

Hicks, the strychnine coursing through his blood, had grown ashen and limp. When he heard that Lorz had been disqualified he perked up and forced his legs into a trot. His trainers gave him another dose of strychnine and egg whites, this time with some brandy to wash it down. They fetched warm water and soaked his body and head. After the bathing he appeared to revive and quickened his pace. "Over the last two miles of the road," wrote

race official Charles Lucas, "Hicks was running mechanically, like a well-oiled piece of machinery. His eyes were dull, lusterless; the ashen color of his face and skin had deepened; his arms appeared as weights well tied down; he could scarcely lift his legs, while his knees were almost stiff."

He began hallucinating, believing that the finish line was still 20 miles away. In the last mile he begged for something to eat. Then he begged to lie down. He was given more brandy but refused tea. He swallowed two more egg whites. He walked up the first of the last two hills, and then jogged down on the incline. Swinging into the stadium, he tried to run but was reduced to a graceless shuffle. His trainers carried him over the line, holding him aloft while his feet moved back and forth, and he was declared the winner.

It took four doctors and one hour for Hicks to feel well enough just to leave the grounds. He had lost eight pounds during the course of the race, and declared, "Never in my life have I run such a tough course. The terrific hills simply tear a man to pieces." Hicks and Lorz would meet again at the Boston Marathon the following year, which Lorz won without the aid of anything but his legs.

So, the 1904 Olympics were a giant fucking shitshow. In an attempt to repair the damage done, an extra olympics were held in Athens in 1906. 20 nations competed, and it kinda worked in salvaging the idea of the Olympic games.

Now the Olympics are everyone's favorite and least favorite sporting event that happens every two years. We will never forget the Olympics of 1904. Forever and ever, amen.

Sources

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