

The 1904 Olympic Marathon

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It was the hottest day of 1904¹. The newspaper reporters were fanning themselves and even the president's daughter, Alice Roosevelt², was trying to keep cool. There was a mixture of people with many different languages and accents. But there was one goal: everyone wanted someone to win the Olympic Marathon.

The runners stretched to prepare themselves for the run ahead. They eyed the dusty dirt trail in front of them. Shaking hands with their competitors, they listened to their coaches for one last time. A little voice inside each head said, "Go for the gold."

It was the first year that medals were being awarded to the fastest runners³.

Thomas Hicks stretched as he talked to his trainer. He had come a long way from Massachusetts to run this race, and he was determined to finish.

Frederick Lorz sipped his drink and wiped his brow. He was determined to win, even if he didn't play fair and square.

And the contestant who had traveled the furthest⁴, Felix Carvajal, had come to St. Louis all the way from Cuba after training for all his life. He was very nervous about the race.

Each person in the race had a very different story. Each person had the same goal but a different path they wanted to take. Someone had to be the winner, and there was only one gold medal. When the gun blasted, signaling it was their time to run, all 47 men began their Olympic journey.

1. Lucas, *The Olympic Games*, 49; 2. ; 3. <http://www.olympic.org/st-louis-1904-summer-olympics>

2. Abbot, *The 1904 Olympic Marathon*. *The Smithsonian*.

<http://blogs.smithsonianmag.com/history/2012/08/the-1904-olympic-marathon-may-have-been-the-strangest-ever/>

3. About the Games. *Olympics*. <http://www.olympic.org/st-louis-1904-summer-olympics>

4. Duggan, *Marathon from Hell*. *Marathon and Beyond*.

<http://marathonandbeyond.com/choices/duggan.html>

Felix Carvajal

I had ran very fast for all of my life.

Walking and running each day, I carry the mail for the people of Cuba¹.

I had to hitchhike to get to the marathon, but I am ready.

When the race starts, I feel the excitement of the crowd lifting my spirits.

I can do this. If only it weren't so hot...

I should have eaten something before the race started.

Come on Felix, you can do this...

But I'm so hungry.

An apple! A delicious green apple.

A delicious green apple that looks like it's just for me.

A delicious green apple that will help me win the race.

A delicious green apple that.. tastes kind of funny.

ZZZZzzzzzz...

1. The St. Louis Republic, *Chronicling America*, 5; Lucas, *The Olympic Games*, 55; 2.

Frederick Lorz

The Olympics are here and I will run. No matter what, I will win this race.

The path in front of me is dirty and full of twists and turns.¹

I don't know if I can win the race...

No! I *can* do this.

I will win this race.

Vroom... VROOM

A car races past me, flinging dust in my eyes.²

Wait! An idea!

But is it wrong? I wonder.

No. I can win this race.

I climb in a car, driven by a helpful friend.³

"I can win this race!" I say, as I climb out of the car near the finish line.

"And the winner is..."

1. Lucas, *The Olympic Games*, 50; 2.3; <http://www.olympic.org/st-louis-1904-summer-olympics>;

2. *Ibid.* 49.; The St. Louis Republic, January 13, 1905

3. *Ibid.* 46.

Thomas Hicks

The runners around me all seem to have lost their heads.

One is eating a rotten peach.¹

Another is driving away.

baBOOM... baBOOM!

I know in my heart, I must run a fair race.

A quick race.

It is so hot and my heart is beating fast.

baBOOM... BABOOM!

My heart feels as if it will explode.

My friends and my coach are pulling me to my feet.²

“Finish the race, Thomas!” they yell.

“Win the race Thomas!” my heart screams.

BABOOM... BABOOM!

All I need to do is cross the finish line, but my legs can barely move.

They feel as if they are stuck in quicksand.

My eyes begin to shut, but I know I can do this.

I fall into my coach’s arms, but I will keep going.

1. *Ibid.* 56.

2. *The St. Louis Republic.* (St. Louis, Mo.), 13 Jan. 1905. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Lib. of Congress.

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020274/1905-01-13/ed-1/seq-11/>

The medal was about to go on Frederick’s neck. The sunlight danced off of it, making it look divine. It was the first medal to ever be awarded. And to an American! This was an amazing day.¹

But something didn’t feel right. Frederick had finished much too quickly, and he didn’t seem that tired. Nobody mentioned that he was barely covered in sweat.

“Wait a second,” said a voice from the crowd. Everybody turned and stared.

“You rode in a car, and that’s cheating.”

Frederick looked nervous and squirmed. His coaches looked at him with a gaze of disbelief. Was it true? Everyone was staring at him, but not in the way they were before. Accusing eyes bore into his back.

“It was just a joke,” he said, and shrugged his shoulders. The whole crowd began to whisper, and the gold medal was pulled away from his neck. A race official came down from the stands.

“You will never race again!” he said. The crowd cheered, and Frederick was so ashamed. He had cheated, which he knew was wrong. Running was what he loved, and he had ruined it.²

As Frederick Lorz hung his head, he heard cheers from behind him. Thomas Hicks was slowly approaching the finish line. He had a friend on each side of him, holding him up, and he looked awful. He was covered in sweat and could barely breathe.³

At the very end, he picked his head up and smiled as he crossed the line in the sand. *He had won the Olympic marathon.*

He couldn't believe it. He felt so sick, but it had been worth it. He had run the race and he had done it fair and square.

He smiled for the flashing cameras as Alice, the President's daughter, put his hard-earned gold medal around his neck.

He had done it. He had won the Olympic marathon.⁴

1. George R. Matthews. *America's First Olympics: The St. Louis Games of 1904*. 12.

2. *Ibid.* 140.

3. *Ibid.* 11.

4. *The St. Louis Republic*. (St. Louis, Mo.), 13 Jan. 1905. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.

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