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*The 1904 Olympics and the  
Missouri Athletic Club*

# The 1904 Olympics and the Missouri Athletic Club



Members of the Missouri Athletic Club track team who participated in the Olympic Games

By John M. McGuire  
*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

In the next two years, 2003 and '04, a pair of very important century marks will hit the calendars here on the western banks of the Mississippi.

The first is next year, the 100th anniversary of the Missouri Athletic Club, followed by another historic date in 2004 observing the same milestone for the St. Louis Olympic Games, the first Olympiad to be held in the Western Hemisphere. At the time, St. Louis was America's fourth largest city.

Not surprisingly, these two anniversary dates have significant links. The then brand-new Missouri Athletic Club had a lot to do with organizing these first American Olympic games, which came a year later. In fact, the World's Fair and Olympic Games of St. Louis were the primary driving force for the formation of the Club in 1903.

## Olympics Fuel Formation of the M.A.C.

By the turn of the century, Charles Henry Genslinger had successfully unveiled the Olympic Club in New Orleans and later moved to New York to form the New Manhattan Athletic Club. Genslinger had read newspaper reports about the 1904 World's Fair and Olympic Games, so he decided the time was ripe to form a fine gentleman's club for St. Louis. So in the fall of 1902, Genslinger packed up and headed west to St. Louis. His goal was to form a sports oriented organization which also had a social element.

"A Great Honor" was the headline in the M.A.C.'s Journal in '03, as the writer noted that "although this Club has not, as yet, opened its doors, and

may be regarded as not being in existence, it was given a liberal representation in the (Olympic) committee appointments, which were made at this meeting." Two M.A.C. members, George D. Lyford and H. L. Hilleary, were named to the Olympic Games Committee.

Genslinger's vision became a reality when the Missouri Athletic Club opened its doors in the seven-story Boatmen's Bank Building at Fourth and Washington on September 19, 1903.

The following year, athletes wearing the M.A.C. cherry diamond logo were competing at the Olympic Games. In the early Olympics, many of the American athletes came from the ranks of athletic clubs like the M.A.C.

The games here were only the third Olympiad since the modern games were revived in Athens in 1896. And M.A.C. officials and athletes were very much involved in these third games. In fact, the M.A.C. just a year old at the time provided a substantial number of officials for all of the sporting events. The games, held in St. Louis because of the 1904 World's Fair in Forest Park, a.k.a. the Louisiana Purchase Exposition reportedly lasted eight months, although there's a lot of confusion about just when the official Olympics did take place.

One thing that is for certain, the Missouri Athletic Club was bustling with activity throughout much of 1904. Dignitaries like Fair President David R. Francis, Mayor Rolla Wells and people from around the world could be spotted in the lobby of the Club. Between May and December, approximately 22,000 guest cards were issued to visitors. The 100 sleeping rooms were constantly occupied.

### *St. Louis Beats Chicago*

The fact that the games were held here is an interesting story in itself.

In 1901, the International Olympic Committee chose Chicago as the site for the first modern Olympics in this part of the world. But the wily and clever World's Fair poohbah, former Missouri governor and city mayor, David R. Francis, threatened the IOC by saying that he would hold a rival athletic competition if the III Olympiad wasn't held here.

Francis' maneuvering worked. The IOC left the choice up to President Teddy Roosevelt, who was the honorary president of the Louisiana Exposition in St. Louis. So naturally he pointed to St. Louis, even though it made IOC officials wince. They feared that Olympic Games held as part of a World's Fair would simply be a sideshow.

That turned out to be largely true, even though the attendance here was greater than it had been at the Paris Games in 1900, where Americans won nine-tenths of the events. After the St. Louis Games, IOC President Baron de Coubertin, who stayed in Paris and refused to come here, pulled the plug on any future Olympics being held as part of a World's Fair.

By all accounts, the St. Louis Olympic record-keeping was abysmal

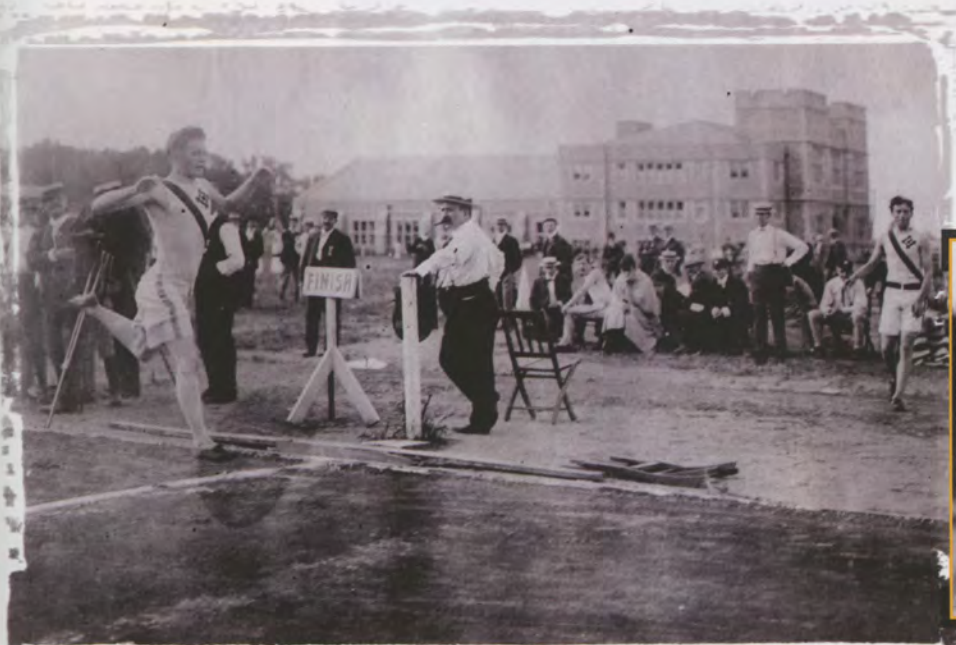
and arbitrary, but one thing is for sure, Americans dominated the games. Only 13 foreign countries participated; it wasn't easy to get here and Russia and Japan were in a war.

The few members of the IOC who came here decided what events counted, which made the history of the St. Louis games even murkier. Apparently, the Olympic organizers said that Aug. 29 would be the beginning date for the real Olympics, as opposed to the sporting competitions that took place over an eight-month period, events that were linked to Fair activities rather than the actual Olympics. Confusing? Yes.

So most accounts say the real St. Louis Olympiad took place over five days in late August and early September, although other versions contend the games officially began on July 1. Who knows for sure?

### *A Wild Marathon*

On Aug. 30, 1904, it was a marathon to end all marathons in terms of wild and humorous stories. It drew 10,000 at Francis Field, the largest gathering for the St. Louis Olympics.



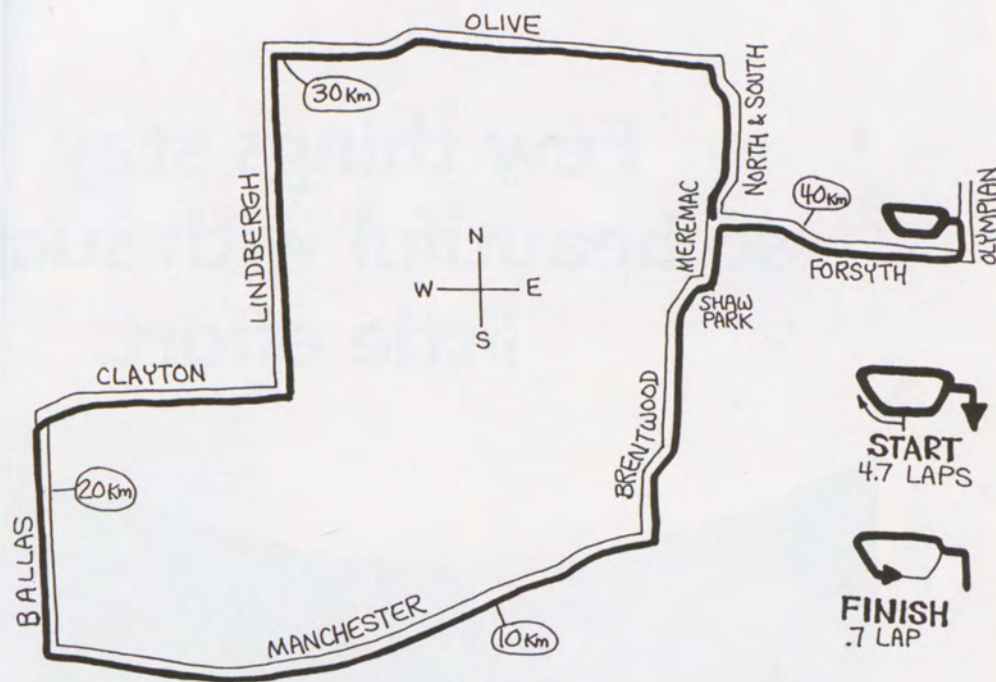
*Left, A member of the victorious M.A.C. relay team crosses the finish line.*

*Below, Thomas J. Hicks won the grueling marathon race.*



It was run on a scalding hot day on a course of 22 miles and 1,470 yards, a route full of dust and 90-degree heat in the shade. (Olympic marathons today cover 26.2 miles.) The marathon began with David Francis firing a starting pistol at Francis Field. The 31 runners did five laps around the third-of-a-mile track at the stadium, and then ran out the east gate, up an incline, then west on a road they called Olympian Way, a.k.a. Forsyth Boulevard. Only 14 would finish the race.

They then went left on Meramec Avenue in the sleepy little county seat town of Clayton, followed South Brentwood to Manchester Road, onto Ballas and Clayton roads, turning left again on Denny Road, now called Lindbergh. They went along Olive to Olive Street Road, to North and South, back to Meramec and Olympian Way for the last lap at the stadium.



1904 St. Louis Olympic Marathon

# Phoenix

PHOTOGRAPHY

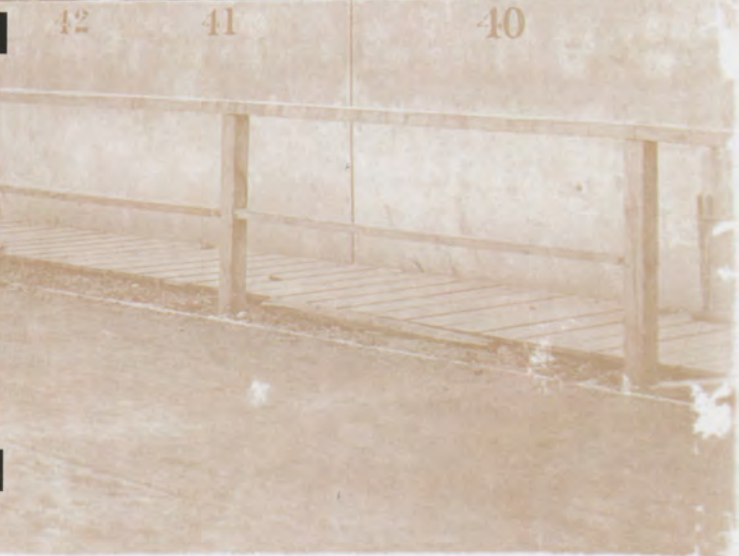
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What happened at the end, some three-and-a-half hours later, was truly bizarre. Nine miles out, marathoner Fred Lorz, of New York's Mohawk Athletic Club, began suffering from cramps and keeled over. He hitched a ride in a passing auto, reportedly sitting in the back seat waving at spectators and other runners. The auto broke down near Francis Field, so a rested and refreshed Lorz got out and ran toward the finish line.

So here's how the story goes: Seeing Lorz approaching the finish line, the crowd began to roar, bands started to play, and President Roosevelt's daughter Alice began to approach him with a victory wreath.

Stop, said angry officials, realizing that Lorz had cheated. So three hours, 28 minutes and 53 seconds later, a physically depleted Thomas J. Hicks, an Englishman running the marathon for the YMCA in



*Francis Field at Washington University was the sight of a bizarre finish in the marathon.*

Cambridge, Mass., so he was actually an American entry, staggered across to victory. No wonder he was staggering. Over the course of the race, handlers (and they truly did handle him, something that would later cause some controversy) gave him doses of strychnine, shots of French brandy, sponges of warm water from the boiler of a Stanley Steamer and egg white.

"Never in my life have I run such a tough course," said Hicks. "The terrific hills simply tear a man to pieces."

This hot and dusty long run nearly killed a San Francisco marathoner named William Garcia. "The Olympic Games of 1904," a book by Charles L. P. Lucas, published in 1905, noted that the roads, many inches deep in dust, "the roads in St.

Louis County were frightful," caused erosion of the membranous wall of Garcia's stomach, making him pass out from internal bleeding.

There is no mention of whether Lucas tried to administer a one-sixtieth grain of sulfate of strychnine and egg white to Garcia, as he had to Hicks, the winner, who strangely enough, would later make his living as a clown.

If there was a marathoner who captured the hearts of those along the roadways and in the stands, it was the five-foot tall Havana mailman named Felix Carvajal, one of four Cubans who participated in the Games. Amazingly, this wispy runner, wearing heavy street shoes, trousers, a long-sleeved shirt and cap, stopped to chat with spectators and reportedly picked apples and ate them as he ran.

Even though this appeared like something out of a Charlie Chaplain movie, the little postman Carvajal nearly won a medal, finishing fourth, just behind Albert Corey of France and Arthur Newton of the United States.

Another interesting pair of marathon runners were two South Africans, Lentauw and Yamasini, who came here to work as World's Fair concessionaires. Even though they had no marathon experience, they decided to make a run for it. Like Carvajal, they were not well equipped, nevertheless they finished 9th and 12th respectively. Their participation was an interesting forerunner to today's marathon domination by Kenyans.

"If grandfather had not stopped and helped those who'd fallen down (from heat exhaustion), I'm told he would have won," said John Furla II, a grandson of a Greek immigrant, John C. Furla, a naturalized American citizen who ran the marathon for both the Greek national team and the City of St. Louis. During the Fair, Furla also operated a small fruit stand on the Forest Park fairgrounds. He finished 13th out of



*M.A.C. members competed and officiated the Games. Notice the man standing at the top of the picture wearing the M.A.C. logo.*



*The M.A.C. competed in a water polo match against the Chicago Athletic Association.*

### *Olympic Firsts and Lasts*

One thing can be said about the '04 Olympics, the Games produced some interesting and unusual events, and at least one loaded with controversy. What happened here nearly a hundred years ago, in some cases would never happen again at Olympics Games. The Olympic golf tournament at Glen Echo Country Club would turn out to be the one and only time the IOC would allow Olympians to whack away.

St. Louis was also thought to be the site of the first Olympic water polo competition. The Missouri Athletic

the 14 finishers. Long after his death in 1938, organizers of the current St. Louis Marathon award the winners the John Furla Memorial Cup.



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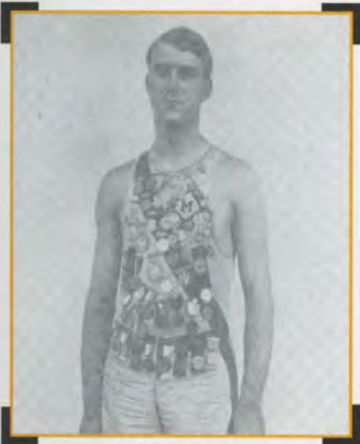
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Harry J. Kiener represented the M.A.C. at the 1904 Olympics.

Club competed against the likes of the New York Athletic Club and the Chicago Athletic Association. Members of the M.A.C. team included Harold Blake, Charles Cohn, Edward Cohn, Gwynne Evans, August Goessling, John Meyers, W.R. Orthwein, Amadee Rayburn, Hugh Siegel and Manfred Toeppen.

While the New York Athletic Club won the gold medal, they paid a severe price. The *New York Herald* reported that several athletes were stricken with typhoid fever after competing in an artificial, contaminated pond. "The water was green and slimy, like stagnant putrid pools found in swamps. After the first day's competition, seven of twelve NYAC men were compelled to take to bed, sick from the effects of the water in which they swam."

Want to see something else of Olympic weirdness? St. Louis held the first tug-of-war competition with teams from America, South Africa and Greece grunting away trying to pull each other 6-feet in five minutes. The "tug" was won by a team from Milwaukee made up of men from Chicago. Four Olympics later, Antwerp in 1920, was the last time this so-called sport was held, "tug" was abolished after that.

Maybe one of the most significant aspects of these St. Louis Games is that they were the first racially integrated Olympics, and at least one

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black athlete won two bronze medals. Moreover, this runner, George Coleman Poage of the University of Wisconsin and the Milwaukee Athletic Club, might have won a gold in the 400-meter race if it had not been for the moves of a Missouri Athletic Club runner, Joseph Fleming.

According to written accounts, "Poage was running on the outside of the field, in second place, and so easily was he traveling that many thought the colored man would win." But rounding the last turn, Poage was cut off by Fleming of the M.A.C. and Frank Waller, a member of Poage's Milwaukee team, claimed second-place and finished a yard behind the gold-medal winner, Harry Hillman of the New York Athletic Club. Poage, however, would later call St. Louis home when he took a job teaching at Sumner High School.

### *M.A.C. Olympic Glory and Tragedy*

Several Missouri Athletic Club athletes enjoyed success at the Games. C.L. Hastedt won the 100-yard dash. Harry J. Kiener competed in the half mile, 120-yard high hurdles and 220-yard low hurdles. Kiener later starred as center on the M.A.C. basketball team and brought honors to the Club. Kiener is regarded as one of the great athletes in St. Louis history and his name is immortalized thanks to Kiener Plaza.

Ten years after the Olympic games, the M.A.C. would figure in again in a horribly tragic way, a deadly footnote to the memories of the games. It happened on March 9, 1914, when a fire destroyed the old athletic club's seven-story building at Washington Avenue and 4th Street. Most if not all of the official '04 Olympic records, stored in the building, were destroyed in a raging blaze that killed 37 people.

Save for the 1896 Great St. Louis Cyclone that killed 307 people on both sides of the Mississippi River,



*C.L. Hastedt, representing the M.A.C., won the 100-yard dash.*



*While some Club trophies were spared, the 1904 Olympic records were destroyed in the 1914 M.A.C. fire.*

the M.A.C. fire became the second worst disaster in St. Louis history at the time, becoming a sad note to the Club's first century of existence. The fire occurred the morning after one of the biggest Sunday night dinners in Club history. The fire started in the main dining room.

### *The Olympic Legacy*

Although the fledgling Games of 1904 may seem rather mad-cap and rag-tag, without these early athletic pioneers, the Olympics likely would not have evolved into the glitzy, international spectacle that it is today. The III Olympiad in St. Louis was dismissed by Life Magazine,

which wrote "the heartland put on a homegrown and unremembered Olympics."

Well, claims of being "unremembered" will certainly disappear when next year and the year-after roll around, especially here in the heartland at the Missouri Athletic Club. The Olympic Games of 1904 helped the M.A.C. make a name for itself. Since then, the Olympics and the M.A.C. have flowered and continue to flourish today. Thanks to the Olympic Games of 1904, the young Missouri Athletic Club got off the starting block quickly and has been running strong ever since.