

The Olympic Games - Athens 1896 *

VII - Description of the Games

The fifth day

29th March

In the Stadium

Fortunately this day, so anxiously awaited, dawned more serene. From the very early hours there is unusual movement and feverish expectation. The density of the crowd in the offices of the Council of the Games is indescribable. The police can only just manage to contain the crowds. But also in the streets, especially in Stadium Street, it becomes difficult to make one's way on the pavements. The reason is the sale of the tickets, of which the price, by a prudent decision, was lowered from this day onwards. All demand them, but they wish to obtain the best possible seats and keep on pushing and elbowing.

And the reason for all this turmoil and expectation is that during this day the Marathon race is being carried out. From the very first day that the idea of the Games was promoted, all in Greece looked first to this out of all the events. By degrees and little by little, the idea was cultivated and took root that the winner of the Marathon race should be a Greek. This idea was dictated by Greek pride, and the easily explained desire that it should not be a foreigner who should take the prize of this most important of events, which was the race of 40 kilometres ; yet the historic traditions and the recollection of the herald who traversed the same course, from the battle of Marathon, and breathed his last after managing to say only "We have won" imparted to it a national character. Since then, the matter was placed in this light and generally such significance was given to the above-mentioned event, the interest of the public concentrated on it with pertinent exclusivity. The more the day of the event approached, the more the burning interest of the public rose and the wish that it should be a Greek who was declared a winner and not a foreigner. Hence, many promises and awards started to be announced. Hotel keepers, tailors, hair-dressers and other tradesmen, published declarations in the newspapers, promising that they would provide free to the happy victor of the Marathon race, if he were a Greek, the services of their trade, some for a certain duration, and some for life, while others undertook to give awards or presents.

In the morning at 10 a.m. in the Stadium the two gymnastics events postponed from the previous day were resumed.

1st Event

The Parallel Bars - Individual

This event was eighth in the order of the previous day. Eighteen participate in it of whom some are Greeks. The exceptional German gymnast Flatow is declared the winner with the Swiss Zutter second. The German flag hoisted on the mast is duly greeted.

* Official report of the 1st Olympic Games, published in the "Olympic Review" since No. 152-153.

2nd Event

Climbing the rope

In this event, which is more spectacular and more difficult, five contestants take part. First the young man N. Andriakopoulos of Patras climbs with a skill to be envied and with rapidity. He is a member of the Panachaeon Club. After him Xenakis of the National Gymnastic Club shows much skill and agility. After them, of those registered, attempts are made by the German Hoffmann, the Dane Jensen and the Englishman Elliot, but they fail and the remaining who have registered withdraw. Therefore, Andriakopoulos is declared the winner and Xenakis is second. The appearance of the blue and white colours of the Greek flag on the top of the mast provokes prolonged shouts of joy and enthusiasm.

Shooting

During the same morning from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m., the contest of shooting with service revolvers at a distance of 25 metres, is held at the rifle range. The contestants were sixteen in all, divided into 5 heats. The winner is the American John Paine shooting 25 successful shots out of the 30 which each had the right to shoot, obtaining 442 marks, while second was his brother Sommer Paine with a total of 23 successes and 380 marks. Some of the champions withdrew during the competition.

The two American winners are infantry captains in the army of the U.S. ; they used their own personal arms which they brought with them, of the latest type and very accurate.

In the stadium

Afternoon

The noon time church bells had hardly sounded when the trek to the stadium was starting. The movement in town was indescribable. In all the streets, in all the corners of the city the populace moved in groups towards the parts by the banks of the Ilissus. All means of transport were called into service. The railway carriages arrived and discharged their passengers in the stations in their hundreds. At 1.30 p.m., the City of Athens was deserted and the stadium was full. After half an hour, there was not an empty seat in this vast place.

Those who did not have the good fortune to see the Pan-Athenian stadium on this historic day, missed a sight of unprecedented grandeur. The graduated sides of the vast enclosure are covered by a thick crowd, pressed together and becoming one compressed mass, of which the sombre colour is enlivened by the uniforms of the military and the garments of the ladies. Even the most distant tiers were packed to suffocation. The stairs between them were packed to the very top and even the corridor around the arena was filled by spectators standing and continually being increased in numbers so that communication and through passage was almost impossible. The officials in charge make every possible effort to contain this ceaseless flood. Above this imposing foregathering another belt of spectators presses around the encircling stone wall on the summit, forming a wreath of its own with, still higher, other dark masses covering the heights above on the top of the Ardettos.

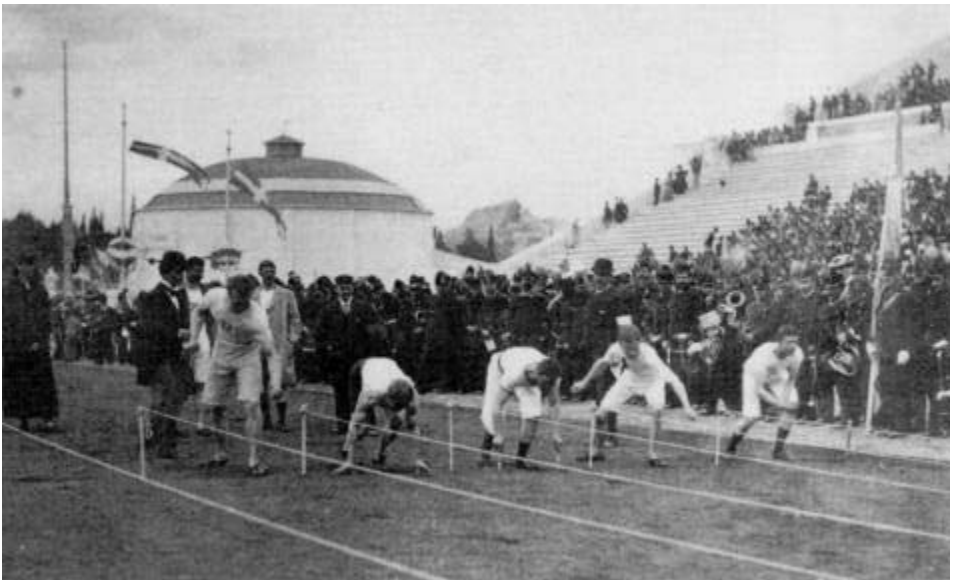
It is reckoned that 70 thousand entered the stadium on that day. But outside in the surroundings of the stadium, apart from those on the heights, there is another dense human anthill, endless and filling the space in front of the stadium. The pavements of Herodes Atticus Street are occupied by a dense throng and it is with difficulty that the foot and mounted guards are able to maintain order. The inquisitive crowds extend further, much further, and cover the pavements of the lengthy Kifissia Avenue upon which carriages have been prohibited on this day, and up to Rizarios school, whence the arrival of the first runner will be announced by a gun. Some go still further, since all, within and outside the stadium, have but fierce impatience to see who will be the winner of the Marathon race.

At precisely half past two in the afternoon, the Royal Family enters the stadium together with the King of Serbia and the other official guests, and are received with the customary honours. On entering, they stand for a moment, to the sound of the band and the lively cheers, to admire the impressive sight, and then advance to their seats within the sphendone. Immediately following this, the beginning of the Games is announced by a trumpeter and proceeds according to programme.

1st Event

Final of the 100 metres

Six contestants participate, including the Greek Chalkokondylis. They run like lightning when the starting sign is given and the American Burke arrives first in exactly 12 seconds. Second comes the German Hoffmann.



The start of the final of the 100 metres, won by Thomas Burke of the United States (second from the left).

2nd Event
The high jump

A horizontal bar is placed between two perpendicular poles. The bar is regularly raised after each jump by fixed distances, which are marked on the poles. The contestants must jump over this bar without knocking it down. The lowest height is 1.50 metres. Only five contestants from the 14 registered put in an appearance, and of these three are Americans, who from the start can be seen to be fine athletes. The more the height is increased, the more difficult the jumping becomes. The competitors gradually drop out and the American Clark remains as victor, as victors gradually drop out and the American Clark remains as victor, having jumped 1.81 m. Once more the star spangled flag proudly floats, while the enthusiastic and foreign sounding cheers of the American fellow-athletes echo for the repeated victories.

3rd Event
The 110 metres hurdles race

The event consists of a duel between the American Curtis and the Englishman Goulding, the two others who are registered not putting in an appearance. Curtis wins, arriving first in $17 \frac{3}{5}$ sets. The enthusiasm of his fellow-countrymen now reaches its peak while the third time on this day the American flag is raised and hailed as victorious more than that of any other country during the Games.



110 metres hurdles. Thomas Curtis Curtis (USA) leading the second finalist, Grantley Goulding (GBR).

4th Event
Pole vault

This contest, being spectacular and interesting, succeeds for a while to hold the interest of the public which is getting impatient since the time for the arrival of the Marathon runners is getting close. There are only five out of the sixteen entrants, the Greeks Damascos, Theodoropoulos and Xydas, and the Americans Taylor and Hoyt. The superiority of the latter two can be seen right away ; they had their own long and strong poles and jump with amazing dexterity over the horizontal bar, which is continuously raised in height. Of the Greeks Theodoropoulos distinguished himself and is ceaselessly encouraged by the spectators, cheering his successful jumps, but he and the others withdraw from the contest, not being able to jump over 2.85 m., and they remain as spectators of the dual between the Americans, offering them their care, since,

owing to the advanced hour and the cold, they are in need of massage and tonics. This duel is long protracted. Hoyt reaches 3.25 m. but Taylor does not lag behind, since he jumps 3.30 m. and is declared the winner.

It should be noted that towards the end this contest was interrupted and was concluded later, since in the meantime, the competitors in the Marathon race arrived, about whom we refer to later.

5th Event

The marathon race

Many had registered for this most important event, but most withdrew at the last moment, not feeling that they had enough strength. The remainder, about twenty-five, went to Marathon from the previous day together with the special committee and spent the night there. Around 2 p.m. on the following day they were placed in two lines, a few steps apart, in positions drawn by lottery, close to the bridge of Marathon plain, which was the starting line. The starter, Major G. Papadimantopoulos, after a short oration, gave the starting signal by a pistol shot and immediately the runners, wearing light garments, set forth. The runners were followed by cyclists, officers and soldiers on horseback, surveying their course, and, at a distance, carriages with doctors having the necessary emergency medicaments for the care of the exhausted.

Their course had variegated dramatic phases and episodes. Up to Pikermi the agile Frenchman Lermusiaux is in the lead ; after him follow the Australian Flack, the American Black, the Hungarian Kellner, and then the Greek runners, of whom the first is Lavrentis from Amaroussi. Mr. Lermusiaux has a lead of three kilometres on Mr. Flack, who is second. He has run the distance to Pikermi in 52 minutes. Along the route, at all spots, many of the inhabitants of the villages of Attica have taken up positions, awaiting the contestants with great curiosity and interest, and greet them with encouragement without any discrimination as to nationality, offering them refreshments. After Pikermi, many begin to feel the strain through fatigue, withdraw and get into the carriages that are following. Louis from Amaroussi passing by the inn close to Pikermi asks for and drinks a glass full of wine, makes enquiries regarding the runners in front of him and announces with confidence that he will catch them up and pass them.

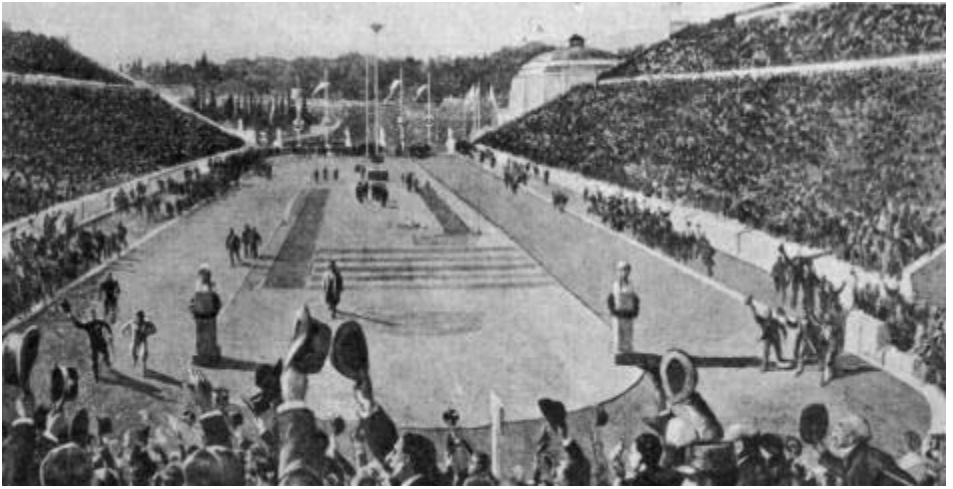
Black falls out at the 23rd kilometre and the third place is taken by Vassilakos. At Harvati it is Lermusiaux who arrives first, followed by Flack who is second. The crown that the villagers had prepared for the first runner to arrive there, under a triumphal arch, rests on the brow of the Parisian, who continues hastily in the lead. But, at this spot, there is an uphill, the Frenchman gets tired and his fellow countryman, the cyclist Guisel, rubs him down with alcohol, which gives time for Flack to pass him. Louis continually gets closer and closer, while many peasants from his village follow him, running, and constitute, so to speak, a guard of honour. At the 32nd kilometre Lermusiaux staggers and falls and is collected by those who are following and placed in a carriage. At the 33rd kilometre, Louis catches up with Flack and passes him but keeping a distance ahead of him of not more than twenty paces, up to the 36th kilometre. After Flack come the Hungarian Kellner, Vassilakos, and the very

young Belokas, full of energy. At the 37th kilometre, outside Ambelokipi, Louis hastens his pace and Flack despairing of victory, staggers and falls and is carried unconscious into a carriage. Louis arrived first at the Rizarios school and a gunshot announced his arrival. His victory is now assured. The many curious along the route greet him and encourage him with enthusiastic shouts.

In the stadium, in the meanwhile, there is an agony of expectation. Impatience cannot be contained from 4.30 when it was reckoned that the first runner would reach the stadium, since the hour of the start was unknown. The phases of the contest of the pole vault, full of interest, manage temporarily to absorb the interest of the crowd. Suddenly, unknown how, it is rumoured from mouth to mouth that the Australian Flack is arriving first. The news was brought by the German cyclist Goedrich. A mournful sadness spreads over all the faces and complete silence reigns through the discouragement. But the delusion does not last long. The starter of the Marathon race, covered with dust from the long ride on horseback, is seen to enter the stadium, and goes directly to the Royal thrones to announce that Louis is in the lead. The news is spread like lightning, an immense shout emerges from all breasts, while simultaneously the gunshot announcing the arrival of the Greek victor is heard. The spectators henceforth listen to no advice, to no order. Standing, they have their attention glued to the entrance. The same excitement reigns also outside the stadium, and the Chief of the Police, on horseback, together with his retinue, coming from Kifisia Avenue, announces with emotion to the crowds in Herodes Atticus street, that the winner is a Greek, and is accosted with myriads of uninterrupted acclamations.

After a few minutes, which seemed centuries, a movement is noticed at the entrance of the stadium. The officers and the members of the committee hasten thither. Finally, a man wearing white, sunburnt and covered in perspiration, is seen to enter. It is Louis, the victor of the Marathon race. He arrives running, on the right side of the arena, most fatigued, but not to exhaustion, followed by the members of the committee and the ephors who cheer him. The Crown Prince and Prince George run with him, one on either side. The King, when the runner reached his place in the sphendone and bows to him in greeting, gets up and waves his nautical cap, for a long time in deep emotion. Some of the aides-de-camp rush forward, embrace the runner and kiss him. The two princes, who were joined by Prince Nicholas, lift the victor in triumph. The foreign officials applaud with emotion.

What happened at that moment in the stadium cannot be described. The sailor delegated to hoist the flags on the mast, so soon as he saw the number 17, which the victorious runner bore on his breast, hastened to raise the Greek flag, the sight of which raises a storm of enthusiasm. The air echoes with the shouts of victory, hats are thrown into the air, handkerchiefs wave as well as small Greek flags, up to then hidden and now unfolded. The whole of the crowd, in a state of excitement, celebrates the victory. The public demands with shouts and the bands play the national anthem. The moment is sacred and before its greatness, the foreigners who are present are captivated and acclaim the Greek victory in various languages.



Marathon : The triumphant arrival of Spyros Louīs.

Louīs is led to the changing rooms. He has covered the distance of 40 kilometres in 2 hours, 58 minutes and 50 seconds. Second, after a few minutes, Vassilakos arrives, and his arrival causes a second explosion of enthusiasm. He covered the distance in 3 hours, 6 minutes and 3 seconds. Third arrives the younger Athenian Belokas, who showed the greatest endurance against tiredness, having covered the distance in 3 hours 6 minutes and 30 seconds. Fourth comes the Hungarian Kellner, five seconds after Belokas. He also shows remarkable endurance, circulating in the arena and conversing with his fellow nationals, before going to the changing rooms. He is cheered with particular sympathy by the crowds. Following them, come : Vretos, Papasymeon, Deliyannis and Massouris. Those who were exhausted during the race, and picked up in the carriages, are conveyed to the changing rooms where the doctors administer the attentions of their profession. After the arrival of the runners, the contests which follow lose their interest and many of the spectators depart ; besides the hour is already advanced. In spite of this, in order to complete the programme the pole vault is continued, after which there follows the sixth event.

6th Event

Wrestling

In this there are five contestants, of the nine registered, and of them two are Greeks, Christopoulos from Patras, and Tsitas, baker of Athens, a pupil of the famous athlete Koutalianos. The first pair consists of Christopoulos and the Hungarian Tapovitsa, wearing the garb of wrestlers. They get hold of each other and wrestle on the circular sand-covered space in the middle of the arena, towards the splendone end. The result remains in doubt for a long time till finally the Hungarian withdraws. Then the pair is that of Schumann and Elliot. The German throws the tall and agile Englishman in a moment.

match. The fourth pair is Tsitas and Schumann, who wrestle for a long time on equal terms. But the sun has set some time back and the spectators demand by shouts that it be postponed for the morrow, which is done.

Those in the stadium emerge in throngs. Spyros Louïs surrounded by his shouting fellow villagers had left a little earlier, and, recognised by the crowds, became the object of frenzied acclamations. The crowds dispersed to the various centres and celebrated his victory which is considered a national one. All speak about Louïs. All wish to get to know him, to congratulate him, to offer him presents. Even in the stadium, after the victory, some enthusiasts hastened to send to the happy victor gold watches and precious tobacco boxes. Louis, surrounded by his relations and friends and many people, is seen off as he departs for his village to celebrate there his victory.

FESTIVAL IN THE PIRAEUS

This historic day so full of emotions is concluded by the grand festival in the Piraeus, organised by the Committee of the Games, with the co-operation of the Municipality of the Piraeus. Tens of thousands of people continually went down to the neighbouring city by the railway, of which the harbour and coast were a very line sight. The whole of the coast, all the buildings and edifices upon it, brightly lit, scintillate. The great lights upon the freighters in the harbour and the Bengal lights (coloured) and the plentiful lighting of the warships, the bright electric lights, the multitude of Venetian (Chinese) lanterns, hanging from the masts of the vessels, and the reflection of so many lights on the calm surface of the sea, all this constitutes a fairy-like effect containing indescribable magic.

The whole of the Royal Family, together with the King of Serbia, Alexander, and the Grand Duke George, came down and took up positions on the balcony of the City Hall. They remained to admire the wonderful sight. Later the various corporations concentrated in front of the Square of the Customs House, with their standards, and sailors bearing lamps and torches, with the Philharmonic band in front, set forth by the coastal avenue. Their parade, seen from afar, is a sight of unbelievable beauty. Below the City Hall, the group of the Piraeus Musical Union sang harmoniously a song entitled "The Sailor Lad", after which the band of the Philharmonic society in the Tinanian Gardens played a selection of airs from the music of Wagner's Lohengrin. After this, the fireworks placed in the harbour are lit.

The festivities came to an end around midnight, and all left with tired bodies from the fatigue and the deep emotions.

(To be continued)