

# THE GREATEST GATHERING OF TRACK AND FIELD OLYMPIANS:

THE BRITISH EMPIRE VERSUS THE U.S.A., 1920, 1924 AND 1928.

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**F**or more than two centuries, Great Britain and the United States of America have been engaged in activities both familial and sometimes discordant. In matters economic, linguistic, cultural, theological, military, and a score more connections, including sport, the two great national entities have had an enduring relationship.

American and British pedestrian footracers - professional distance runners - crossed the Atlantic for sixty-five years of the nineteenth-century. Straddling both centuries were the intense and civilized athletics competition between the combined Oxford and Cambridge Universities and the American Ivy League schools. In New York City 1895, the semi-professional track teams of both the USA and Britain met in a highly-publicized match, with the "Yanks" winning every event. National and world-records fell in running, jumping, and throwing events. All such superficialities ended with the onset of World War I in 1914, and it was not until the Antwerp, Belgium Olympic Games of 1920 that some degree of normality returned. Memories were long and fond, and following these Games of the Seventh Olympiad, the American Olympic track and field team delayed their journey home, crossed the English Channel and engaged the "British Empire" in a spirited competition in London, England, September 4, 1920. A similar amicable competition took place following the Paris and Amsterdam summer Olympic Games of 1924 and 1928, respectively. The majority of the two national teams were present . . . the greatest gathering of track and field Olympic athletes in history.

QUEEN'S CLUB LONDON:  
SEPTEMBER 4, 1920.

**Results and Comments.**<sup>1</sup> The largest crowd "in the history of athletics in this country" enjoyed this first post-war competition. Many of the events were in the form of relays, the British winning five as did the Americans, with two events uncontested by the home team (Meyers and Jenne vaulted 12 feet, while Lincoln's 196' 10" won the javelin; Brutus Hamilton, 164' 8" and Bradley 160' 10"). Britisher Baker defeated Olympic high jump champion Landon 6' 3 1/2" to 6' 2 3/4". U.S. long jumpers Merchant and Hamilton did 22 feet, while Bradley's 21' 11 1/2" was just ahead of Canada's Earl Thompson (21' 10 1/4").

The same Thompson, gold medalist at Antwerp, won the 120 yard high hurdles in 14 4/5 seconds... "a world record for grass" with Barron [15.0 s.] and Smith of the U.S. in close pursuit. The 440 yard intermediate hurdles was easy for the visitors, with Smart (56 1/5 s.), Watt and Meanix taking all the places.

**4-mile relay:** USA 18 min. 08 4/5 sec. (Curtis; Connolly; Ray; Shields) Empire 70 yards back (Lock; Seagrave; Hatton; Baker).

**Mile relay** won by Empire 4 yards in 3:19 2/5 s. (Ainsworth-Davis; Henning; Buller; Rudd);

**2-mile relay** won by the Empire in 7:53 1/5 (Phillips; Baker; Mountain; Rudd); USA 30 yards back (Driscoll; Devaney; Ray; Scott).

**2-mile team race** won by Brown, USA (9:30 1/5) with Dresser (USA) and Nichols (Empire) runner-ups.

**4x100 yard relay:** USA 39.0 sec. (Merchant; Shea; Woodring; Scholz); Empire (Davidson; Oosterlaak; D'Arcy; Mawby).

**4x220 yard relay:** Empire 1:29 3/5 sec. (Oosterlaak; Butler; Mawby; Davidson); USA six yards back (Shea; Kirksey; Scholz; Woodring).

It seemed almost everyone was happy with this civilized international athletics competition. Both teams received warm applause and “the Union Jack and Stars and Stripes were flown side by side.”<sup>2</sup>

**STAMFORD BRIDGE, LONDON:  
JULY 19, 1924.**

**Results and Comments:** The crowd was so great that no one counted, but estimates of 40,000 spectators were quoted in newspapers and official documents.’ The Yanks were victorious in eleven of the fourteen events. The Empire’s three wins were: **2 mile relay** in 7:56  $\frac{4}{5}$  (Mountain; Oldfield; Houghton; Stallard); USA two yards back (Dodge; Watters; Richardson; Enck); **mile relay** in 3:18.2 by two yards (Toms; Ripley; Butler; Liddell); USA (Wilson; Robertson; Stevenson; Fitch); **3-mile team race** won by the USA’s Booth (14:35  $\frac{4}{5}$ ), with winning Empire athletes finishing 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th). The USA **4x100yards** created 37  $\frac{4}{5}$  sec. world record (Scholz; Bowman; Paddock; Leconey); Empire (Porritt; Carr; Nichol; Abrahams); Empire nearly 5 yards back.

**Mile medley relay** (440-220-220-880) won by USA in 3:29.8 (Brookins; Hill; Scholz; Helffrich); Empire half a yard behind (Liddell; Porritt; Butler; Lowe).

**480 yard shuttle hurdle relay** USA 61  $\frac{3}{5}$  sec. (Guthrie; Kinsey; Moore; Anderson); Empire (Atkinson; Harrison; Partridge; Gaby).

**4-mile relay** USA (Watson; Connolly; Hahn; Buker) 17:46.2 and 6 yards over the Empire (Porter; Ellis; MacDonald; Johnston).

**2-mile steeplechase relay** won by the USA 8:13.6 (Devaney; Spencer; Taylor; Rick); Empire five feet behind (Boardman; Blackett; Tatham; Montague).

**Long jump relay** (see note 7) USA (Gourdin 24’8  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”; Rose 23’1”; Dowding 21’6”); Empire (Abrahams 23’2  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”; Honner 21’4  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”); Sutherland did not record a jump).

**High jump** won by USA (Osborn and Brown 6’4”; Poor 6’2”); Empire (Roberts 6’1”; Dickinson and Willis 5’9”).

**Pole vault** won by USA (Barnes 12’9”; Brooker 12’6”; Meyers 12’0”); Empire (Francis and Pickard 12’6”; Campbell 10’0”).

**Shot put relay** (see note 7) won by USA (Hills 49’10  $\frac{1}{4}$ ”; Houser 49’5  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”; Hartranft 46’0  $\frac{1}{4}$ ”); Empire (Beckwith 43’0  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”; Woods 42’2  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”; Spark 38’9”).

**Hammer throw relay** (see note 7) won by USA (Tootell 178’11”; McGrath 168’1”; Merchant 156’6  $\frac{1}{4}$ ”); Empire (Nokes 170’2  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”; Murdock 151’10  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”; Spark 142’2”).

**Javelin relay** (see note 7) won by USA (Welchel 187’8”; Neufeldt 180’7”; Oberst 173’11”); Empire (Duigan 164’4  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”; Sutherland 158’0  $\frac{1}{4}$ ”; Dalrymple 126’7”).

**STAMFORD BRIDGE, LONDON;  
AUGUST 11, 1928.**

**Results and Comments.** The USA won 8 events; the British took 6, all before a more-than-pleased 50,000 spectators. “The American mile relay team, composed of Baird, Taylor, Barbuti, and Spencer, chalked up a new world’s record [4x440 yards] of 3 minutes 13  $\frac{2}{5}$  seconds, leading the Britons to the tape by 9 yards.”<sup>4</sup>

Track genius Jesse P. Abramson was at track side, suffering from the heat and yet capable of writing about “possibly the best track meet I’ve ever seen.”<sup>5</sup>

What a hero was Douglas Lowe as he anchored two Empire teams to victory . . . the 4x880 and the medley relay. What a performance by Cyril Ellis in the 4-mile relay, coming from behind to defeat America’s peerless Lloyd Hahn with a 4 min. 14 sec. clocking.

**4x100 yards;** won in photofinish 37  $\frac{4}{5}$  sec. USA (Wyckoff; Quinn; Cummings; Russell); Empire (Williams; Carlton; Fitzpatrick; London).

**4x440 yards;** USA over the Empire by one second in a new world record (3:13  $\frac{2}{5}$ ); (Baird; Taylor; Barbutti; Spencer); Empire (Wilson; Rinkel; Leigh-Wood; Ball).

**480 yard shuttle hurdles relay** won by USA (Dye; Ring; Anderson; Collier); Empire (Atkinson; Lord Burghley; Gaby; Weightman-Smith); winning time 62.0 sec.

**Shot put relay** (see note 7); USA (Brix 49’6”; Kuck 49’4  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”; Rothert 47’0  $\frac{1}{2}$ ”); British (Woods 42’8”; Hart 42”; Howland 41’0”).

**4 - mile relay** Empire in 17:22  $\frac{3}{5}$  (Docherty; Starr; Whyte; Ellis); USA (Carter; Lermond; Robinson; Hahn); 17:23.0.

**4x 880 yards**; won by Empire in 7:48  $\frac{4}{5}$ ; USA far back; Empire (Little; McEachern; Edwards; Lowe); USA (Sittig; Phillips; Fuller; Watson).

**Pole vault relay** (see note <sup>7</sup>); USA (Barnes 13'9"; McGinnis 13'0"; Droege-muller 12'6"); Empire (Pickard 13'6"; Bond 11'6"; Housden 11'0").

**High jump relay** (see note <sup>7</sup>); won by USA (King; Hedges and Osborn all cleared 6'4"); Empire (Munroe 6'3"; Simmons 6'0"; Gordon 6'0").

**8-lap steeplechase relay**, Empire by 10 yards in 7:52.0, run on grass infield (Livingston-Learmonth; Tatham; Morgan Lord Burghley); USA (Montgomery; Gregan; Dalton; Spencer).

**Hammer throw relay** (see note <sup>7</sup>); USA (Black 163'3"; Oakey 158'4"; Gwinn 155'3"); Empire (Britton 146'11"; Nokes 146'10"; McSweeney 139' 3  $\frac{1}{2}$ ").

Long jump relay (see note <sup>7</sup>); won by USA (Hamm 25'1"; Bates 24'8"; Hubbard 24'6"); Empire (Atkinson 23'10  $\frac{1}{4}$ "; Harrison 22'10  $\frac{1}{2}$ "; Viljoen 21'4  $\frac{1}{2}$ ").

**3-mile team race**; won by Empire (2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 7th places; Light; Johnston; Muggeridge; Beavers); USA (1st, 4th, 6th, 8th places; Smith 14:37  $\frac{2}{5}$  sec.; Romig; Ray; Haworth).

**Javelin relay** (see note <sup>7</sup>); won by Empire (Pilling 204'0"; Lay 203'9"; Weightman-Smith 187'2  $\frac{1}{2}$ "); USA (Sager 201'10"; Bartlett 198'5"; Harlow 185'4").

**Mile medley relay** (440-220-220-880) won by Empire (Edwards; Rangeley; Fitzpatrick and 1:51.0 by Lowe); USA (Cuhel; Alderman; Russell; Conger). Winning time 3:22  $\frac{3}{5}$ , 2 seconds ahead of USA.

"A wonderful afternoon of almost unbearable tension" was *The Times* reporter's by-line.<sup>6</sup>

It was also part three of "*The Greatest Gathering of Track and Field Olympians.*"

## NOTES

1. Full names and nation of origin [for the British Empire athletes] have been added in separate appendixes to this article. For those interested, photocopies of these appendixes can be obtained from the editor of the Journal. It would take too much space to publish them verbatim.
2. See *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, September 5, 1920; part 2, p. 4; *New York Times* [NYT], September 5, 1920, p. 18; *The Times* [London], September 6, 1920 editorial, also *Lowe and Porritt, Athletics* (1929), pages 19-20; and *F.A.M. Webster, Athletics of To-Day* (1929), p. 37.
3. See "US vs. British Empire," *ICAA Handbook 1924*, p. 178; *The Times*, July 21, 1924, p. 4; NYT, July 20, 1924, pages 21, 24; Report on *VIII Olympiad 1924*. AOA Report, pages 24-26. *Lowe and Porritt, Athletics* (1929), p. 20; *New York Herald Tribune*, July 20, 1924; sec.4 pages 1,3.
4. *Chicago Tribune* on-site reporter. See his by-line in Sunday edition, August 12, 1928, p. 5.
5. See his very lengthy description in the *New York Herald Tribune*, August 12, 1928, pages 1, 4.
6. "Close Match at Stamford Bridge," *The Times* [London], August 13, 1928, p. 5.
7. Instead of 'relay', the word used should have been 'aggregate'. It was the total of the performances of the athletes from each country toted up.