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## **New Facts Surrounding Africa's First Encounter with the Olympic Games in 1904**

South Africa participated officially in the Olympic Games from 1908 until 1960, and again from 1992. Van Der Merwe documented this early history (1978) but did not disclose the participation of a "Boer team" in the tug-of-war event or study the true facts behind the presence of two "Zulus" at the 1904 St. Louis Games. The two "Zulus" were in fact the first Blacks from Africa to take part in the Olympic Games, yet virtually nothing is known regarding their presence in St. Louis. According to the Official Report of the Games by Charles J.P. Lucas, South Africa had three marathon runners competing, "Lentaauw" and "Yamasani" from "Zululand" and Harris from the "Transvaal." Now, for the first time for nearly a century, there is a concern for more information about these athletes.

Certain questions were resolved by this research, notably, the identity of the three marathon runners. Robert (Bob) Harris was from Aliwal North in the Northern Cape and not from the Transvaal (nowadays known as Gauteng). The two Black runners were not Zulus from Zululand, but more likely Tswanas from the Western Transvaal (North West Province). As for their names, the spelling that has been accepted up till now is the phonetic spelling as published in the American newspapers of the day. Their correct names appear to be Len Tau and Jan Mashiani. An official program of the marathon race, obtained from the US Olympic Committee, reveals furthermore that the names of the two runners as indicated on the back of the only official photo in possession of the Missouri Historical Society have been switched. Len Tau must be the taller of the two, the barefooted one with the number 35 on his chest.

Historical information on sport in Africa is very limited. This paper enhances the historiography on African participation on world class sport by throwing more light on Sub-Saharan Africans' participation in the modern Olympic Games. In the light of South Africa's recent dispensation, and the dearth of information on the achievements of deprived groups, this is important. This research contributes to our knowledge of South African participation in the Olympic Movement and especially, in disclosing the involvement of two great African athletes omitted from sport history books for nearly a century, to the historiography on Black sport in South Africa.



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