

An Examination of The 1928 Olympic 800 Meter Race For Women

LYNNE EMERY

California State Polytechnic University

Track and field for women was introduced at the Ninth Olympiad, Amsterdam, 1928. One of the running events, the 800 meters, still affects women's Olympic participation in track and the purpose of this paper was to determine what actually occurred in the 1928 800 meter finals.

Many conflicting stories of the 800 meter run exist; the most common that five finalists dropped out of the race before the finish, five more collapsed at the tape, and the eleventh runner fainted in the locker room. Newspaper accounts spoke of the spectacle, of the runners falling headlong to the ground, of the prostrate and distressed forms. The Congress of the International Amateur Athletic Federation promptly voted to eliminate the 800 meter run since it appeared to be too strenuous for women.

A thorough examination of the evidence including eye-witness accounts showed that there were nine women in the 800 meter finals, all nine completed the race and several bettered the existing world's record. The finalists and their times were: first, Linda Radke, Germany, 2:16.8; second, Kinuye Hitomi, Japan, 2: 17.6; third, Inga Gentzel, Sweden, 2: 17.8; fourth, Jenny Thompson, Canada, 2:21.6; fifth, Fanny Rosenfield, Canada, 2:22.4; sixth, Florence McDonald, USA, 2:22.6. In seventh place was Marie Dollinger, Germany, 2:23.0; eighth, Gertruda Kilosowna, Poland, 2:28; and ninth, Elfriede Wewer, Germany.

Contrary to popular opinion, the runners did not fall on the track but several moved to the infield to lie down since they were not only winded but also disappointed at not winning. The removal of the race from the Olympic Games by the IAAF was unjustified based on the evidence presented. Because of this race, adding women's track events to the Olympic program has been a slow and difficult process.



The session on Women and Sport included Jean Pekara, Roxanne Albertson, Lynne Emery, and Jan Beran as speakers.