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## MARATHON, BETWEEN HISTORY AND TRADITION

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### Abstract

*Problem statement.* The history of the longest running event began in 490 BC, when the Greek soldier Philippides brought to Athens the news of victory in the Battle of Marathon. In memory of the sacrifice made by this soldier who, at the cost of his life, ran about 40 kilometres, the marathon event was organized. The first race took place at the Athens Olympics, in 1896. It was the beginning of the modern era of the Olympic Games. The length of the race underwent several changes and was officially set at 26.2 miles (42.195 km), in 1921.

The impact of long-distance races has led to organizing sports running events since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first running event took place in 1897, in Boston. For decades, marathons were organized only for male athletes. Women's participation has been allowed since 1972, and the first Olympic marathon for women was organized in 1984.

*The aim of the research.* Through this paper, we want to make a synthesis of all aspects that have marked the evolution of marathon running over the millennia.

*Conclusions.* Over the decades, the evolution of mass sports events has made significant progress.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, organizing such events has a considerable impact on the population, from the motor, psychological, social and cultural perspectives.

Currently, around 1,100 running events are organized worldwide, the estimated number of competitors reaching 541,000.

*Keywords:* marathon, sports events, history.

### Introduction

Running, as both a style and a way of working, is in full development, although it is essentially one of the most natural movements. Some of the transformations undergone have resulted from the trends that emerge in society. (Bota, 2007)

Running is the simplest and most natural way of training a number of fitness components, being initially considered the main exponent of the fitness. (Bota, 2007)

Marathon is the longest athletics event that involves running the standard distance of 42.195 km. Marathon races are dedicated to both performance athletes and

amateurs. More than 1,000 amateur street running events are organized every year.

In an attempt to create an acrostic, we can characterize the "Marathon" by the words in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Acrostic for the term “Marathon”

### The aim of the research

Through this paper, we want to make a synthesis of all aspects that have marked the evolution of marathon running over the millennia.

### Brief history of the marathon

The history of the longest athletics event begins in 490 BC, when the Greek soldier Philippides brought to Athens the news of victory in the Battle of Marathon.

The name “Marathon” comes from the legend of Philippides, the Greek messenger. This legend states that he was sent from the battlefield of Marathon to Athens to announce that the Persians had been defeated in the Battle of Marathon, which took place in August or September, 490 BC. It is said that he ran the entire distance without stopping and burst into the assembly, exclaiming “we have won!” before collapsing and dying.

There is debate about the historical accuracy of this legend. The Greek historian Herodotus, the main source for the Greco-Persian Wars, mentions Philippides as the messenger who ran from Athens to Sparta asking for help, and then ran back, a distance of

over 240 kilometres each way. In some manuscripts of Herodotus, the name of the runner between Athens and Sparta is given as Philippides. Herodotus makes no mention of a messenger sent from Marathon to Athens and narrates that the main part of the Athenian army, having fought and won the exhausting battle, and fearing a naval attack of the Persian fleet against an undefeated Athens, marched quickly back from the battlefield to Athens, arriving the same day. (Martin, Gynn, 2000)

In memory of the sacrifice made by the soldier who ran to the death about 40 kilometres, the marathon event was organized, the first race taking place at the Athens Olympics in 1896.

When the modern Olympic Games began in 1896, the initiators and organizers were looking for a great popularizing event, recalling the glory of ancient Greece. The idea of a marathon race came from Michel Bréal, who wanted the event to be present at the first modern Olympic Games of 1896, held in Athens. This idea was firmly supported by Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, but also by the

Greeks. The Greeks organized a selection race for the Olympic marathon on 22 March 1896, which was won by Charilaos Vasilakos in 3 hours and 18 minutes (with the future winner of the introductory Olympic Games marathon, Spyridon “Spyros” Louis, who was ranked 5<sup>th</sup> at a second race, two weeks later). The winner of the first Olympic marathon (a race for men only), on 10 April 1896, was Spyridon Louis, a Greek water-carrier, in 2 hours 58 minutes and 50 seconds. The marathon of

the 2004 Summer Olympics was run on the traditional route from Marathon to Athens and ended at the Panathenaic Stadium, the venue for the 1896 Summer Olympics. The men’s marathon was won by Stefano Baldini in 2 hours 10 minutes and 55 seconds, a record time for this route until 2014, when Felix Kandie lowered the record to 2 hours 10 minutes and 37 seconds.

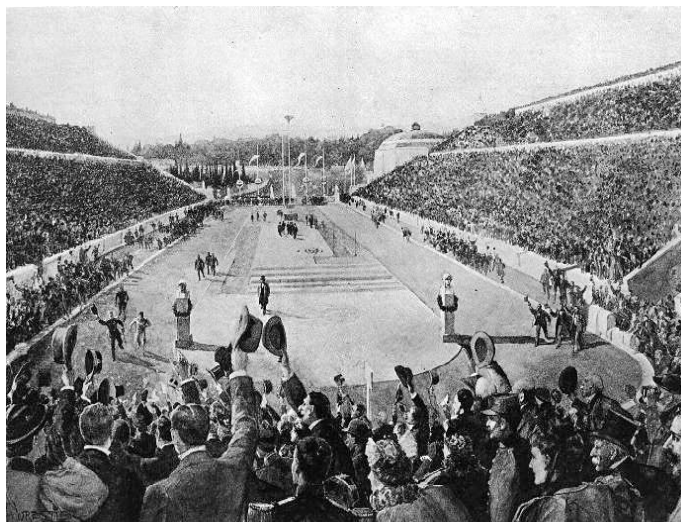


Figure 2. The 1896 Olympic Games

### Olympic marathon distances

The first official marathon in the 1896 Olympics was set at 40 kilometres to commemorate the dramatic race that the Greek messenger made in 490 BC.

In the next Olympic Games, the length of the marathon remained about 25 miles (40 kilometres) until the 1908 London Olympics, when it was extended, apparently in order to host the British royal family. According to sources, Queen Alexandra asked

for the race to start on the Windsor Castle lawn, so that the little princes in the nursery could watch it from their window, and to finish in front of the royal box at the Olympic Stadium. The length of that route happened to be 26.2 miles (26 miles and 385 yards or 42.51 kilometres). The random increase in mileage ends with an addition to the marathon distance, and in 1921, the length of the marathon was officially set at 26.2 miles (42.195 km).

Table 1. Olympic marathon distances

Olympic marathon distances		
Year	Distance (km)	Distance (miles)
1896	40	24.85
1900	40.26	25.02
1904	40	24.85
1906	41.86	26.01

1908	42.195	26.22
1912	40.2	24.98
1920	42.75	26.56
1921 onward	42.195	26.22

### History and evolution of the marathon in Romania

In Romania, the history of running competitions begins at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the initiative of students learning in Western countries. During holidays, they used to organize running, jumping and throwing competitions.

The first athletic competition organized in Romania takes place in 1882, in Bucharest, at the initiative of Louis Schmettau, with the participation of students from the "Sf. Sava" and "Matei Basarab" high schools. Gradually, there is an increasing interest in sports activity, in general, and particularly in athletics. There are organized races attracting a large number of participants, as well as competitions based on age-related criteria, and the specialized literature starts emerging. (Sabau, Sabau, 1999)

*The Encyclopaedia of Physical Education and Sports in Romania* mentions that, in 1885, the "Romanian Running Society", founded in 1882 by Louis Schmettau, is dissolved. An action takes place in 1896, with the organization of a long-distance race, from Bucharest to Pitesti and back to Bucharest.

The publicity made by all means available at that time brings 335 participants to the starting line, but only 22 finish the race. The winner of the competition was a military man in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, Alpine Hunters, named Ilie Gheorghe, who covered the distance of 222 km in 41.04:00, achieving an hourly average of 5.405 km. (FRA, 2008)

Between 1906 and 1912, on the occasion of school holidays, running and jumping competitions are organized in several high schools of Bucharest, Ploiesti, Craiova and Galati. In 1912, the "Committee for Athletics, Running and Competitions" is established within the Romanian Federation of Sporting Societies (FRSS). In fact, the Romanian Athletics Federation (FRA) was the 19<sup>th</sup> World Federation, and in 1923, it was affiliated to the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). Also in 1912, several school sports societies

are established in Bucharest, besides the high schools where athletics is practiced ("Sf. Sava", "Gh. Lazar", "M. Viteazul" etc.), as well as the "Atheos" and "Marathon" clubs for long-distance running. In the summer of that year, the first edition of the Interschool Championship (exclusively for boys) is organized at the Baneasa racetrack. The (modest) performances achieved are considered the first national records (13"5 – 100 m, 57"5 – 400 m, 1.10 m – high jump, 9.92 m – shot put etc.).

The impact of long-distance running has led to the organization of running events since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first street running event took place in 1897, in Boston. For decades, marathons were accessible only for male athletes, the participation of women being allowed since 1972.

Throughout the decades, the evolution of mass sports events has recorded significant progress, more than 1,100 running events being currently organized worldwide, the estimated number of competitors who finished the 26.2-mile race reaching 541,000.

In Romania, more than 100 amateur street running competitions are currently organized.

Since 2008, Bucharest has been included into the international marathon circuit, all Bucharest Running Club competitions being accredited and listed in the international calendar at the AIMS (Association of International Marathons and Distance Races) and IAAF.

The calendar of organized events includes three of the major street running competitions in Bucharest, namely 10K & Family Run, Bucharest Half Marathon and Bucharest Marathon.

In 2018, the marathon race, held within the Raiffeisen Bank Bucharest Marathon event, has the Bronze Label status, a certification awarded by the IAAF. It should be noted that the marathon organized in Bucharest is the only race in Romania that has obtained this certificate.



Figure 3. The Bucharest International Marathon

In the 21st century, organizing such events has a considerable impact on the population, from the motor, psychological, social and cultural perspectives.

Annually, more than 1,000 marathons are organized all over the world. Some of them belong to the Association of International Marathons and Distance Races (AIMS), which, since its establishment in 1982, has come to reach over 300 events developed in 83 countries and territories. The marathons of Berlin, Boston, Chicago, London, New York and Tokyo form the biennial World Marathon Majors Series, awarding 500,000 dollars yearly to the best mass and female performers in the Series. (Abbott World Marathon Majors, 2017)

In 2006, the Runner's World editors selected a "Top 10 World's Marathons", where the marathons of

Amsterdam, Honolulu, Paris, Rotterdam and Stockholm were present along with the five original World Marathon Majors events (except Tokyo).

The Boston Marathon is the oldest annual marathon in the world, inspired by the success of the 1896 Olympic marathon, and has been held every year since 1897 to celebrate the Patriots' Day. (Clerici, 2014)

The oldest marathon in Europe is the Košice Peace Marathon that took place in 1924, in Kosice, Slovakia. The historic Polytechnic Marathon was interrupted in 1996. The classical Athens Marathon traces the Olympic route of 1896, starting from Marathon, on the east coast of Attica, where the Battle of Marathon took place in 490 BC, and ending at the Panathenaic Stadium in Athens.

### Conclusions

- Over the decades, the evolution of mass sports events has made significant progress.
- In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, organizing such events has a considerable impact on the population, from the motor, psychological, social and cultural perspectives.
- Currently, around 1,100 running events are organized worldwide, the estimated number of competitors who finished the 26.2-mile race reaching 541,000.

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