

NUTS NOTES

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EDITORIAL

You probably noticed that "AW" in conjunction with David Dryer Sports Travel Ltd are running three tours to the World Cup (Düsseldorf, 2/3/4 September); you now have the chance to come on a NUTS special, arranged through Alf Wilkins, which will be about £20 less than any other comparable trip. Travel will be by scheduled BA services with 3 nights accommodation, probably at Hotel Atlantik; we hope to obtain good stadium seats through the BAAB. Please contact Alf as soon as possible if you are interested: his address is 30 Chester Close South, Regent's Park, LONDON NW1 4JG (telephone home: 01-935 7583; office: 01-452 6544).

List compilation will be undertaken this year as follows: 100-400m Linda Bonthron, 800-3000m Mike Strange, 5000m-30km and 3000m St Bob Phillips, 110m-400m H Mike Gill, HJ/PV Celia Parton, LJ/TJ Richard Hymans, SP/DT/HT/JT Tony O'Neill, Decathlon Alan Lindop, Marathon & 20M Dave Bendy, Relays Keith Morbey, Senior Walks (Men) Colin Young, Senior Women (except Walks) Liz Sissons, Intermediate & Junior Women Tony Miller, European Junior Women Peter Martin, Walks (all Women's age groups) Robert Cole, Juniors Nigel Bailey, Youths (To be notified later), Boys David Phillips, Junior & Youth Walks David Rowland, Relays (all junior age groups) Keith Morbey.

MISCELLANY

- § Tony Isaacs (ATFS) still has available copies of "South Pacific Athletics Handbook" at £1.00 including postage; his address is 68 Kennedy Avenue, MACCLESFIELD, Cheshire SK10 3HQ. This 76 page booklet contains details of marks by SP athletes in major meetings, results of SP Games 1963-75 and deep all time lists for both men and women; an index contains birth data for many outstanding SP performers.
- § A new publication has appeared on the athletics scene - well, not brand new, because "Athletic Review" has been revived. Published monthly with 36pp, subscriptions are £1.30 for 6 issues and £2.40 for 12 issues from: 5 Newby Avenue, Rainhill, PRESCOT, Merseyside L35 9JR.
- § David Dallman (our man in Vienna) came across this athletic reference in "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" by James Joyce: p.184 "Side by side with his memory of the deeds of prowess of his uncle Mat Davin, the athlete, the young peasant worshipped the sorrowful legend of Ireland."
- § Bob Phillips, whose Rugby Union reports appear regularly in "The Guardian", ran in the 1976 Barnsley Marathon, finishing in 3:32:10. He wrote very amusingly about his experience in an article in the "Liverpool Echo".

THE GREAT OLYMPIC HURDLES MYSTERY: Part 2 by Peter Lovesey

You may remember that in the last issue I raised the matter of the hurdles event at the 1896 Olympics, which is listed in some results as a standard 110m, 10 hurdle race, while others show it as 100m, over 8 hurdles, each one metre high. My appeal for information has yielded some interesting comments.

The first came in a letter from RLQ (otherwise Roberto Quercetani): "Trying to remember how we, the compilers of the ATFS Olympic Handbook, turned from Diehards (1948 ed) to Upstarts (1952 ed) .. could be that we "inherited" the 100m, 8 hurdles version from the 1948 Olympic Book of Harold Abrahams (I can't say for sure, because I don't have it with me now)." He went on to say that he now felt the Diehard argument outweighed the Upstarts, and included a photocopy from a Greek book "100 Years of Neohellenic Athletics 1830-1930" (Athens, 1962) showing that Greek statisticians record the event as 110m in both heats and final.

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I decided to get in touch with Harold. RLQ's recollection was correct; there is a footnote HMA's OLYMPIC GAMES BOOK (1948) stating "Apparently there were only eight hurdles each 1 metre high and the distance was 100 metres". Harold told me that he carried out a lot of research for the book and that the information must have come either from the official report of the Games in Greek, French and English, or from the Greek daily newspapers, which he consulted at the Newspaper Library at Colindale.

I made plans to visit Colindale. Before I could get there, three other letters arrived. Richard Szreter had found a number of references to 110m, the most interesting an article in the Fortnightly Review for June 1896 by G S Robertson (later Sir George Robertson) stating "the 110m (120-1/5y) Hurdle Race took considerably longer than one would have expected judging from the excellence of the competitors; the result may have been due in some measure to the unusual arrangement of hurdles." Tantalising! What can he mean? Is this ammunition for the Upstarts (for any 8 hurdle arrangement would have to be unusual) or does he mean that the hurdles were arranged on the track (which is undisputed, I think), rather than the grass, which was the custom in England?

Erich Kamper, acknowledged as a leading authority on the Olympic Games (he is the author of WHO'S WHO AT THE OLYMPICS (Graz, 1975), ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES (Dortmund, 1972) and ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF THE OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES (Stuttgart, 1964)), wrote from Austria pointing out that there was an error in my previous article, in which I had suggested (on information from IOC Director, Monique Berlioux) that the official report gave the event as 110m. On page 35, in Greek, the event is described as 100m with obstacles, and on page 85 in French as "course de 100m avec obstacles". Only on page 136 in English is the reference "110m with hurdles". EK is convinced that the original text was in Greek and the other two texts only translations. Moreover, he takes me up on my comment that a winning time of 17.6 for 100m over 8 hurdles is abysmal: "... considering the fact that Curtis was never US champion and Goulding never before 1896 nor after among the first three in the AAA Championships, both were probably "grade 4" hurdlers. Perhaps "hurdle-jumpers" and not real hurdle-runners. In my opinion it seems not impossible that the distance was indeed only 100m and not 110m."

My third correspondent was Dave Terry, who promised to write in full when he had next been to Colindale, but gave the following brief facts in support of 110m: 1) The English version of the official report states 110m. 2) The Field report states 110m. They had their own reporter there. 3) History of Greek Athletics 1830-1930 states 110m; also for their Olympic trials. 4) The Games organiser (Secretary) was at Oxford University. 5) Charles Perry laid out the track and facilities, i.e. he marked it. 6) Official programme of events prepared in 1895 states 110m under French rules, which required 10 hurdles, 3ft 6in in height and 110m.

I must admit here that I hoped to get some guidance from a book I had seen reviewed some months ago in the TLS, and had optimistically ordered. RS mentioned it too in his letter. It is THE FIRST MODERN OLYMPICS by Richard D Mandell (Univ of California Press). Surely a book devoted to the 1896 Olympics would provide the answer? It does not. The event is mentioned twice by Prof Mandell: on page 134 he writes "Tom Curtis had won the finals in the 100-meter hurdles from Goulding. The Englishman's tales of earlier triumphs in South Africa had led all Athens to share his view that he was the world's fastest hurdler, but he lagged in the first brief burst, gained on the leaps but lagged once more to dash through an already broken tape, whereupon he stopped neither to linger nor to say farewell, but went from the stadium to the station and took the first train away from Athens." Thinking that established Prof Mandell as a strong supporter of the Upstarts, I turned to his list of the winning times for the track events on page 158, and found "110-meter hurdles, 17.6 seconds." But if this only compounded the confusion, it was interesting to see that the quote given above was from an article written by Curtis, the winner of the race, in Sportsman, XII No.1 (July 1932) p.22, entitled "The Glory that was Greece". Had Curtis himself referred to the race as 100m? I have written to Mandell, but haven't heard anything yet.

There are two other references in the book that challenge Kamper's suggestion that Curtis and Goulding were "probably "Grade 4" hurdlers." On page 129, he refers to the "renowned Englishman" who "had previously strutted around Athens explaining the origin of the medals on his chest"; and on page 159, he lists four of the Boston AA team as "of world championship caliber" and includes Curtis.

I went to the Newspaper Library with the idea of looking up the Greek daily, Akropolis, The Field, The Boston Post and The Gloucester Standard (Goulding was a Gloucester man). I had mixed fortune. Akropolis had gone for micro-filming and was not available. In The Field, I found a very full account of the Games, in which the heats were reported as "Hurdle Race, 110 metres, 10 flights", but the final as "100 metres Hurdle Race"! Anyway, Goulding "skimmed his timber in beautiful style" and was "as pretty a hurdler as one could wish to see, but was quite untrained, having come out to Greece for his health, and was handicapped by a bad spill he got at his first practice at the stadium." The Boston Post also carried a detailed account of the Games, listing the event as 110 meter Hurdle Race (120 yards). "Tom Curtis," it said, "the surprise of yesterday's meet, and who won the 110 meter race, was exceedingly slow. The distance is almost exactly the regulation 120 yds, and the record for this event is 15.4 sec held by Stephen Chase of Dartmouth College." I turned back the pages to see what I could find of Curtis's form before the Olympics. He was active in the 1896 indoor season. In the Ninth Regiment Games in Boston on Jan 25, which Bernie Wefers won the 75 yard dash from scratch in a world record of 7.6, Curtis, from a 4yd start, was second. At the Boston AA Indoor Games on Feb 8, Curtis won the 40 yards hurdles in 6.0, from an 8 foot start. Stephen Chase was put out in the heats. So while Curtis may not have been a scratch man in 1896, he was no slouch either. My last source, The Gloucester Standard, had only a short account of the Games, borrowed from the Birmingham Post, but mentioned that Goulding was second in the 110m hurdle race.

So where are we in this attempt to clear up the mystery? A little short of the solution, I feel. I have tried to report the facts as fairly as I can. To sum up my own thoughts, I am satisfied that the 100m version has important textual evidence to support it. I wonder if it could have arisen from a printing error in the programme of the day of the final. The Field mentions somewhere that the programmes for each day's events were flimsy and by no means reliable. I still cannot accept that Curtis would have been as slow as 17.6 if the race had been only 100m, over 8 hurdles.

One last observation. At the 1906 Intercalated Olympic Games in the same Athens stadium, the 110m hurdles was won in 16.2, an improvement of 7.95% on the 17.6 of Curtis in 1896. If the event were 10m and 2 hurdles shorter in 1896, you would expect the improvement in the 1906 race to be less percentage-wise than the improvement in other events. In fact it was greater. The 100m showed a 6.66% improvement, the 400m 1.845%, the 800m 7.25% and the 1500m 7.75%.

As several of my correspondents pointed out, we may never know the answer. If I hear any more, I'll let you know. My thanks to everyone who got in touch.