

1897 Boston Globe Story on 'American Marathon'

From The Boston Globe,
April 20, 1897

The lead:

The "Marathon" race from Ashland to this city, held under the auspices of the Boston athletic association, yesterday afternoon, in conjunction with open handicap games on Irvington oval, in emulation of the Olympic games held in Athens last spring, proved a great success and is an assurance of an annual fixture of the same kind.

J.J. McDermott of the Pastime A.C. of New York won the distance run, and he was given an ovation as he went around the Irvington oval track finishing a record-breaking performance.

He made the distance, 25 miles, in 2h 55m 10s, which puts in the shade the performance made by the Greek peasant, Spiros Louces, from Marathon to Athens, last season, by about 30 seconds.

The start:

The early morning trains to Ashland carried hundreds of spectators who wished to see the start of the great race and then jump on a train again and be present at Irvington oval to see the finish. A small army of bicyclists went on the trains and over the road, and many of them returned with the runners.

At 12:15 Tom Burke scraped his foot across the narrow street in front of Met-calf's Mill and called the contestants' number. Fifteen men answered.

At 19 minutes past noon starter Tom Burke gave the word "Go." All the contestants went away quickly, but after going about 50 yards they seemed to realize that they had just 25 miles of hard road before them and settled down to a comfortable jog.

The race:

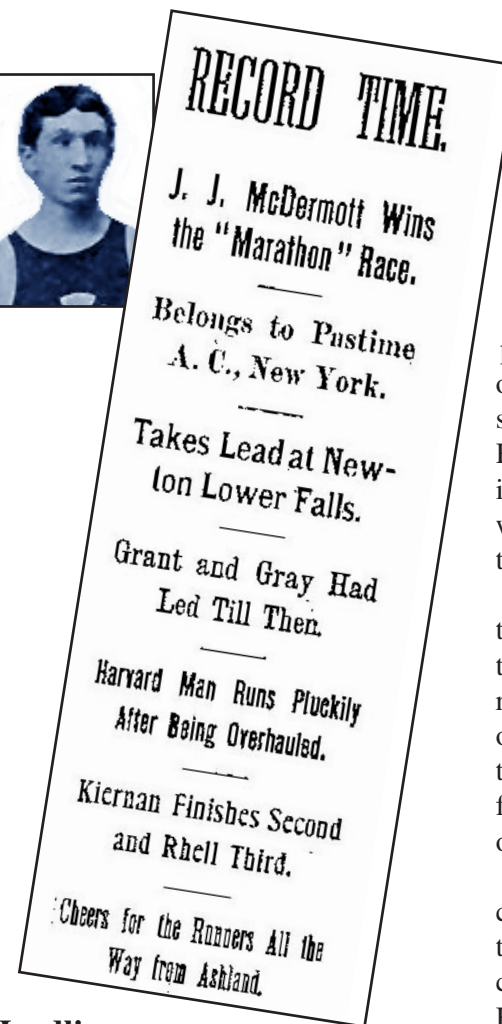
The crowd at the Ashland station was

good natured, and as it formed a line for the athletes to pass, the sleepy old town rang with the cheers of her lusty sons. As each passed he received a hearty greeting. After passing the station the men settled down to work in earnest and from here to South Framingham the order was almost unchanged, except that McDermott went back a little to save himself.

Hamilton Gray and Dick Grant were running side by side, stride for stride, as they passed through the long line of spectators which stretched from Ashland to South Framingham. The houses all along the line were filled with people, and many handkerchiefs and good wishes were wafted upon the beautiful April day as the men, with faces set, kept on.

After leaving South Framingham cyclists dropped in line about the leaders, as if the heavens had suddenly opened and rained wheels. Carriages, wagons, motor cycles and in fact every conceivable form of conveyance was brought into line, and by the time the tail end of the line of runners had left the square there was hardly room to turn around.

From South Framingham to Natick there was very little change in the order of the leaders. The runners still continued to receive ovations all along the line, which they acknowledged by waving their hands or bowing. Grant and Gray were running a splendid race, there being no difference in the length of stride, and each man seemed to have about the same amount of endurance. Gray's manner of running was prettier than the Harvard man's, but it must be remembered that this was the first long run that Grant had engaged in, and he was running a beautiful race. About half way between South Framingham and Natick, the competitors encountered a hard hill, but they went up in apparently more easily than did those who were on wheels. Somewhere between these two



Headlines

tell a great story; and winner
John. J. McDermott (Above).

places McDermott shook [J.J.] Kiernan and gained third place.

The order was not changed between Natick and Wellesley, the only change being the lessening of the distance between McDermott and the two leaders. Several young women from Wellesley college received the leaders at Wellesley, and when they recognized the Harvard colors of Grant they cheered.

The order behind McDermott had not changed materially. Just as the hill between Wellesley and Newton Lower Falls was reached McDermott got on even terms with the leaders and brushed

past them down the hill. He evidently took the heart out of Gray, for he stopped running and walked. Grant gave chase, and although nearly played out he clung to the heels of the New York flyer and winner of the New York race last fall. It was a hot race for about a mile, and the Harvard crack was applauded generously for his plucky but fruitless race. At the bottom of the hill and at the rise of the next he staggered a few steps and quit running. He walked to the top of the hill, just in time to see the little Pastime A.C. wonder disappearing around a turn in the road.

A street watering cart was passing at the time, and Grant signalled the driver to stop and he laid down in the street, requesting the driver to let the water run over him. After this shower bath he continued again for a short distance, but his feet had gone back on him and he was obliged to give up the race.

The main part of the crowd now centered about McDermott, and the attendants had hard work to keep the road clear. He was running like clockwork. His legs seemed to rise and fall like a phantom Greek and his little body was bent just the least bit forward, his arms were at full length at his side, and his face was set with determination. As he turned into the boulevard he asked his attendant, Corp. Eddie Heinlein, to tell him when he had gone 20 miles. He breasted the long hill manfully, still maintaining the beautiful form, and he laughed at the wheelmen who were pounding their pedals in their endeavor to keep their machines in motion.

He never lessened his pace until he reached the Evergreen cemetery, about a quarter of a mile from the reservoir entrance. Here he stopped running for the first time since he started just 20 miles back. After walking about one-eighth of a mile he again sprinted for about 20

yards, when he was seized with a cramp in his left leg. He received a vigorous rubbing amid the plaudits of the people who had gathered to see the man go by. He started again. He ran a few steps and was obliged to stop again.

Many thought that he was gone, but he held his leg stiff and said "Rub." That leg was rubbed! He started once more on his last run and never stopped until he was past Coolidge Corner, heeding not the great demonstration that was accorded him. Down the short hill on Beacon st. to St. Paul st. he went, where he stopped running and walked to Carleton st. In the meantime he mustered all his remaining strength, and when he was told that another runner had just come over the hill, he shut his teeth, set his face, and leaning well forward, he dug his shoes into the hard Beacon st. surface and started on his last spurt. He ran up the hill like a half-miler, down the other side to Commonwealth av. and across Massachusetts av. breaking a funeral procession and stalling two electric cars.

The finish:

... The little champion of champions landed on the track with a bound, turned to the left and moved his lithe, well-shaped limbs like a piston-rod around the track. He ran the lap in exactly 40 seconds. When he finished he was perfectly strong, but he was lifted to the shoulders of the crowd, and it was by the hardest kind of reasoning that he escaped and ran to the B.A.A. clubhouse. "This probably will be my last long race. I hate to quit now, because I will be called a quitter and a coward, but look at my feet. Do you blame me for wanting to stop it? I only walked about a quarter of a mile in the whole distance and it was 20 miles before I lagged a step. I think I shall be all right tomorrow."