

GEORGE GOULDING, 1912 OLYMPIC CHAMPION

Recent articles on the great Canadian racewalker George Goulding by Mike Parker in the September 2012 NZ Contact Magazine and in the *O Marchador* blog ¹, have brought the 1912 Olympic champion back into the public spotlight.

Yes, it is 100 years since Goulding won the 10,000m walk at the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm. So I have padded the articles out into what is hopefully a comprehensive review of this wonderful walker.

George Henry Goulding was born in Hull, England, on 19th November 1884. He was just 18 when he migrated to Canada in 1903, subsequently settling in Toronto and joining a local athletic club. He won the first marathon held in London, Canada, in 1907 when the favourite, Tom Longboat, failed to show. With this win under his belt, he was selected to represent his adopted country in the marathon at the 1908 Olympic Games.

After his arrival in London, Goulding had his first exposure to the sport of race walking. He found he had an aptitude for the event and the technique came naturally to him. He immediately decided to enter the walking events as well as running in the marathon. London 1908 would be the last Games in which a person could enter an event in such a relaxed fashion. His Olympic schedule was a busy one. Competing in both the 3500 metres and the 10 mile walks would mean competing in heats for both events if he was to progress to the finals. Then he had to finish off with the marathon. This meant he would have to complete five gruelling races during the Games.

What made this all the more remarkable was that when Goulding stood on the start line for his heat of the 3500 metres walk he had never taken part in a walking race before. It was even more incredible that he promptly went out and won the race and qualified for the final. In that historic final held two days later, Goulding almost achieved the impossible, holding third place until, in the closing stages of the race, he was overtaken by New Zealander Harry Kerr and relegated to fourth place with a time of 15:49.8.



The final of the 1908 Olympic 3500m walk - winner George Larner is fifth from left. Second placed Ernie Webb is second from right. Bronze medallist Harry Kerr is fourth from left. Fourth placed Goulding is on the right.

Two days after the 3500 metres walk final Goulding missed making the final of the 10 Mile walk when he failed to finish in his heat. He followed his walk performances by finishing 22nd in the marathon out of 27 finishers. There had been a high attrition rate in this race with half of the 55 starters failing to complete the distance.

In the four years leading up to the next Olympic Games, Goulding trained hard and perfected his race walking technique - he was determined to come away from his next Olympic experience a winner. Between 1908 and 1912 he competed extensively in Canada and North America and lost just one race. Usually these races were handicap type events, George giving away huge distances. These events made him work hard and improved his speed and endurance.

In 1909, Goulding entered 19 major walking competitions, winning 18. At his 1910 debut on the American walking scene, he broke the U.S. record for the mile walk with a time of 6:29.2.

1 <http://omarchador.blogspot.com.au/2012/07/ha-100-anos-goulding-vencia-marcha-dos.html>

By this time, Goulding's rising success had caused quite a stir among Canadian sports fans. A match race was soon set up between Goulding and Olympic dual silver medallist E.J. Webb of England. Goulding easily won both the one and three-mile races as 20,000 fans cheered him on. A second match race against English champion George Lerner once again proved to be no contest. In 1911, the unbeatable Goulding proceeded to break the world record for the mile with a time of 6:25.8.

Goulding was so good that he was often handicapped in competition and forced to wait at the starting line while his opponents walked ahead. But even with head-starts of a few hundred yards, opponents still couldn't beat Canada's heel-and-toe champion.



Goulding (right) and Webb (left) in match racing mode

When the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games came round, Goulding was in great shape. There was only one race walk on offer - the more traditional 10,000m track walk. On July 8th Goulding won his heat in 47:14.5 ahead of Webb (GBR) who was second in 47:25.4. Three days later, Goulding won the Olympic title with a time of 46:28.4 ahead of Webb with 46:50.4 (the Englishman claiming his third Olympic silver medal, adding to the two he had won in London in 1908) with Altimani (ITA) third with 47:37.6.



Goulding, here in third place behind Webb of England, early in the 1912 Olympic 10,000m walk at Stockholm

After winning the gold medal, Goulding's first act was to send a telegram to his wife. It read only, "Won - George."

Goulding spoke more of the final, as given in Henry Roxborough's *Canada at the Olympics* ²

"In the final, I took the lead right from the start. When I was about 40 yards ahead of Webb, I thought the judges were after me. One of them said something in Swedish which I didn't understand; but when I turned toward him I saw a broad grin on his face and concluded he must have said something nice. Still, it was a ticklish moment, for the judges had the right to pull anyone off the track without previous warnings. With other judges, I could have improved my time; but during the last mile, when I had a lead of about 75 yards, I slowed considerably and took no chance of being disqualified. Besides, in the first heat, I had rubbed the skin off my toes, while wearing almost new shoes; and in the final my feet were really torturing. However, in winning, I soon forgot the pain and remembered only the pleasure."

Despite Goulding's fine walk, the race was controversial. Goulding was a very fast walker and a very fair one (there is no historical evidence showing that Goulding was ever disqualified in a race walk event) and Webb, despite being over 40 years old, was also highly regarded for the standard of his walking, though he was clearly unable to match Goulding's pace. Unfortunately, by the end of the final only four athletes remained in the event, three having been disqualified and three failing to finish. When added to the disqualifications that had occurred during the two qualification heats, notable among them being those of one of the pre-Games favourites Bobby Ridge (GBR) and Australian William Murray (Australasia), eyebrows were raised and questions started being asked about racewalking's place as an Olympic event.



Webb and Goulding lead the 1912 10,000m Olympic walk. Was the judging overzealous? Judging by this photo, almost certainly!

Racewalking, in only its second Olympic Games, was being issued with a red card. After further controversies in the 1920 and 1924 Games, the Olympic fraternity lost patience with this troublesome sport and, at the next Congress of the International A. A. Federation in the Hague, it voted to exclude walking from the Olympic programme (9 votes to 8), the French representative expressing the hope, in view of the difficulties experienced by judges at former Games, *"that the event would be omitted for ever from the programme of the Olympiad."*

The voting read as follows:

For the walk: Australasia, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Ireland, Italy, South Africa and U.S.A.
Against: Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Roumania, Sweden and Switzerland.
Abstaining: Belgium and Poland.

It is also worth mentioning that 1912 was the first time Russian walkers competed at the Olympic Games. Considering the Russians current level of performance their introduction to Olympic competition was rather inauspicious. Their three walkers all failed to make the final, one being disqualified, another failing to finish, their remaining athlete finishing second to last in his heat and only just breaking 60 minutes. What a difference 100 years can make!

Goulding continued racing after his 1912 win but, with the First World War intervening, he had not chance to try for a third Olympics. His career stats read impressively - in invitational track meets in Canada, Britain and the US, he won

² <http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/summer/1912/ATH/mens-10-kilometres-walk.html>

300 races at distances from 1 to 40 miles. He also competed in many stunt races, winning against a man driving a horse and buggy and against a 4-man US relay team, attracting thousands of spectators wherever he competed.

In 1915, Goulding's shining star was slightly tarnished when American officials accused him of accepting payment for his athletic feats and succumbing to "professionalism." Goulding, a man known for his honest, gentlemanly conduct, held firmly to his amateur status and proved that he had never accepted payment aside from travel expenses.

Even towards the end of his career, he was still amongst the best in the world as this news cutting testifies

WORLD'S WALKING RECORD EQUALLED
George H. Goulding Wins Mile Race in 71st Regiment Armory in 6:28.
January 21, 1916, Friday, New York Times

George H. Goulding of Toronto, Canada, holder of nearly all the American and world's walking records, equalled the best figures ever made for a mile on a board floor track when he won an invitation handicap event which featured the charity games for the Save-A-Home Fund held in the Seventy-first Regiment Armory last night.



Goulding displays perfect form as he strides to the line to win the 1912 Olympic 10,000m walk

Goulding was one of 50 famous Canadian sports persons inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame in its inaugural year of 1955.³

He died on 31st January 1966, aged 81.

Tim Erickson
5 October 2012

3 <http://www.sportshall.ca/honoured-members/honoured-members/>