

TL1: Biased reporting of the first women's 800m

What follows is a summary of the relevant points from the article, *The changing role of women in the Olympic games*. It is useful to read the whole article as it gives a number of interesting facts that may enrich the discussion.

- The founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Couberton, did not believe women should participate in the Olympics and barred them from the first games.
- Women did begin to compete in some events, but not track and field until 1928.
- Women set up their own international athletics body in 1921 and ran women's Olympics from 1922 until 1934.
- The men's body was jealous of the success of the women's games and reluctantly allowed the women to compete in 5 (only) track and field events in 1928.
- The men did not believe that the women were capable of the rigours of the 800m and, as detailed below, a leading sports writer falsely reported that the race was excessively grueling and this event was not run for women again until 1960.

John Tunis, a prominent sportswriter of the day, portrayed the 800-metre event as follows: "Below us on the cinder path were 11 wretched women, 5 of whom dropped out before the finish, while 5 collapsed after reaching the tape".

Records, clearly indicate that only 9 women started, not 11, and all 9 finished the race. The winner set a world record. She and a few of the other competitors were understandably spent after racing at world-record pace. Some of them lay down beside the track, but none of them dropped out or collapsed from exhaustion. [This report] suited the purpose of the male-dominated administration, who prevented women from competing in any race longer than 200 metres in the Olympic Games for the next 32 years.

It is interesting to compare a report on the men's 800m in 1904: "at the finish of the 800-metre run, two men fell to the track, completely exhausted. One man was carried to his training quarters, helpless. Another was laid out on the grass and stimulants were used to bring him back to life." (DeFranz, 1997).