

L. E. Myers,
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Lon Myers

INTRODUCTION

One of the charter members of the recently created National Track and Field Hall of Fame was an individual whose name few modern track and field experts would recognize. Laurence Eugene "Lon" Myers was a runner without peer in the years when track and field was just developing in this country. During a career which spanned the years 1878 to 1888 Myers won with such consistency and style, set so many national and world records, that he was recognized as the "world's greatest runner." Considering the early state of training methods, equipment, as well as the primitive conditions of most running tracks, the records of Myers are truly remarkable. During his amateur career he won fifteen American championships as

well as several Canadian and English national titles. Most significantly however was the distinction of holding every American record in all distances from fifty yards to a mile at some point in his career.

In addition to Myers' virtuosity as a runner, much of the growth in popularity of track and field as a spectator sport in the late nineteenth century can be attributed to the interest generated by Myers' unrelenting assault on national and world records. The imagination of the public was captured by the match races between Myers and the English champion W. G. George. Although he never claimed the distinction, Myers was clearly America's first international track star.

MYERS THE MAN

The Myers family roots in the United States go back to the early seventeenth century to Myer Myers who was a prosperous Jewish silversmith from New York. During the early eighteenth century several members of the Myers family moved to Richmond, Virginia, where they established a tobacco business. It was not possible to trace Lon Myers' ancestry in a direct line back to Myer Myers because of the scarcity of records and the fact that there was a tremendous amount of intermarriage among Myers' cousins. In addition the surname of Myers is a common Jewish name which made tracing even more difficult. The evidence that is available indicates that Lon has been placed in his proper ancestral setting.

Lon was born on February 16, 1858, in Richmond, Virginia. His father, Solomon H. Myers, was a clerk in a Richmond business. Lon was in the first graduating class of Richmond High School where he was noted for his ability to run and jump.¹ Myers was sickly as a youth and a physician encouraged him to go into athletics. In fact Myers was sickly throughout his entire life. Malaria and pneumonia plagued him on several occasions, hampering his running, and finally, he succumbed to one of his frequent bouts of pneumonia in 1899.²

Shortly after Lon graduated from high school his father moved the family to New York City where Lon became a bookkeeper. In his spare time Myers ran, first for the Knickerbocker Yacht Club, then the Manhattan Athletic Club, which he represented most of his amateur career. Myers' time

¹Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond from 1769-1917* (Richmond, Virginia: Herbert T. Ezekiel, 1917), p. 224.

²*New York Times*, 17 February 1899, p. 5.

on the running track spanned ten years; from 1878 to 1885 he was an amateur, and from 1886-1888 he ran as a professional in New York and Australia.

A clipping from the *Manchester Athletic News* stated that “there never was a man more naturally cut out for running than L. E. Myers. He is narrow chested, and next to no weight above the hips, but his style of going, the way in which he puts his feet down, is without doubt the most perfect action I ever saw exhibited by any pedestrian.”³ Myers had a long loping greyhound type stride which is supposed to have caused the Earl of Crawford to state “there is the only real runner I have ever seen.”⁴



Lon Myers — Athlete

Myers stood five feet, seven and three-fourths inches and weighed 114 pounds. His slender appearance drew him great support from spectators during his handicap races. Many fans in England were outraged to find that he was standing

³*Testimonial Athletic Benefit to L. E. Myers* (New York: J. B. Gipson, Publisher, 1885), p. 26.

⁴The Earl of Crawford as quoted in Samuel Crowthers and Arthur Ruhl, *Rowing and Track Athletics* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1905), p. 325.

thirty to sixty yards behind men who from all appearances should have been giving yards to him.⁵ Lon was a confident and cocky individual. In 1879 he stated: “next season I am going to alter all of the records from one hundred yards to the mile.”⁶ He accomplished that goal. In England in 1881 a runner named Phillips, who had beaten Lon in the 100 yard dash, bragged about what he would do to Myers in the 440. Myers spent the last straightaway in the race running sideways reminding Phillips of his boast and asking him if he couldn’t do a little better.⁷ Lon, who ran a 48.6 quarter, beat Phillips by five yards going away. The many descriptions of Myers’ races indicates that he was much more conscious of winning than of time. Myers was fiercely competitive and often over extended himself by entering many races on the same day. His numerous American and world records indicate that he was not totally oblivious to “time.”

In general Myers was a very personable fellow and was well liked by his fellow competitors. Socially he was considered a gentleman and a man of the highest character. When Lon retired from amateur athletics his friends and fellow athletes gave him a testimonial benefit which was held at Madison Square Garden. Testimonial benefits, while common among people in the theatre and the arts, was unheard of in athletic circles.⁸ The testimonial had the dual purpose of honoring Myers and helping him to reestablish his financial resources. Myers’ family was affluent but his many years as an amateur, with his trips abroad, made his personal financial position precarious.

After his testimonial Myers became a professional runner. Myers won many races but it was the twilight of his running career and a poor source of steady income. From the end of his running career in 1885 until his death in 1899 Myers raised horses and was a book maker (legal at that time). Unfortunately for Lon his horses never ran as well as he did.⁹

COMPETITIVE CAREER

The competitive running career of Lon Myers began on a successful note in November, 1878, in the election day games of the New York Athletic Club. Before 3000 spectators Myers

⁵*Testimonial, op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸See *New York Sportsman*, 23 August 1885, p. 183.

⁹See Bernard Postal, et al., *Encyclopedia of Jews in Sports* (New York: Block Publishing Company, 1965), p. 478.

won the 440 in 55 seconds aided by an eighteen yard handicap.¹⁰ In January 1879 in what was billed as “the modern Olympian Games” Myers won the 440 and also the 220 in what was described as “great ease.”¹¹ The first real sensation created by Myers was in winning the scratch 880 in Gilmore’s Garden in the Scottish American Club games. Running the top half milers of the day, the unheralded Myers won the race by fifty yards in 2.10½¹² Soon afterward Myers reputation was firmly established when he defeated the reigning 440 champion Ed. Merritt. In the club games of the New York Athletic Club he amazed everyone by setting the world record in the 440 at 45 1/5 seconds, running the last 120 yards without his right shoe. In the same meet, he set the American record in the 220 in 22¾ seconds in what was described as the “handsomest running that was ever seen on the grounds.”¹³ It should be noted that Myers’ record marks the first time that anyone had ever broken fifty seconds in the 440. By the time of the fall championships of the National Association of Amateur Athletes of America (NAAAA) Lon had developed into the premier athlete in the country. For winning national championships in three events, the 220, 440, and 880, Myers was awarded a silver vase from Tiffany and Company as the “best general athlete” and was acclaimed as the “fastest amateur runner in America” for 1879.¹⁴

The early successes which Myers experienced undoubtedly led him to set high goals for himself. In 1880 he set out to systematically destroy all existing records from the 100 to the mile. Beginning in the spring at Staten Island he ran a record 600 yard race in 1:14½ followed by records in the 300 and the mile in the N.Y.A.C. Spring games. The world record in the 1000 of 2:18¼ was set at Elizabeth, New Jersey in July. The same month he set the world 880 record of 1:56⅛ in the games of the Manhattan A.C.¹⁵ Records continued to fall as Lon continued to concentrate on one after the other. A summary of Myers’ assault on the record book through 1880 was published in the *Sporting Mirror*:¹⁶

¹⁰*New York Times*, 6 November 1878, p. 8.

¹¹*New York Times*, 4 January 1879, p. 2.

¹²See Frederick W. Janssen, *History of American Amateur Athletics* (New York: Charles R. Bourne, 1885), p. 77.

¹³*New York Times*, 21 September 1879, p. 2.

¹⁴*New York Times*, 28 September 1879, p. 2.

¹⁵*New York Times*, 18 July 1880, p. 5.

¹⁶*Sporting Mirror*, July, 1881, pp. 196-199.

<i>Distance</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Date</i>
100	:10	Manhattan Athletic Club	September 18, 1880 (tied with two others)
220	:22 3/4	New York A.C.	September 20, 1879
250	:26 1/4	Manhattan A. C.	September 25, 1880
320	:35 1/8	American A. C.	September 4, 1880
440	:49 1/5	New York A.C.	September 20, 1879
500	:58	Staten Island A.C.	May 29, 1880
600	1:14 1/2	Staten Island A.C.	May 29, 1880
660	1:22	Manhattan A.C.	July 17, 1880
880	1:56 1/8	Manhattan A.C.	July 37, 1880
1000	2:18 1/4	Elizabeth, N. J. A.C.	July 10, 1880
Mile	4:29 1/2	New York A.C.	May 31, 1880

It should be noted that many of the races at "odd" distances were not contrived to make Lon successful, but were predicted by the lengths of existing tracks which varied widely.

At the height of his form for the National Championships of 1880, Lon ran in seven races and won national titles in all four events in which he entered, the 100, 220, 440 and 880 all in a single day. As if this were not enough, three days later he travelled to Montreal for the Canadian Championships and won the same events there.¹⁷ As a result of his performances in 1880, Lon was the undisputed king of the running track, at least on this side of the Atlantic. Our athletic cousins in England were quite skeptical of the records being broken in America. The English press had commented frequently on the "bounce" which American watches apparently had as well as the ability of Americans to time properly. As the outstanding athlete in America it was logical that Myers be sent abroad to quiet the English critics and to "prove that our stop watches were not eight day clocks."¹⁸ Selected also was America's champion walker E. E. Merrill. This was to be the first trip abroad by American track athletes, and because of its serious purpose the eyes of the American athletic world were on its representatives. To raise money for the trip a special winter games was held in Madison Square Garden which was described as "financially, and in every other respect, a great success."¹⁹

¹⁷*Testimonial*, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*New York Times*, 17 March 1881, p. 2.

The English were eager for this confrontation with Myers as one official remarked: "Let him come, he will go back a sadder but wiser man. . ." ²⁰ Upon his arrival Myers slight appearance failed to impress his hosts. Convinced more than ever that Lon would fall easy prey to their runners, the secretary of the London A.C. remarked: "He may be a good runner, but he is not strong enough to run our best men." ²¹

Myers was quick to make believers of his English hosts. In his first race in England in July, 1881 he won the 440 in 49 4/5 seconds which set an English record. The following week he lowered that record to 49.0. ²² Then, before 20,000 spectators at Birmingham on July 1 he lowered the record again to 48 3/5. In the same meet he set the English record in the 880 in 1:56 and was immediately declared by the English press as "the best runner ever seen." ²³ The success of the trip as measured by the victories of the American pair, especially Myers, is obvious. Myers won every race in which he competed except one. The one race which he lost was a hundred yard dash in which Lon got a bad start. The trip accomplished the purpose of establishing the credibility of American records and the accuracy of our timers. The London *Sporting Mirror* conceded this by stating:

. . . since Merrill and Myers have exemplified their ability to go fast, and to equal, if not defeat, their performance in Yankeeland, it is evident that we must never throw a doubt again upon the timekeeping at athletic sports across the Atlantic as long as they are verified by an acknowledged and competent authority. ²⁴

Upon his return to America, Myers received a tumultuous welcome from friends and fellow club members. As a brass band played "See The Conquering Hero Comes," he was presented with a pillow of white carnations and tube roses which spelled "Welcome." ²⁵ A few days later a celebration dinner in his honor was held which was attended by prominent athletes and athletic club officials. After dinner President George W. Carr of the Manhattan A.C. proposed a toast to the health of Mr. Myers "whose sources of power were concealed under the table." Mr. Carr, commenting on the success of Myers' trip, said that he had "signally proved to them that our

²⁰ *Testimonial, loc. cit.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *New York Times*, 10 July 1881, p. 2.

²³ *New York Times*, 17 July 1881, p. 2.

²⁴ *Sporting Mirror*, August, 1881, p. 5.

²⁵ *New York Times*, 7 August 1881, p. 12.

performances have not been exaggerated.”²⁶ Returning to competition in this country, Myers continued his remarkable running. In a joint meeting of the New York and Manhattan Athletic Clubs, Lon lowered the American record in the 300 to 31½ seconds. This effort netted him a diamond badge valued at \$500.00, offered by G.M.L. Sachs on condition that the existing record be broken. His victory in this event was accomplished despite having been ill prior to the race and having received a warning from his physician that he would be “seized with congestion of the lungs unless he abandons racing.”²⁷ Myers continued to run however and in the NAAAA Championships the following week won the 100, 220, and 440 in non-record times. He had entered the 880 but withdrew.²⁸ As if to make up for his withdrawal from the 880 the previous week, Lon, in the Fall Games of the American A.C., lowered the world record in the 1000 yards from 2:18 to 2:13 and in the process bettered the 880 record to 1:55½ finishing 100 yards ahead of his nearest competitor.²⁹

Myers frequent attempts to set records and his tendency to fully extend himself aroused additional concern over his health. In an editorial in the *New York Times* it was noted that:

Eye-witnesses assert that at the close of this marvelous achievement the athlete was thoroughly exhausted and in great distress, requiring an unusual amount of attendance and recuperative treatment before he recovered from the shock to his system:

... in view of the fact that his performances this year have been unprecedented in number and brilliancy, and must, further, have caused a great consumption of his muscular tissue and vital energy, he might find it beneficial to look out for his health and suspend, for a period at least, further attempts at cutting down rival records of prowess.³⁰

The year 1882 for Myers was memorable in many respects. In addition to his continued assault on existing records this year was climaxed by the first meeting between Myers and W. G. George. George was the premier distance runner of the 19th century who held records from one to ten miles. The match-up between these two champions generated a great amount of interest on both sides of the Atlantic. Myers won

²⁶*New York Times*, 11 August 1881, p. 2.

²⁷*New York Times*, 18 September 1881, p. 5.

²⁸*New York Times*, 25 September 1881, p. 8.

²⁹*New York Times*, 9 October 1881, p. 2.

³⁰*New York Times*, 10 October 1881, p. 4.

the first race of a half mile while George won the second race which was a mile run. The third race of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile was also won by George. This year also brought increasing competition from other runners reflecting the improving quality of American competition. In the national championships before 5000 spectators, Lon lost the 220 to H. S. Brooks of Yale. This was his first loss of a scratch race in over two years.³¹ Myers' followers attributed the loss to his taking Brooks too lightly. In all fairness to Lon it should be noted that he was handicapped by one yard for making two false starts and that he lost the race by less than a yard.³² During the year it was becoming increasingly difficult for Myers to win due to the large handicap given the other runners in most races. In handicap races it was necessary for him to run through a field of several runners, forcing him to run wide and cover a greater distance. Moreover Lon was increasingly barred from competing in some races, particularly club matches, because few wanted to run against him.³³



Track Meet — Late Nineteenth Century

Lon added to his assortment of American records in May 1882 by winning a sixth of a mile hurdle race in $37\frac{1}{8}$ at Staten Island.³⁴ He also set records at several unusual distances:

³¹*New York Sportsman*, 23 December 1882, p. 375.

³²*New York Times*, 11 June 1882, p. 8.

³³*New York Times*, 30 May 1882, p. 8.

³⁴*New York Times*, 21 May 1882, p. 7.

250, 300, 350, 400, 600, 700, and 800 yards. In October 1882, Lon returned to Canada where he won the quarter and half mile runs at the Canadian Championships.³⁵

The following year proved to be a disappointment for Myers. He was plagued throughout the spring and summer with malaria. In fact, he was still bedridden until just ten days before the National Championships. Then, rather than have people think he was trying to avoid a rematch with Brooks, and despite the fact he was in very poor condition, he entered the 220 and ran a creditable race. He was ahead at the finish until he stumbled in the final yard and fell under the tape losing to Brooks for a second time. Myers regained enough strength to win the championship in the 440 and keep his string of quarter mile championships alive. By the time of the Canadian Championships in October, 1883 Myers was almost back in form as he again won the 220 and 440.³⁶

The year 1884 was marred by charges against Myers for violating the amateur code. The charges were brought by James Watson, a reporter, before the executive committee of the N.A.A.A.A. Myers was accused of the following:

1. He received a salary from the Manhattan A.C. as superintendent of construction of its new grounds and he received a salary as secretary of the club,
2. that Myers ran a skating rink during the winter of 1882-83,
3. that Myers had received money for judging at a professional six days race,
4. that Myers was athletic editor of a sporting paper.³⁷

In addition, William McEwen, an ex-official handicapper of the NAAAA charged Myers with selling some of his medals and pawning others. Ed Plummer, a local sports reporter, backed up most of Watson's and also McEwen's charges. In England, several popular sport newspapers also made accusations against Myers. It appeared for a time that Lon's days as an amateur were numbered, but friends on both sides of the Atlantic came to his rescue.

On April 25, 1884 the executive committee of the NAAAA met and formally cleared Myers of all charges against his amateur standing. In view of the charges, one might wonder how such a decision was reached. Apparently many of the charges were dropped because of lack of evidence. Moreover, some of the charges were ignored because they failed to violate

³⁵*New York Sportsman*, 23 December 1882, p. 375.

³⁶*Testimonial*, op. cit., p. 10.

³⁷*New York Sportsman*, 29 March 1884, p. 244.

the spirit of the existing amateur code. Specifically, it was determined that running a skating rink and writing sporting articles for newspapers did not violate the code. The motives behind Myers' accusers were also considered at the hearing. Involved was a personal dispute between Myers and Watson which led to the charges.³⁸

One English writer of the time wrote an editorial criticizing the NAAAA for bringing Myers to trial.

. . . these gentlemen have erred in allowing the character of a member of their own association to be questioned on hearsay testimony given by men who, with the well known instinct of professionals, seek to cry down amateurism to the level of professionalism. The AAA of Great Britain would not throw out any such evidence, for the good reason they would not stoop to receive it in the first place.³⁹

The London *Pastime* of April 9 commented as follows on the trial:

The long talked of 'Myers scandal' has at last been brought to an issue, and the accusers of the 'amateur champion of the world' have retired discomfited. The charges of professionalism which have been so freely made against the Manhattan man have been traced to a trio of individuals whose ill-will toward Myers appears to have been their only reason for behaving in such a ungenerous manner . . . it appears to us that the NAAAA has been occupied in the not very profitable employment of manufacturing a mountain from a molehill.⁴⁰

Myers' defense against his accusers came from athletes and sportswriters from all over the world. No one, however, defended Myers more staunchly than the *New York Sportsman* for whom he wrote his outstanding athletic column "Advice to Young Athletes on Training." His series on track and field techniques could be reprinted and still be of value to contemporary athletes.

After being cleared of the charges against him, Lon along with three other athletes returned to England in 1884 where he intended to run again in the English championships and also was hoping for a rematch with W. G. George. He was frustrated in both. The sponsor of the championships refused to allow foreign participants while George steadfastly refused

³⁸*New York Sportsman*, 5 April 1884, p. 264.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*New York Sportsman*, 26 April 1884, p. 324.

to meet him. In spite of these disappointing developments, the trip was considered a success for Myers, if not for his teammates, since he was able to lower the English records in the 440, 600, and 800 yard races.⁴¹ Upon his return to the United States, Lon regained national championships in the 220 and 880 and held his title in the 440.⁴²

Bothered again by malaria in the spring of 1885, Lon decided to go abroad. In this, his third trip to England, he was warmly received and proceeded once again to demonstrate his amazing versatility and durability. While in England Lon ran in approximately thirty-five races winning about one thousand dollars worth of prizes. He took twenty-four firsts, five second, and one third. Lon won every race that he ran from scratch, losing only in those in which he was heavily handicapped. Although he failed to improve on his earlier world records, he was credited with beating the English record in the 880 on several occasions as well as running a number of 440's below fifty seconds. On this trip he was again permitted to enter the English Championships where he won the 440 and 880.⁴³

As Myers was getting ready to leave England the question of his amateur standing was again raised. This time the London *Pastime*, which had earlier defended him, charged Lon with being a professional. The primary complaint was that Myers refused to meet British challengers except at distances at which he was sure to win. It was felt that Myers was doing this to avoid the possibility of losing which would affect his ability to draw spectators. He was also charged with having received pay for running in some small meets.⁴⁴ In answering his critics, Myers produced a document which purportedly gave him the right to take money on behalf of the Manhattan A.C. for his appearances. This failed to quiet his English critics but the NAAAA dismissed the matter in what was described as a "not-guilty-but-don't-do-it again" resolution.⁴⁵

Upon his return from England Lon was again met by a tugboat welcoming committee and a rowdy celebration. Plans were announced for a testimonial event in his honor to be held in October of 1885.

After a brief rest Lon competed in a few meets although he did not participate in the National Championships. In the fall games of the Manhattan A.C. he won the 440 and 880, and

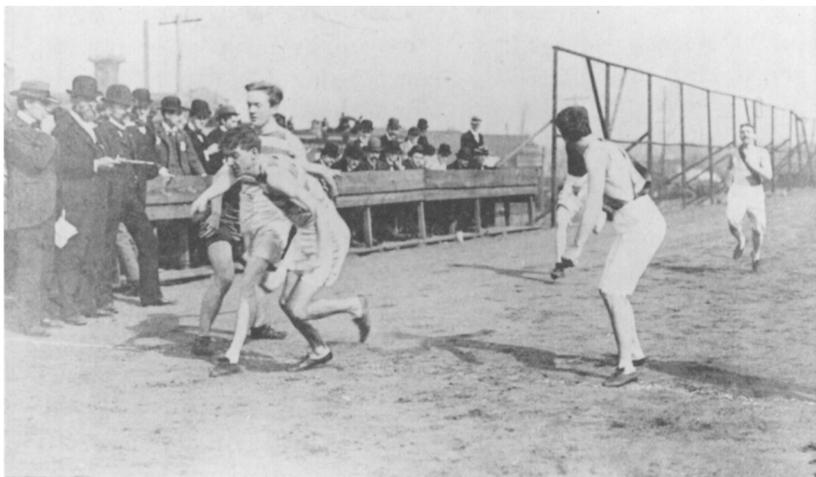
⁴¹*New York Sportsman*, 12 July 1884, p. 37.

⁴²*Testimonial*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁴³*New York Sportsman*, 5 September 1885, p. 197.

⁴⁴*New York Sportsman*, 19 September 1885, p. 242.

⁴⁵*New York Sportsman*, 21 November 1885, p. 445.



Relay Race — Late Nineteenth Century

in the games of the Olympic A.C. he won the 880 in 1:55 $\frac{2}{5}$ beating his own American record.⁴⁶ These races were the last for Lon in 1885 and occurred after he had announced his intention to retire from active running.

The testimonial games in Myers' honor were publicized as the greatest athletic exhibition ever held in New York City. The games were a huge success attended by several thousand spectators. The proceeds of the benefit which totaled about \$4,000 were presented to Lon in appreciation of his contributions to athletics.⁴⁷

In spite of his announced retirement, the topic of Myers' amateur standing was a hot issue after the benefit. Critics cited the money he received as additional evidence of his professionalism. Reverberations of his dealings while in England were still being felt on both sides of the Atlantic.⁴⁸ It was obvious that Myers, should he decide to come out of retirement, would have to run as a professional. Other factors were also operating which seemed to be pointing Lon toward professionalism. The lack of amateur competition of his caliber also forced him to seek competition against professionals. Finally, Lon desired a rematch with W. G. George. George had prevailed in the previous match and Myers wanted very badly to even things up. Over three years had passed since their original meeting and the comparisons of the two runners

⁴⁶*Testimonial, op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴⁷*New York Sportsman*, 10 October 1885, p. 300.

⁴⁸*New York Sportsman*, 30 January 1886, p. 30.

in the press were incessant. To run against George, Myers would have to declare himself professional since George had turned professional in 1884. George brought matters to a head by arriving in this country in January, 1886 and immediately challenging all American runners, specifically Myers. The challenge, coupled with an opportunity to even the score with George, plus the financial possibilities of the match, were enough to bring Lon out of retirement and into the professional ranks.⁴⁹

After some preliminary maneuvering and several false starts an agreement was finally reached whereby Myers and George would run a series of three races consisting of 1000, 1160, and 1320 yards for a thousand dollars a side. The winner was also to receive a trophy worth \$200 “emblematical” of the middle distance championship of the world. The runners were to share equally in the gate receipts.⁵⁰ The distances were later changed to 1000 yards, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, and one mile which favored Myers less than the original agreement. Since Myers was the world record holder in the 1000 yards and George the record holder in the mile, each was favored to win his specialty. The $\frac{3}{4}$ mile was the unknown quantity and there was much speculation about who was going to win at this distance. The first race of the series was attended by over 5,000 people who packed into Madison Square Garden. Several amateur events were held preliminary to the main attraction. To add to the pageantry and excitement of the occasion, a brass band played “Yankee Doodle” and “Hail to the Chief” while waiting for the big event to begin. Myers strategy in the race soon became apparent. He merely let George set the pace while staying close until the final lap when he “. . . darted by George as if he had been anchored, and then coming away won as he pleased by about five yards.” The winner was treated to repeated cheering and the enthusiastic waving of handkerchiefs by the ladies.⁵¹

In the second race which was to be for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, George was a slight favorite since this was closer to his natural distance and somewhat beyond Myers’ normal range. Another large and very enthusiastic crowd of over 6,000 came out in rainy weather to view what was considered to be the key race of the series. George again was forced to set the pace with Myers clinging to his heels until the last seventy yards when:

⁴⁹*New York Sportsman*, 30 January 1886, p. 30.

⁵⁰*New York Times*, 19 February 1886, p. 8.

⁵¹*New York Herald*, 2 May 1886, p. 18.

there was a wild yell that baffles description. Again came that marvelous flash of white, with the slim legs going like the driving rods of an engine. Myers, in the fraction of a second, had shot forward like a rifle ball. Outside of George he went, and passed the champion of England as if he were standing still. The men, the boys, the dudes, and the girls all yelled. It was one universal outburst of boundless joy.⁵²

Following the two decisive wins by Myers it would appear that the final race of one mile would have been anticlimatic. This was not the case however. In what was described as the most exciting event to ever take place in Madison Square Garden and before another overflowing and exuberant audience, the final race got underway. Myers' strategy remained unchanged as he again forced George to take the lead. George continued to remain in front unchallenged until the final lap when Myers began to move up. George tried to hold Myers off but was unable to overcome Lon's final drive with which he overtook George about thirty yards from the finish winning by four feet. The events that followed were best described in the *New York Herald*:

The scene that followed baffles description. Pandemonium seemed let loose, men by the hundreds jumped down from the boxes, smashing seats and chairs, and, like a great tidal wave, overflowed the center of the building. Thousands shouted 'Good' and then tried to split their throats in the 'Hurrah ! Hurrah ! Hurrah ! M-Y-E-R-S !' The excitement continued for several minutes until the gas was extinguished forcing everyone out of the building.⁵³

Despite the sweep of the series by Myers, George remained unbowed conceding nothing to Myers. He explained his failure to defeat Myers in terms of the slow track and sharp turns as well as the smoke and confusion of the Garden. George left the country within two weeks of the match with Lon among the crowd of well wishers seeing him off.⁵⁴

Unable to secure satisfactory matches in this country, Lon left the United States for Australia in early 1887 to try his luck in a country where pedestrianism was immensely popular. It was probably more than coincidence that W. G. George was to be there at the same time. A third match of three races was arranged, this time for \$2,000 per race. The first race of a

⁵²New York Times, 9 May 1886, p. 1.

⁵³New York Herald, 6 May 1886, p. 15.

⁵⁴New York Sportsman, 29 May 1886, p. 430.

thousand yards was held in Sydney on March 26, 1887. Lon won by six yards in 2:19. Two weeks later he defeated George at 1500 yards by less than a yard.⁵⁵ The third race of the series was never held. George left Australia shortly after the second race. Lon remained in Australia for about eighteen months before returning to the United States and his final retirement from running.

THE LEGACY OF L.E. MYERS

It is regrettable that somehow over the years the accomplishments of L. E. Myers have been largely forgotten. This is surprising since, in his day, he was the unquestioned king of track and field being recognized in the United States and England as the champion amateur runner of the world. Probably never before and certainly never since has anyone approached the dominance of a sport that Myers achieved. The respect which Myers earned from his contemporaries is reflected in the following quote:

. . . first of all, among the runners, famous for all time, was the name of L. E. Myers, the man who would run practically any distance, short or long, and run it like a champion of champions, as indeed he was. For most of us one national championship seems worthy of years of endeavor, but Myers accumulated championships with 'negligent ease.' . . . other championships, records, and notable performances might be added at will, but it is enough, perhaps, to say that this athlete of thirty years ago still stands today, as he stood then, the most remarkable example of an all-around runner that the modern world has known.⁵⁶

Most illustrative of the above comment concerning Lon's facile ability to win championships is the last of his achievements which include fifteen American, ten Canadian, and three English for a total of twenty-eight national titles. These championships are summarized below:

	100 yds.	220 yds.	440 yds.	880 yds.
American	1880 and 1881	1879-'81, '84	1879-'84	1879-'80, '84
Canadian	1880	1880, '83	1880-'83	1880-'82
English			1881, '85	1885 ⁵⁷

⁵⁵*New York Clipper Annual*, 1888, p. 39.

⁵⁶Ellery H. Clarke, *Reminiscences of an Athlete* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1911), pp. 24-25.

⁵⁷*New York Clipper Annual*, 1884, p. 67. *Ibid.*, 1888, pp. 46-48.

It is quite likely that Myers could have won several more championships. Even though he went to England expressly to run in the championships in 1884 he was banned from running these which is regrettable since he was at his peak at that time. Moreover, Lon was well known for his generosity toward his teammates of the Manhattan A.C. in that he would frequently remove himself from a race if he felt that another team member had a chance to win.

In addition to Myers' national championships he set numerous American and world records. It is not fair to count all of Myers' records since many of them were set at unusual distances on odd shaped tracks. Nevertheless, the following table compiled by the *New York Clipper* in 1886 demonstrates Myers' versatility and speed.

50	5.5	1884	American amateur record
100	10.0	1880	American record tied
200	20.1/3	1881	American record
250	26.0	1882	World record
1/6 Mile			
Hurdles	37 1/8	1882	
300	31.3/8	1881	American record
350	36.8	1881	World record
400	43 5/8	1882	World record
440	48.6	1881	American record
440	49.4 Grass	1885	World record
500	58.0	1880	World record
600	1:11.4	1882	World record
660	1:22.0	1880	World record
700	1:31	1882	American record
800	1:44.4	1882	World record
840	1:48.6 Grass	1885	World record
880	1:55.4	1884	American record
	1:56.5 Grass	1885	World record
1000	2:13.0	1881	World record
1320	3:13	1882	American record
Mile	4:27.6	1882	American record ⁵⁸

⁵⁸*New York Clipper Annual*, 1887, p. 29.

At the time of Myers death in 1899 he still held records in the following events.

350	:36.8
400	:43. ⁵ / ₈
600	1:22
842	1:48.6
1000	2:13.0 ⁵⁹



Lon Myers

⁵⁹*New York Clipper Annual, 1900, p. 105-106.*

In summary it can be said that L. E. Myers deserves to be recognized as one of the all time greats in track and field for the following reasons:

1. Lon set standards of performance and style which were the model for a generation.
2. He was largely responsible for the popularizing of track and field during its developmental stages in this country.
3. He was the first American track and field athlete to achieve international fame.
4. It can be said that Myers singlehandedly established credibility in American track and field records at a most critical time.

In 1929, almost fifty years after Lon's prime, at the American National Championships, the quarter was won in over 49 seconds. Old L. E. would have been right in there. What other athlete, transposed fifty years in time, would still be competing for a national championship? L. E. Myers may still be "the world's greatest runner."