

**Andrew Sockalexis,
Olympic Marathoner from Maine**

By. Thomas C. Bennett



At the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, Sweden, Andrew Sockalexis, a Penobscot from Indian Island, ran over the 25-mile marathon course to finish fourth. Six of the first ten finishers were Americans, competing over a 54-hill course said to be covered with rocks the last three miles. Sockalexis solidified his standing as one of the premier American runners of the day, but his career would be cut short by tuberculosis at the young age of 27.

The Boston Marathon served as the Olympic qualifier for Americans in 1912, with 138 hopeful Olympians registered for the 25-mile Ashland-to-Boston run. Calrence DeMar's 2:21:39.6 course record, set the previous year when he was running for the North Dorchester Athletics Association, was the standard. Although DeMar would not be running that Patriot's Day, most of the top amateurs in the country were entered, with Mike Ryan and John J. Reynolds of the Irish-American Athletics Club of New York, Sydney Hatch of Chicago, Joe Forshaw of the Missouri A.C., Sammy Mellor and Albert J. Hayden of the Mercury A.C. of Yonkers and Edward Fabre of the National A.A.A. on Montreal considered amount favorites.

The roads that year were said to be "heavy" with mud prevailing in the early stages but better footing to be encountered once the runners reached the macadam roads. Mike Ryan of the Irish-American A.C. ran a course record of 2:21:18.2 for first, with the unheralded Andrew Sockalexis of the North Dorchester A.C. running a close second to Ryan and missing DeMar's 1911 mark by a mere 14 seconds.

The record for the Olympic Marathon prior to the 1912 running was 2:51:23.6, and the best mark among the English, German and French athletes in their trials was 2:36:55.4 run by Corkey of England. Sockalexis and the Finnish runner Hannes Kolehmainen were the favorites that day, but Kolehmainen dropped out at 19 miles, along with the American Mike Ryan. Kenneth K. MacArthur, a policeman from South Africa's Transvaal region ran a 2:36:54.8 for first, with countryman Christian W. Gitshaw second in 2:37:52. Gaston Strabino, a machinist from Paterson, N.J. was third in 2:38:42.4, followed by Sockalexis in

2:42:07. Of the twelve Americans entered in the marathon, ten finished. F. Lazaro, the only Portuguese runner in the event dropped out do to sunstroke and died in the hospital the next morning.

In an iinterview given to the Maine press upon his return, Sockalexis stated that he felt the American team was seriously overworked for the race, and said he never trained "in such strenuous fashion." His immediate plans included going into the woods for a long rest.

Sockalexis returned to Boston the following April, with added incentive to win: Pauline Shea of Indian Island promised the runner she would marry him if he were to prevail in the race. As the newspaper put it, Sockalexis would have to "dangle the scraps of the finest warriors in America at his belt or she (would) have none of him."

Sixty athletic warriors lined up for the 17th running of the Boston Marathon that April 19, with fine weather and some 200,000 spectators lining the course. Harry J. Smith of the Bronx Church House, New York, set the pace for three-quarters of the race, covering the first 12 miles in 59 minutes. Fritz Carlson, running for Cookes Gymnasium of Minneapolis, took the lead at mile 21, with Sockalexis moving into second place one mile from the finish. Carlson went on to win with a time of 2:25:14.8, with Sockalexis exactly two minutes behind. Smith was third followed by George McNerny of Philadelphia and Edward Fabre of Montreal.

Pauline Shea, waiting at the finish for the runner from Indian Island, fainted when he crossed the line. After being revived she told the judges she would marry Sockalexis despite his second-place finish.

Sockalexis went on to more road races, always drawing a good number of spectators. He developed tuberculosis at some point after his last race, a 15-miler in 1916 between Indian Isalnd and Bangor's Bass Park in which he defeated his good friend Clarence DeMar. Andrew Sockalexis died August 16, 1919 and was post humanly inducted into the Maine Sports Hall of Fame in 1984.