

Long-distance footrace first held at the revival of the Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. It commemorates the legendary feat of a Greek soldier who, in 490 bc, is supposed to have run from Marathon to Athens, a distance of about 40 km (25 miles), to bring news of the Athenian victory over the Persians and then expired. The story of this messenger from the Battle of Marathon was later conflated with the story of another Greek soldier, Pheidippides, who ran from Athens to Sparta in advance of the fighting. Appropriately, in 1896 the first modern marathon winner was a Greek, Spyridon Louis.

In 1924 the Olympic marathon distance was standardized at 42,195 metres (26 miles 385 yards). This was based on a decision of the British Olympic Committee to start the 1908 Olympic race from Windsor Castle and finish it in front of the royal box in the stadium at London.