

# Arthur Conan Doyle and the Dorando Affair

By Clifford Goldfarb

It is said that one measure of the popularity of a public personality is the number of rumours and urban legends that have grown up around him. Based on this test, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle must surely be one of the most popular writers of all time. Unfounded rumours, all of which have received media coverage and publicity, include the accusation that he was a cocaine addict<sup>1</sup>; that he was the author of the Piltdown Man hoax<sup>2</sup>; that he murdered Bertram Fletcher Robinson, the alleged author "The Hound of the Baskervilles" to prevent him from claiming his just share of the authorship. It was also claimed that the murder was to cover-up an affair between Conan Doyle and Robinson's wife.<sup>3</sup> It was also said that he was complicit in the death of Houdini.<sup>4</sup>

If we believed these rumours, we would conclude that Sir Arthur was a one-man crime wave. I will leave these to be dealt with by other scholars on other occasions. There is one other rumour, equally persistent, equally false, to be dealt with here.

It is a hot, muggy, airless day, late afternoon, Friday, July 24, 1908.<sup>5</sup> The crowd at Stadium, in the London suburb of Shepherd's Bush, has been anxiously awaiting the entry through the Stadium gate of the leader of the marathon race. Once in the Stadium the runners would have to make their way 385 yards to the finish line.

The crowd has been expecting to see Charles Hefferon of South Africa enter the Stadium first, as the announcers have been informing them of his lead. But, to their surprise, first through the entranceway is not Hefferon, but Dorando Pietri of Italy. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was present as a special correspondent for the London *Daily Mail*. Here is his version of what happened next:

"THE DAILY MAIL, SATURDAY, JULY 25, 1908  
A HEROIC ROMAN

HOW DORANDO FAILED  
TO SEIZE THE LAUREL

BY SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.  
NO EXULTANT VICTOR

*But how different from the exultant victor whom we expected! Out of the dark archway there staggered a little man, with red running-drawers, a tiny, boy-like*

*creature. He reeled as he entered and faced the roar of the applause. Then he feebly turned to the left and wearily trotted around the track. Friends and encouragers were pressing around him.*

*There were wild gesticulations. Men stooped and rose again. Good Heavens, he has fainted; is it possible that even at this last moment the prize may slip through his fingers? Every eye slides round to that dark archway. No second man has yet appeared. Then a great sigh of relief goes up. I do not think in all of that great assembly any man would have wished victory to be torn at the last instant from this plucky little Italian. He has won it. He should have it.*

*Thank God, he is on his feet again – the little red legs going incoherently, but drumming hard, driven by a supreme will within. There is a groan as he falls once more, and a cheer as he staggers again to his feet. It is horrible, and yet fascinating, this struggle between a set purpose and an utterly exhausted frame. Again, for a hundred yards, he ran in the same furious and yet uncertain gait. Then again he collapsed, kind hands saving him from a heavy fall.*

*He was within a few yards of my seat. Amid stooping figures and grasping hands I caught a glimpse of the haggard, yellow face, the glazed, expressionless eyes, the lank, black hair streaked across his brow. Surely he is done now. He cannot rise again.*

*From under the archway has darted the second runner, Hayes, Stars and Stripes on his breast, going gallantly well within his strength. There is only twenty yards to do if the Italian can do it. He staggered up, no trace of intelligence upon his set face, and again the red legs broke into their strange automatic amble. Will he fall again? No, he sways, he balances, and then he is through the tape and into a score of friendly arms. He has gone to the extreme of human endurance. No Roman of the prime ever bore himself better than Dorando<sup>6</sup> of the Olympic of 1908. The great breed is not yet extinct. ...*

*But to those who saw it, when all other memory of the great race of 1908 has passed away, there will still remain the vision of that swarthy face, those dead eyes, and the staggering red legs which carried Dorando to victory. Even as I write there comes the rumour that he*



Dorando Pietri reaches the finish line – the famous version of Davidson Brothers.

*has been disqualified. If true, it is indeed a tragedy. But there are prizes higher even than the oak branch and the medal. The Italian's great performance can never be effaced from our records of sport, be the decision of the judges what it may.*

*PS – The rumour then is true. I confess that I cannot see how the judges could have come to any other decision. It was as matters stood, a fair and square win for the American, since, without help, Dorando must have lain senseless on the track. And yet the tragedy remains."*

Conan Doyle was so taken by the gallant efforts of Pietri, that he appealed in a letter published on the front page of the same paper that day for a collection to be taken up:

*"To Honour Dorando*

*SIR, May I add a short letter to the description of the race which I have been privileged to give in another column of the Daily Mail?*

*I am sure that no petty personal recompense can in the least console Dorando for the national loss which follows from his disqualification. Yet I am certain that many who saw his splendid effort in the Stadium, an effort which ran him within an inch of his life, would like to feel that he carries away some souvenir from his admirers in England.*

*I should be very glad to contribute five pounds to such a fund if any of the authorities at the Stadium would consent to organise it."*

Queen Alexandra was also caught up in the affair, so much so that she had a special silver cup made up for Pietri and awarded it to him in a short ceremony at the prize giving. Conan Doyle and his wife Jean presided over a second ceremony at Carmelite House, home of the *Daily Mail*, at which £308, the proceeds of the collection, was presented to Pietri.<sup>7</sup>

And so, Dorando Pietri and the "Dorando Affair" passed

into Olympic history. In his native Italy Pietri is honoured by track clubs and competitions in his name, not to mention a statue erected in 2008 in his hometown of Carpi, Italy, an event celebrated with the issue of a € 0.60 postage stamp.

And what of Sir Arthur? He too has passed into Olympic legend, for there is now a belief, well-entrenched in Olympic stories, that one of those who rendered the aid that resulted in Pietri's disqualification was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle! Is this story true?

I believe it is a false and quite recent addition to the history of sport – a legend that, even after its retraction by some of those who have helped to perpetuate it, has now become an unwelcome "truth".

### The "Battle of Shepherd's Bush"

It should come as no surprise to those of us who have followed recent Olympics that scandal and controversy have accompanied virtually every Olympic Games since their revival in 1896. The London Olympics of 1908 were no exception. In fact, it was originally intended that these Games would be held in Rome. The devastation caused in the Naples area by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius on April 4, 1906 gave the Italian government the excuse it needed to announce that it did not have sufficient funds for relief efforts and would have to cancel the Games.<sup>8</sup> They were hastily moved to London.

Before the Games even began, there was further controversy. To the British, with their strong tradition of 'gentlemen vs. players', the American team was perceived as professional and as enjoying an unfair advantage over the true British amateurs.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps in response, the American team had objected to the entry of the famous native Canadian long-distance runner, Tom Longboat, from the Six Nations reserve at Ohsweken, Ontario, the pre-race favourite, objecting that he was a professional. The Canadian delegation supplied an affidavit affirming his amateurism, and that was enough for the British officials to allow his entry.

They were spared the further controversy that might have erupted when Longboat, who like Pietri had probably taken an overdose of performance enhancing drugs, most likely strychnine,<sup>10</sup> was unable to finish the course. The British and American press were each full of diatribes against the others. Matters had not been helped by a mistake made by the organisers at the ceremonial opening ceremony. The flags flown in the stadium did not include the Stars and Stripes. The organisers claimed this had been an accidental on their part.<sup>11</sup>

Once the Games commenced, there were several more scandals. The first was the final of the 400 metres, an incident which has earned its own place in Olympic history

as part of "the Battle of Shepherd's Bush".<sup>12</sup> The race was contested by three Americans and the English born Scot Wyndham Halswelle representing Great Britain. John Carpenter, the first-place American, was disqualified for interfering with Halswelle. The officials then ordered a re-run of the race, in accordance with their view of the rules. Carpenter was disqualified and the other Americans refused to compete. So the British runner cruised around the track, becoming the first and only athlete in Olympic history to participate in a final with no competition. Naturally he won the gold medal.

The Americans also withdrew in protest from the tug-of-war, complaining that the members of the British team from the Liverpool police force were wearing illegal boots with steel spikes – which, according to the Americans, did not fulfill the requirement that competitors in this event must wear their work shoes.<sup>13</sup>

The marathon was to result in the final controversy of the Games. Prior to 1906 the race had covered a distance of 40 kilometres, or about 25 miles, the supposed distance from Marathon to Athens. In the Athens Olympic Games of 1906, the distance had been increased to 41,860 meters, or just a few yards over 26 miles.

The King gave permission for the race to start in the grounds of Windsor Castle. Over the years many have written that this was because Queen Alexandra wanted the Royal Children to be able to watch the start. Marathon historian and ISOH member Bob Wilcock has reviewed the evidence and concludes that this was done to avoid crowds at the start. He also studied the finish and noticed that because it was impractical to use the "Royal Entrance" for the runners a further distance was added.<sup>14</sup> This resulted in the addition of 335 meters, or 366 yards, to the 1906 distance.<sup>15</sup> While it was a small addition to the total length of the race, the 385 yards, or 352 meters, which Pietri had to run after entering the stadium, it was to result in the final scandal of the Games.<sup>16</sup>

### Pictures at an Inquisition

Where does the myth of Conan Doyle's interference come from? It is regularly perpetuated, as for example, in Martin Booth's book, "The Doctor, The Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle":

*"At the 1908 Games, Conan Doyle was at the very centre of the controversy. ... Some spectators, Conan Doyle amongst their number, guided and helped the exhausted and confused runner to the finishing line. ... Conan Doyle, in the meantime, opened a subscription list for Dorando in the Daily Mail which collected sufficient money for him to open a bakery in his home town in Italy. There were those who believed that Conan Doyle felt guilty for having steered the runner in*

*the direction of the finishing tape and that his fund-raising efforts were aimed at assuaging his guilt as well as morally supporting the Italian. Whatever the truth of the matter, it was yet another instance of injustice to which Conan Doyle addressed his energies and influence."*<sup>17</sup>

Jon Lellenberg critiques Booth as follows<sup>18</sup>:

*"... Booth repeats some mistakes by others in his account of Conan Doyle's life. Most of them are minor ones, posing no serious danger to the author's or reader's attempt to understand Conan Doyle. Neither, perhaps, do the two or three more serious errors. He perpetuates the misunderstanding that Conan Doyle was one of those who helped the Italian marathon runner Pietri Dorando to stagger across the finish line in the 1908 London Olympics, when Conan Doyle was a special correspondent there for the Daily Mail. The evidence that Conan Doyle was one of those guilty of such a gaffe is the familiar photograph Booth reprints, when in fact the person helping Dorando across the finish line bears only a superficial resemblance to Conan Doyle. (In the background, in a straw boater, is the man whom Dame Jean Conan Doyle has wearily pointed out as Jean's father to more than one journalist rehashing the tale in the press.)"*



There are two well-known photographs of the finish line extant. In the hardcover edition of his book, Booth uses one taken by Davidson Brothers. In this edition, he identified the bulky man in the cloth cap holding Pietri's left elbow as Conan Doyle. This identification was patently wrong, since the man is clearly not Conan Doyle, but Dr. Michael Bulger, the senior medical official of the Games. Jean Conan Doyle apparently contacted Booth when the book appeared in 1995 to protest that her father had nothing to do with the interference. In the paperback edition of his book, Booth replaced this photo with a second one from the International News Group (ING), taken from a slightly different angle, and showing a bulky

**Presentation of the Gold Cup in the Carmelite House on August 1, 1908: in the middle Dorando Pietri, left from him Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, to the right the second wife from Sir Arthur, Jean Conan Doyle.**

man over Pietri's left shoulder. He identified that man as Conan Doyle, but maintained his assertion that he had helped to aid Pietri and was guilty of the disqualification. This is the same person that Jean Conan Doyle had said was her father.<sup>19</sup>

As we shall see later, if both of them are correct, then the accusation against Conan Doyle would have some credibility! Clearly Conan Doyle does not appear in the 'Davidson Brothers' picture. The ING picture, does show a tall, bulky man in the background, wearing a straw boater and carrying an umbrella. He is also apparently smoking a cigarette and wearing some kind of badge on his left lapel. There is a superficial resemblance to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, but with the quality of the photographs, it is difficult to make a positive identification.<sup>20</sup>

Both photographs were taken from approximately the same viewpoint, but the ING version seems to have

that the man Jean and Booth have identified as her father most likely IS NOT; and (B) even if that man is Conan Doyle, the film and the still photos do not show him helping Pietri at the crucial times – they show the other man in the background.

While you would expect a child to be able to identify her father in a photograph, for a number of reasons this identification is probably incorrect. Dame Jean's eyesight had been deteriorating for several years by the time Booth's paperback edition appeared. As we shall see, there was also a mistaken belief among Conan Doyle's children that he had been an official in 1908. So Dame Jean probably expected to see her father at the finish line, and identified the person in the photo who most closely resembled him.

The straw boater is, of course, not conclusive. Almost all of the officials on the track were wearing them. It is likely that Conan Doyle was wearing a straw boater that day – for example, he is holding one in a photograph taken the next day at a special presentation at Carmelite House, the offices of the *Daily Mail*, to Pietri, in which he is seated next to his second wife, Jean (but the band is much smaller than the band on the straw boater in the ING photograph – suggestive, but not conclusive, since Conan Doyle was wealthy enough to own more than one straw boater).

Because of the quality of the film and the technology I have available, I can't prove that the man in the background was not Conan Doyle. But there is clearly no evidence of him assisting Pietri, while all of the other evidence clearly points to a negative conclusion.<sup>22</sup>



**The photograph from ING with a slightly different view: Jean Conan Doyle identified the man in the straw boater over Pietri's left shoulder as her father. He is not visible in the other, better-known picture of the finish.**

been taken a fraction of a second earlier – Pietri is actually breasting the tape in the Davidson Brothers version, while he appears to be several feet back in the ING version. It appears that there in the background, there were two men wearing straw boaters, one hidden from the camera in each of the two photos. This becomes clear when we examine the film of the race finish, in which both can be seen.<sup>21</sup>

The difference is that the character whom others have identified as Conan Doyle, just over Pietri's left shoulder in the ING photo, can be followed for 4–5 seconds and, as he comes closer to the camera, it seems possible to conclude that he looks different to Conan Doyle. Even if this is an incorrect conclusion, the second person in the background in the Davidson Brothers picture, sometimes also identified as Conan Doyle, can also be followed. This person can be clearly identified from other pictures as one of those who helped Pietri – he was almost certainly one of the other members of the medical team. And it is absolutely clear that he is not Conan Doyle. In other words (A) this small video clip makes it possible to show

### **The Case of the Dog in the Night Time**

But the really interesting thing is that none of the numerous British, American or Canadian contemporaneous newspaper accounts of the race, none of the official reports, none of the pre-1996 Olympic factbooks and none of Conan Doyle's early biographers even hint that Conan Doyle had any involvement in helping Pietri. Conan Doyle was, in fact, in the stands and not on the track – unless he jumped out of his seat and ran down to the track to watch Dorando totter the last few steps.

He did not take part in the illegal assistance. The false rumour, or "canard", as I will call it, that he was one of those who caused Pietri to be disqualified, appeared many years after the event, and I cannot find it in any publication predating the end of World War II.

Various supporters of Conan Doyle's innocence, including his daughter Jean, have pointed to individual photographs of Pietri being assisted. They correctly insist that none of these shows Conan Doyle amongst the helpers. However, this alone is not enough to settle the issue.

Even contemporary accounts of the race vary as to how many times Pietri was assisted on that last lap. Some say five, others two, three and four. Most of the stories agree that he fell five times, but it is not clear how many times he was helped to his feet.

One says that doctors gave him a stimulant more than once<sup>23</sup> and that a Stadium announcer (shown holding one of the megaphones that was used to make announcements to the crowd) and Jack Andrew, a senior Olympic official<sup>24</sup> were the two who helped him over the line. Others who were identified at the time were the chief medical officer, Dr. Michael Bulger, another one of the track doctors not named in any of the accounts I have seen, and Mr. Perry, a groundskeeper.<sup>25</sup> Not one of those accounts suggests that Conan Doyle had anything to do with the finish.

A number of the papers, and some of the photographs and paintings of the event, indicate that, in addition to the officials, there was a small crowd of onlookers surrounding Pietri on one or more occasions as he lay on the track. However, invariably these accounts state that it was the "officials" who assisted him.

The *Daily Mail's* regular correspondent refers several times in his own article to "officials" helping Pietri to his feet and later helping him across the finish line.

The Official Report of the race was quite laconic in describing the assistance Pietri received:

*"Dorando was almost unconscious when he reached the cinder path, and turned to his right instead of his left. The slope from the archway was apparently the final stroke. He collapsed upon the track. As it was impossible to leave him there, for it looked as if he might die in the very presence of the Queen and the enormous crowd, the doctors and attendants rushed to his assistance."*<sup>26</sup>

No names or even titles are mentioned and the number of times Pietri received assistance is not referred to, although the article implies that there were at least several such occurrences.

A number of self-serving pamphlets and articles followed these Olympics, mainly to set out complaints and responses over the alleged mistreatment of the American delegation. In response to the work of one American official, Gustavus T. Kirby, who criticized the British Officials of the 1908 Olympics Games, an American lawyer named Francis Peabody, Jr. published a letter to the *Boston Daily Globe* on September 19, 1908, defending the British officiating at the 400 meters and marathon events. Peabody claims to have seen the race from a front seat in the grandstand, within 100 feet of the finish line. Peabody's tract so angered "A Member of the American Olympic Committee", that another pamphlet was writ-



Conan Doyle vs. unidentified man (right). This man, who resembles Conan Doyle was one of the officials on the track, but has not been positively identified. He is most likely a member of the medical staff.

ten, presumably by either Kirby or James E. Sullivan (it is not known for certain). In it, his eyewitness account of the finish of the marathon completely exonerates Conan Doyle. He wrote:

*"The photographs show that when Dorando was brought on the track it was done by British officials, held by them and they turned him in the right way to the finish line.*

*But some excited individuals rushed up to him and shouted to him to run, which he attempted to do.*

*They were not excited individuals but very anxious officials. The photographs show that there were three British officials on the track when Dorando was started toward the winning post. They were Mr. Andrews, Dr. Bulger and the groundsman, Mr. Perry; these were showing Dorando the way to go.*

*Dorando was helped to his feet three times, and finally half led and half carried to the finish in a perfectly public and open way. Every one who was not too excited realized that the moment he was helped his chance of winning the race was gone.*

*This statement is as near the truth as the others. Dorando was helped to his feet positively four times and perhaps five. The men who did this were not excited individuals, they were not his handlers, not outsiders, but British Olympic officials, and the photographs tell the tale.*

*The man who had hold of his right arm when he passed me was the announcer, dressed in a livery with a megaphone in his right hand.*

*This is on a par with all of the other statements made by Mr. Peabody. The men, or the two men, who lifted Dorando up when he fell thirty yards from the tape were Mr. Andrews, a British Olympic official, who had charge of the Marathon Race, and Dr. Bulger. The photographs show Mr. Andrews carrying him across the line and breaking the tape. He did not have a livery on at all; Mr. Peabody has mixed two different Olympic officials: the official announcer was the man who usually presides at functions of the Lord Mayor – the City Toastmaster – he wore a uniform; Mr. Andrews did not wear a uniform. ...*

*The only help [Dorando] received was from the British officials: five photographs, taken each time Dorando*

*was down, show that he received inside help, help from the officials who were appointed to see that the race would be conducted fairly. ...*

*There is a photograph showing the fourth time Dorando fell; it is on the bend as he entered the home stretch. What do we find? Dorando on the track, helpless, Dr. Bulger is holding him up and testing his heart, and another doctor is massaging him. Standing on the track, not watching Dorando but watching the entrance where Hayes at that moment entered, are Mr. Davidson and Mr. Andrews, two British Olympic officials, and on the infield, close by, Secretary Fisher. ...*

*...after going about twenty yards the Italian fell again; Hayes was near him, and it was then that Mr. Andrews took him up and rushed him across the finish line, breaking the tape."<sup>27</sup>*

Again, there is no reference to Conan Doyle in this account, nor apparently in any of the other pamphlets or tracts referred to. Needless to say, the name of Arthur Conan Doyle does not appear on the list of names of the track officials.<sup>28</sup>

It is an old maxim of archaeologists, of Talmudic origin<sup>29</sup>, that "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence". However, in this case, it is the converse of that maxim which provides the rule. When it is reasonable to expect that, if an event occurs, it will be heavily reported by the press, who were present in numbers, the total absence of such a report must be taken as virtual proof of the non-occurrence of the event.<sup>30</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was one of the most famous and popular of Britons<sup>31</sup>, and an internationally noted sportsman. It is too much to believe that, if he had jumped out of his seat and run onto the track to assist Pietri, in front of 80,000 roaring spectators<sup>32</sup>, *not one account* of this would have appeared in all of the popular press and other contemporary reports, not even in the ones which named names! In addition, Conan Doyle's letter appealing for money to give as a consolation prize to Pietri, appeared on the front page of the *Daily Mail* on the day of the race.<sup>33</sup> Later he was a guest of honour at the ceremony in which a cup, similar to that given to Hayes for winning the event, was given by Queen Alexandra to Pietri. There hadn't been enough time for the cup to be engraved, so it was accompanied by a handwritten note from the Queen. After the Games ended, in the cause of international sportsmanship Conan Doyle hosted a reception at his home for the American athletes. Can you imagine what the British press would have had to say about Conan Doyle's report of the race, and all of the above activities if Conan Doyle had been responsible for the disqualification that allowed an *American* to win the Marathon? Can you imagine

what the American press would have said if it appeared that Conan Doyle had tried to cheat so an American runner would be prevented from winning? In this case, absence of evidence is truly conclusive – or to use Conan Doyle's own metaphor, the fact that the dog did nothing in the night-time<sup>34</sup> proves the case!

Finally, and not insignificantly, after the disastrous British showing in the 1912 Games, Lord Northcliffe appointed Conan Doyle captain of the British team for the ill-fated 1916<sup>35</sup> Olympics, an honour that surely would not have been given to someone who was alleged to have so spectacularly blotted his copybook.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Smoking Pistol**

So, how and when did this canard get started? With absolute assurance, I can say that it did not start before 1948. In the February 1948 issue of *World Sports*, Harold Abrahams<sup>37</sup> wrote an article entitled "DORANDO – The Immortal Loser", in which he opines that Dorando "is the most famous name in all the history of the modern Olympic Games".

He then proceeds to give quite a detailed and interesting account of the race. When describing the assistance received by Pietri, he can only say that, when he entered the Stadium:

*"He dragged his weary limbs, which for nearly three hours had carried his little body over the ground, a few yards, turned to the right instead of the left; was pushed into the opposite direction and then collapsed in a heap on the ground.*

*What then happened no one now really knows. I have read dozens of contemporary accounts, and naturally they differ considerably in their detail. Undoubtedly he fell four or five times. Undoubtedly he was on one occasion helped to his feet, and, I think, undoubtedly he was held up over the last few yards as he struggled to the finishing line ..."*

Abrahams doesn't name any of those who assisted Pietri. His article prompted a letter from Conan Doyle's son, Denis, which was published in the issue of *World Sports* for April 1948<sup>38</sup>:

*"I was very interested to read Mr. Harold Abrahams' graphic account of the Dorando Marathon of 1908. I have always been interested in this race because it was described to me more than once by my father, the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who saw this race himself as a member of the British Olympic Committee. As a matter of fact, my father was instrumental in starting a collection for Dorando after the race which, I believe, realised £300.*

*Incidentally, as you no doubt are aware, the medical*

examination of Dorando immediately after the race, disclosed the remarkable fact that his extraordinary physical effort displaced the position of his heart by an eighth of an inch.

I cannot resist giving you a curious little example of the world-wide fame which, as Mr. Abrahams so truly points out in his article, Dorando achieved by his failure to win. When I accompanied by father on one of his American lecture tours as a young boy, I bought a small pet tortoise which I used to race against other pet tortoises. I called him Dorando.

Upon our return from America my parents had occasion to engage a new housemaid for our home at Crowborough, Sussex, and before coming to us, she asked permission to bring with her little racing tortoise, which she said she had named Dorando after the famous Marathon runner!

I wish your admirable publication the great success it deserves.

Denis S.P. Conan Doyle

Hotel George V, 31, Avenue George V, Paris"

It is absolutely clear that at this point in time, no one was accusing Arthur Conan Doyle of having anything to do with the disqualification of Pietri. The reference to the two pet tortoises is also very telling – it is hard to believe that Arthur would have allowed either of them if he had been in the least sensitive about Pietri's disqualification. Yet in a column by an American writer named Maxwell Stiles, published in 1948<sup>39</sup>, and reprinted in a collection of his columns called "Back Track" in 1959, this statement appeared:

*"Just a few years ago the son of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a letter to World Sports advising that excellent publication that one of the figures he had recognized in the picture of Dorando's finish, a man who was running down the track at Dorando's side, was the famous creator of Sherlock Holmes. Sir Arthur, an avid track fan, was one of the officials."*

So this, to use another Doylean quote, is the "smoking pistol".<sup>40</sup> This obviously incorrect statement, written without bothering to check his sources, leaves Maxwell Stiles with the dubious distinction of having started the rumour! Notice that he does not actually accuse Conan Doyle of having provided assistance, but the implication is certainly clear and undoubtedly led other, even less-informed, people to draw that conclusion.

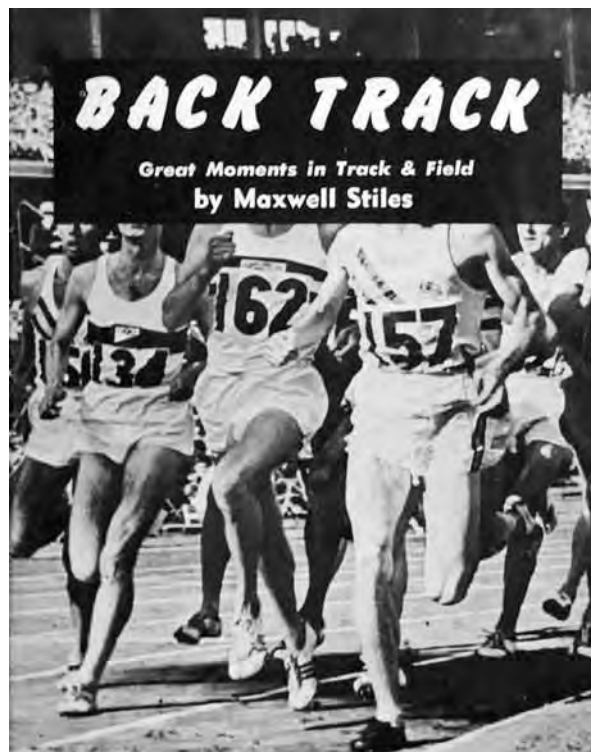
So this must be the genesis of the canard? On what is it based? A vague recollection that Conan Doyle had something to do with the Dorando Affair, transposed by a faulty statement in Denis' letter, and a lack of fact-checking into an assertion of wrongful involvement. The

process, a sub-conscious one, probably went something like this:

1. Conan Doyle was involved in some capacity with the marathon at the 1908 Olympics;
2. The lead runner in the marathon was disqualified for having received medical and other assistance to cross the finish line;
3. Conan Doyle was a doctor (the "medical connection" may derive from a later date, since Stiles doesn't mention it);
4. A photograph shows Conan Doyle running beside Pietri at the finish line;
5. Conan Doyle did have some kind of official connection with the Olympics;
6. Conan Doyle gave money to compensate Pietri for the harm done to his cause.
7. Conan Doyle did it!

I don't know when others first seized on this statement after Stiles made it, but I have not found any other references to Conan Doyle's involvement in the Dorando Affair prior to 1972.

In *La Fabuleuse Histoire des Jeux Olympiques*<sup>41</sup>, published in that year, the authors refer to (unidentified) contemporary accounts that identified Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "father of Sherlock Holmes", as one of the two men surrounding Pietri, tapping him on the face, raising him, putting him back on his staggering legs, and accompanying him almost to the tape.<sup>42</sup> I have not been able to find whether this was inspired by Stiles' articles, which seems



The Back Track cover by Maxwell Stiles, published in 1948, and reprinted in 1959.

improbable, or whether the rumour had by now begun to circulate and there are other, as yet undiscovered, versions of it in print between the early 1950's and 1972.

There is then another apparent gap in reports of Conan Doyle's complicity in the Dorando Affair until 1980. In *The People's Almanac Presents the Book of Lists* No. 2<sup>43</sup>, David Wallechinsky lists "The 10 Most Controversial Events in Olympic History". No. 5: Marathon – London – 1908, and concludes (at p. 353) "The officials, among them A. Conan Doyle, lifted Dorando upright and carried him across the finish line."

Wallechinsky gives no source for this<sup>44</sup> and he himself has now recanted this assertion.<sup>45</sup>

If this is not the true source of this rumour, is there another earlier source? In an article on the Olympics in *TV Guide* for July 28, 1984, Erich Segal, author of *Love Story* and himself a distance runner, wrote, under the headline "There Has Always Been Olympic Mischief". Dick Albright, in *Northumberland Dispatch*, September 1984, reports that Segal's article

*"tells of the acceptance of enticements, the stabbing of rivals, the taking of stimulants, and other un-sportsmanlike conduct down through the history of the International Olympic Games.*

*At the 1908 London Games, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle served as one of the official doctors. During the marathon, an Italian runner named Dorando Pietri reached the stadium but collapsed before he got to the tape. Doyle rushed to administer a drug injection to enable Dorando to finish the race. Instead the shot nearly finished Dorando; and he had to be hospitalized (after being disqualified). Segal relates that Holmes's creator was unaware that he was cheating and, therefore, should not be reproached."*<sup>46</sup>

Segal's article is utter nonsense. He has clearly embellished whatever story he had heard, by turning "stimulants," most likely some liquid, such as brandy, into an "injection". Of course, Conan Doyle was not there in any medical capacity, and, since he had not practised medicine of any kind since 1891, except for a brief time in the Boer War seven years earlier, the possibility that he would have had a medical bag with stimulants of any kind in it is absolutely zero. And Conan Doyle was well aware that the assistance Pietri received would result in disqualification – in his account of the race, he wrote:

*"Even as I write there comes the rumour that he has been disqualified. If true, it is indeed a tragedy. ...*

*PS – The rumour then is true. I confess that I cannot see how the judges could have come to any other decision. It was as matters stood, a fair and square win for the American, since, without help, Dorando must have lain senseless on the track."*

The editor of the *Northumberland Dispatch*, after reprinting an extract from *Memories and Adventures* to counter Segal, suggested that this is the first time such a story had ever appeared in print. However, in view of Wallechinsky's 1980 publication and the other earlier citations, this is obviously not true. But it is an indication that, at this early date, the canard had not yet become widespread.

A further illustration of this fact can be found in a 1980 article by Kate Karlson Redmond.<sup>47</sup> She told the story of the race from Conan Doyle's point of view, but never even mentioned the controversy – the most likely reason for such a conspicuous omission being that Wallechinsky's note had not yet become known and the interference story had not yet appeared in any recent or well-known English publication. Stiles, after all, had not accused Conan Doyle of actually assisting the runner across the line, just of accompanying him.

Doyle scholar Peter Blau immediately challenged Segal on the basis for his story and got a reply dated August 28, 1984:

*"In answer to your question about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the assertion that he was one of the doctors that attended Dorando is based on the identification of one of the figures in photographs of Dorando after his collapse.*

*As we both know 1908 was hardly a high point for the photographic arts, still such notables as the Editor of *The Guinness Book of Olympic Records*, Mr. Stan Greenberg<sup>48</sup> assures me that there are reliable identifications of Conan Doyle, and he stakes his reputation on the fact that the famous author/doctor was one of those who helped inject Dorando.*

*For further information, if this still does not satisfy you, I would suggest you write to Mr. Greenberg direct, care of the Guinness Book of Records."*<sup>49</sup>

I was able to contact Stan Greenberg.<sup>50</sup> He denied being the source of Eric Segal's story. However, in the 1996 edition of *The Guinness Book of Olympic Feats and Facts*, he did say "Over-zealous officials, reputedly including the famous author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, helped him over the finish line." This is in any event a far cry from the 'information' cited by Segal. In fact this statement was new, not having appeared in any of Guinness' previous Olympic fact books, all of which he had edited. Greenberg informed me that he would be excising this suggestion from any further publications – he now believes that Conan Doyle had nothing to do with the disqualification. Greenberg told me that the reason he had changed his opinion was that Peter Lovesey had just recently debunked the myth in an article in *Journal of Olympic History*.<sup>51</sup> The article explores Conan Doyle's Olympic career



and begins: "First, let us dispose of a *canard*". Lovesey then proceeds to identify the two officials on either side of Pietri at the finish line as Jack Andrew, clerk of the course, and Dr. Michael Bulger, chief medical officer of the Games. The man in the straw hat in the background was not Conan Doyle, but probably another member of the medical team. He has also noticed that this background figure had been seen next to Pietri in other photos of him lying on the track.<sup>52</sup> Lovesey's argument is based solely on the photographs and on Conan Doyle's own article in the *Daily Mail*. He goes on to state that the suggestion that Conan Doyle came up with the idea to award Pietri a trophy was also untrue. Conan Doyle's contribution was in fact the appeal for funds which appeared in the *Daily Mail*.

If either Wallechinsky's list item or Segal's misguided article was the start of a new urban legend, it was certainly a successful one. It took a little while, but the story has now penetrated to the heart of the Olympic Movement itself. In the press kit for the Sydney Olympics of 2000, the story was repeated and ended up being translated into dozens of languages, and then placed on dozens of websites. It would be difficult to list them all. The typical article, which appears in enough different languages that there must be a common source, says that one of those who helped Pietri was the author of the Sherlock Holmes detective stories (some say the "father" of Sherlock Holmes), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who came to Pietri's aid and caused him to be disqualified.<sup>53</sup> In the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland, when I was there in 2000, the display for the 1908 Olympics shows a film of the finish of the race, with the announcer's commentary (in English and, presumably, in the French and German versions, as well), identifying the author of "Sherlock Holmes" as one of those who assisted Pietri.<sup>54</sup> The highwater mark for the canard, at least among the relatively tight-knit community of Sherlockians and Doyleans, is the publication of a letter to "Mr. Holmes" in the *Baker Street Dispatch*<sup>55</sup> requesting information on whether Holmes, "Dr. Watson, or Sir Arthur [had] ever been involved with the Olympics as a participant or as an official". The reply was that Dr. Watson had bet heavily on Pietri, concluding "Although it was never proven, many people at the race believed that Sir Arthur was at the scene assisting the Italian runner." No evidence to support this obviously fanciful answer is given.

Now that Greenberg and Wallechinsky have stopped making the assertion, and Lovesey has identified the culprits in the photographs, we can only hope that the rumour will disappear. But it is still firmly entrenched as an urban legend, being regularly repeated in some form or another. *The Times Literary Supplement* for January 18, 2002, published a "TLS/Hatchards Centenary Quiz". Question 10:



*"Distressed in London, in the summer of 1908, he accepted assistance from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: for that he ran into further trouble. Who was he?"*

The Italian stamp from Dorando Pietri, issued in 2008, one hundred years after the Olympic Games in London.

The answer, published on March 1, 2002: "DORANDO PIETRI, disqualified 'winner' of the marathon in the London Olympics".<sup>56</sup> But after a few years of sporadic recurrences the rumour resurfaced with a vengeance in the spring of 2008. First came the announcement that a statue in honour of Pietri was to be unveiled in his hometown of Carpi, Modena, accompanied by the issuance of a postage stamp, leading to repetition of the rumour in various papers. This was followed on April 13 by a press release from European Athletics publicizing the 2008 London Marathon, and repeating that Dorando "had been helped by officials, including by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes." Many papers and websites picked this up and repeated it. The rumour was also repeated in the English language Wikipedia article on Pietri, until I edited it out, a small gesture, but somewhat gratifying. It seems that you can identify the source of a rumour, and you can even disprove it, but, in the end, you can't keep a good rumour down!

1 Thoroughly debunked by Cox. J. Randolph: "Did Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Use Cocaine? A Study in Research, in *Baker Street Miscellanea*, Vol. 14, June 1978, p.31. Ironically, this rumour, which appears to have come into existence about the same time as the Pietri rumour, was repeated in *The People's Almanac Presents the Book of Lists* in 1977 in "Ten People Who Have Taken Cocaine".

2 Authoritatively debunked by Elliott, Douglas: "The Curious Incident of the Missing Link", *Bootmakers of Toronto Occasional Papers*, No. 2, 1988.

3 Garrick-Steele, Rodger: *The House of the Baskervilles*, U.S.A.: 1st Books, 2003-2004. Garrick-Steele who purchased Fletcher Robinson's former home (and believes that he himself is the reincarnation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) has concocted this theory. It received a considerable amount of coverage when he first managed to find a newspaper to print it (a Reuters News Service dispatch of September 9, 2000 was picked up by many papers, including the

- Sunday Times*), but it seems to have died a natural death. Garrick-Steele was denied permission from the local diocese to exhume Fletcher Robinson's body from a churchyard in Ipplepin.
- 4 Kalush, William and Sloman, Larry: *The Secret Life of Houdini: The Making of America's First Superhero*. New York: Atria Books, 2006. Their thesis is that Houdini was an American spy, and that his debunking of Spiritualist mediums, championed by Conan Doyle, led to his suspicious death.
  - 5 All reports agree it was sunny and 28o C, a very unfavourable condition for running a distance race.
  - 6 His proper name was Dorando Pietri. However, confusion has been caused by the fact that his name appeared in the official program as "P. Dorando", which apparently reflects Pietri's having given his name in the form of last name, first name – as he was used to doing in the Italian military. Pietri was born in 1885 in Mandrio, Correggio, Italy and died of heart failure in Sanremo, Italy, at the age of 56 in 1942. His biography can be purchased from *info@aliberteditore.it*. There is some confusion about his death. A 1948 article by Harold Abrahams (see note 16), includes a picture of "Dorando Pietri today ... He's a plumpish man of 64 ... serving tea in his Birmingham café. The little man still treasures the cup presented to him by Queen Alexandra, but it is in London for safe keeping." It is likely that this Pietri was an impostor!
  - 7 Pietri went on to compete professionally for several years. Irving Berlin wrote a popular song about him, entitled "Dorando He's a Gooda for Not". The song is about an Italian-American barbershop owner who bets his shop on Dorando winning a race at Madison Square Garden. The lyrics go, "Dorando he's a drop! / Goodbye poor old barber shop." The reason Dorando lost, according to Berlin, is that the day before the race he ate Irish beef stew instead of spaghetti. Streissguth, Thomas and Hagerman, Jennifer: *Say it with Music: A Story about Irving Berlin*, Minneapolis : Carolrhoda Books, c1994.
  - 8 In fact the decision not to hold the Games in Rome had probably already been made. It resulted from a dispute between Prime Minister Gioletti, who controlled the purse strings and wanted to use the money for new government projects, and Pope Pius X, King Victor Emanuel III and the mayor of Rome, all of whom wanted the Olympics in Rome. See Mallon, Bill and Buchanan, Ian. *The 1908 Olympic Games: Results for All Competitors, in All Events, with Commentary*. McFarland & Co., Jefferson , N.C. & London, 2000, pp.2-3 ("*1908 Olympic Games*").
  - 9 Indeed, those who remember *Chariots of Fire*, a story of the 1924 Paris Olympics, will recall that Harold Abrahams had a paid coach, who was unable to assist him during the 100 metres race.
  - 10 Some accounts mention that champagne, beer and whiskey were also offered to the runners.
  - 11 The Americans reciprocated by refusing to dip their flag when they passed the Royal Box, which was apparently the beginning of the tradition they maintain at all Olympics. The Finnish team was told it had to march under the Russian flag and so marched under no flag. Several Irish athletes withdrew, rather than compete for Great Britain.
  - 12 Named after the area of London in which White City Stadium, the Olympic venue, was located. Stamford Bridge had been the primary athletics facility in London, but White City was a larger stadium.
  - 13 In the response by the Olympic Committee, it was reported that the police wore worn-out work boots and the American team simply did not have the necessary experience to compete. The American pamphleteers Kirby and Sullivan protested that the attempts to help Pietri win the marathon were prompted by the British desire to keep the American Hayes from winning at any cost, and that Hayes was only honoured for his win as an afterthought. The British replied that their response was only "a very natural feeling of admiration and sympathy for pluck and courage." The American protest that it took far too long to decide on Pietri's disqualification was countered by the statement that so many witnesses had to be interviewed that it necessarily took a fair amount of time (see note 27).
  - 14 Bob Wilcock, *The 1908 Olympic Marathon*, *Journal of Olympic History*, Vol. 16, March 2008, No. 1, p. 31.
  - 15 It is ironic that the small increase in the length of the race should prove to be the ultimate cause of the Dorando affair. At this late date, we may think of it as "the folly of a monarch in days gone by" to insist on lengthening the course for his wife's personal pleasure. However, in the early years, the length of the marathon was variable and had generally been increasing. Here is the list: Athens 1896 – 40,000m; Paris 1900 – 40,260m; St. Louis 1904 – 40,000m; Athens 1906 – 41,860m; London 1908 – 42,195m; Stockholm 1912 – 40,200m; Antwerp 1920 – 42,750m; Paris 1924 and all races since – 42,195m or 26 miles, 385 yards (source: Wallechinsky, David: *The Complete Book of the Olympics*, London & New York: Penguin Books, 1984). London was the last Olympic marathon to be run from one point to another – all subsequent races have started and ended in the stadium (except for Rome 1960 and Athens 2004).
  - 16 According to Abrahams, Harold: *World Sport*, Feb. 1948, Vol. 14, No. 2, p.7, it was traditional before 1908 for the Marathon to be 25 miles, with the final lap being run in the stadium on a track which was generally a third of a mile – 586 yards at White City Stadium. Moving the start back to the grounds of Windsor Castle lengthened the run to the Stadium to exactly 26 miles. In order to shorten the distance somewhat, it was decided that the runners would only run from the Stadium entrance to the Royal Box. For some reason which Abrahams could not explain, a decision was made to have the runners turn uncharacteristically to their left and run clockwise, instead of the normal counter-clockwise, which lengthened the run inside the Stadium to 385 yards. "Thus is history manufactured. Had they turned right, instead of left, it would have been 202 yards".
  - 17 London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997, Coronet Paperbacks, 1998, p. 275. In response to a letter requesting the source of Booth's statement that some believed Conan Doyle sponsored a prize for Pietri out of guilt, I received an email from Booth on Feb. 1, 2003, advising that he no longer had his notes for this book and couldn't provide me with an answer. Booth at this point was suffering from the cancer, from which he died in February, 2004.
  - 18 In the second, electronic, edition of the *Quest for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, which was released on Insight Engineering's "The Works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle" CD-ROM in 1997.
  - 19 Georgina Doyle, widow of Conan Doyle's nephew, John, could not find anything in Jean's correspondence indicating that she had written to Booth, and concluded that she must have phoned him sometime in 1995, when the hardcover edition had appeared. She did not think there was any family information on the 1908 Olympics: "No, there is no family tradition, here at any rate, about Dorando – just Jean's strong assertion against the trend of current thinking." In January 1995, Donald Trelford published one of the pictures of the finish line, identifying Conan Doyle as the gentleman assisting Pietri across the finish line. Jon Lellenberg has provided copies of two letters Dame Jean wrote to the paper, neither of which were published. On January 17<sup>th</sup>, she sent the following letter to the editor: "Dear Sir, How easily myths are born. A photograph illustrating Donald Trelford's column last Thursday, showing Dorando Pietri, the Italian marathon runner in the 1908 Olympics crossing the finish line helped by officials after he had collapsed, wrongly identified my father as "a large figure on the right." My father can in fact be seen in the photograph in a straw boater a little distance behind the runner. Although an official, my father was not involved in the well-meaning assistance that resulted in Pietri's disqualification. He did initiate a fund for a souvenir to present to the brave Italian from his many admirers in this country." According to Lellenberg, the letter did not appear in the Telegraph over the more than two weeks that followed. On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, she wrote directly to Donald Trelford: "Dear Mr. Trelford, I am attaching a copy of a letter I sent to the Editor some time ago. I can well understand that it was not published in view of the fact that almost all the correspondence columns were devoted to championing Private Clegg, a cause which I am sure my father would have embraced. However, it is most unfortunate that your erroneous account of my father's involvement with the disqualification of Dorando Pietri in the marathon of the 1908 Olympic Games should go uncorrected. Probably you did not see my letter to the Editor so have not yet made an opportunity to correct your mistake. I do hope you will be able to do so." The following correction appeared in Trelford's column on Mar. 2, 1995: "My picture of the dramatic finish to the London Olympic marathon

- at the White City stadium in 1908 continues to stir old memories. It showed the exhausted Italian runner, Dorando Pietri, being helped over the line by a couple of officials, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Dame Jean Conan Doyle, aged 82, a former Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force, writes to confirm that her father is indeed shown in the famous picture, but is not the big man identified in our caption. 'My father,' she says, 'can be seen in a straw boater a little distance behind the runner.' She goes on: 'Although an official, my father was not involved in the well-meaning assistance that resulted in Pietri's disqualification. He did, however, initiate a fund for a souvenir to present to the brave Italian from his many admirers in this country.' One lesson I learned on my National Service: a WAAF always has the last word."
- 20 There is some variance in the reports of Conan Doyle's height. In his passport issued July 22, 1920 (see Christie's Sale catalogue May 19/04), he gave his own height as 6 feet. Allowing for a bit of shrinkage as he aged, his actual height in 1908 may have been an inch or two greater.
- 21 <http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=52311>, and description at note 51.
- 22 See also notes 19 and 38.
- 23 Mallon and Buchanan, *1908 Olympic Games*. They cite "British Olympic Association / David Wallechinsky newspaper clipping files" as the source of the "stimulant" reference, but say they cannot identify the newspaper or magazine from which the clipping was taken. However, the *New York Times* for July 25, 1908, says: According to the rules of the race, physicians should have taken him away, but the track officials, lost in their sympathy for such a man, and for such an effort, lifted him to his feet, and with their hands at his back gave him support. Four times Dorando fell in the three hundred yards that separated him from the finish, and three times after the doctors had poured stimulants down his throat he was dragged to his feet, and finally was pushed across the line with one man at his back and another holding him by the arm. Directly alongside its own article, *The Times* printed, without comment, an excerpt from Conan Doyle's article in the *Daily Mail*.
- 24 The officials for the Marathon are listed in the *The Fourth Olympiad, being The Official Report of The Olympic Games of 1908, celebrated in London under the Patronage of His Most Gracious Majesty King Edward VII and at the sanction of The International Olympic Committee – drawn up by Theodore Andrew Cook and issued under the authority of The British Olympic Council*, London: 1909, British Olympic Association (henceforth, the "Official Report") at p. 68. Jack Andrew, Honorary Secretary General of the Polytechnic Harriers, was the Chief Clerk of the Course, the senior track official for the Marathon. For reasons I will set out later, it appears he was the man holding the megaphone in the photo. Andrew's account of the race was published in "Polytechnic Magazine" for Aug. 1908, and excerpted in *The Marathon Footrace*, Gynn, Martin D., Champaign, Ill, 1979. Dr. Michael J. Bulger is the senior medical official. Other officials named in the answer to the Peabody pamphlet included Percy L. Fisher, Honorary Secretary, and I.B. Davidson, Motor and Attendants Marshal.
- 25 Peter Lovesey has identified a number of these officials in his articles. See notes 41, 44 and 51.
- 26 *Official Report*, p. 78.
- 27 *The Olympic Games, An Answer to Mr. Francis Peabody, Jr. ("Answer to Peabody")*. This pamphlet and part of Peabody's pamphlet are reprinted in Appendix III to Mallon and Buchanan, *1908 Olympic Games*. There was a further British pamphlet, *The Olympic Games of 1908 in London: A Reply to Certain Criticisms* by Theodore A. Cook, published on behalf of the International Olympic Committee (Oct. 31, 1908).
- 28 Conan Doyle's name does not appear in the list of officials at p. 68 of the *Official Report*, nor in the list of members of the Council of the British Olympic Committee, p. 13. In other words, he was simply not an "official" in 1908.
- 29 This phrase appears three times in the Talmud, generally in the formulation "That I did not see it is no proof [that it did not happen]". See e.g., Tractate *Ketubot*, Ch. 2, s. 23a, Steinsaltz ed., New York: Random House, 1992. The maxim is only to be used in the general sense and cannot govern when there are other witnesses present to see and report on the occurrence of the disputed event.
- 30 This, in fact, is the "argument" that Sherlockians make for the continued existence of Sherlock Holmes. They say that a man as prominent as Holmes would definitely have an obituary in *The Times*. However, *The Times* has never published such an obituary. Ergo, Holmes is alive (neatly, of course, sidestepping the more contentious issue of whether he actually existed in the first place.). G. Ward Price was the reporter who found the house in which Pietri was staying and was the one who quashed the rumour that he had died. In his autobiography, *Extra-Special Correspondent*, London: Harrap, 1957, he never mentions Conan Doyle in connection with the event.
- 31 Someone, possibly George Bernard Shaw, described him as the best-known Englishman of his time – ironic in view of his Scottish-Irish background.
- 32 Estimates of the number of spectators vary between 72,000 and over 100,000. However, according to Glynne Jenkins (private communication), White City could never have held as many as 100,000.
- 33 1 August, 1908: 'Presentation to Dorando at the Daily Mail Office' *Daily Mail*, p.3c. Report of a speech by Conan Doyle at the presentation of a cheque for £308 and a gold cigarette case to the Olympic Marathon runner.
- 34 *Silver Blaze*.
- 35 Webster, F.A.M.: *Athletics of Today: History, Development & Training*, London and New York: Frederick Warne & Co., 1929, p.282, "In 1910 the Amateur Field Events Association was formed under the presidency of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and controlled certain field events championships until they were taken over by the A.A.A. in 1914." Conan Doyle's involvement with this group is further proof of his non-involvement in the disqualification of Pietri.
- 36 "I am so busy. I am trying to reconcile various Olympic Authorities so that we may win the Games in Berlin in 1916. I think I will succeed. Constant letters in the Times and much private writing and scheming" (Letter to Mary Doyle, Windlesham, August 1912, from Lellenberg, Jon, Stashower, Daniel and Foley, Charles, ed.: *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2007, p.584. Conan Doyle was campaigning to have an Empire team in 1916 "irrespective of race or creed, and for bringing to the preparations the organization and training that is commonplace today." He continued to mention the Olympic preparations as late as March, 1913 (*ibid.*, pp. 584-591).
- 37 *World Sports* Vol. 14, No. 2, p.6. Abrahams was the 1924 Olympic Gold Medallist in 100m, whose story is told in *Chariots of Fire*. He was for many years a prominent member of the British Olympic Association. The article is accompanied by three photographs, including the famous Davidson Brothers version used in the hardcover edition of Booth's book, and a picture of a cheerful, chubby 64 year old Pietri, serving tea in his Birmingham café. (See note 6. This photo itself perpetuates a "hoax" the man pictured was not Dorando who had died in 1942.) The Davidson picture of the finish used in Abraham's article was the one which didn't show the Conan Doyle – like character in the background. It would have been interesting to see if Denis had identified that person as his father, which Dame Jean later did, at the time the Booth book appeared in paperback with the replacement picture.
- 38 Vol. 14, No. 4. Denis is, of course, wrong that his father was an official, undoubtedly mixing up his father's presence as a correspondent in 1908 with the captaincy of the 1916 team.
- 39 *Long Beach Press-Telegram*. So far I have not been able to locate the original column, but I do have a copy of the book. An extract from the column can be found at [http://www.trackandfieldnews.com/general/back\\_track/23\\_24.html](http://www.trackandfieldnews.com/general/back_track/23_24.html). The article is identified with "This is another article from the series in the Press-Telegram before the 1948 Olympics." The original article appeared in 1948, before the Olympic Games and after Abrahams's article on Dorando – most likely between May and July, 1948. I am extremely grateful to Catherine Cooke, for drawing this article to my attention. The contents and language of Stiles' column leave no doubt that he was relying heavily on Abrahams' article – the two even have the same title and parts of Stiles' article are more or less direct quotes. Maxwell Stiles was a noted sports columnist and during his lengthy career, he wrote for the *Los Angeles Mirror-News*, the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, the *Oakland Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Examiner*. His specialty was Track and Field, but he covered all sporting events, and authored/collaborated on several books, including *The Rose Bowl: A Complete Action and Pictorial Exposition of Rose Bowl Football*. In the 1940s, Stiles was Public Relations Director for the Los Angeles Rams football team.
- 40 In "The Gloria Scott", the narrator says "Then we rushed on into the

captain's cabin, but as we pushed open the door there was an explosion from within, and there he lay with his brains smeared over the chart of the Atlantic which was pinned upon the table, while the chaplain stood with a *smoking pistol* in his hand at his elbow." Altered to fit American usage as "smoking gun", this phrase has been cited by William Safire as the origin of the term. *Safire's New Political Dictionary* (Random House, New York, 1993).

- 41 Lagorce, Guy and Parienté, Robert: Paris: Éditions O.D.I.L., 1972. I am grateful to Peter Lovesey, well-known British mystery writer and Olympic historian, for drawing this work to my attention (private communication). He also told me that he is aware of a similar statement in the German book "... und dann trennten wir uns. Läufer, Lorbeer und Legenden" (zur Megede, Ekkehard, Bartels & Wernitz, Munich/Berlin, 1966). But no one has ever produced a contemporary account of the race identifying Conan Doyle as one of the perpetrators.
- 42 "Autour de lui deux hommes, un juge et un journaliste que les chroniques du temps disent être Sir Conan Doyle, le père de Sherlock Holmes. Ils se penchent sur l'Italien, lui tapotent le visage, le soulèvent, le remettent sur ses jambes flageolantes et l'accompagnent presque jusqu'au fil."
- 43 William Morrow and Co., New York, and Bantam Paperbacks, 1980. Mr. Wallechinsky has a lot to answer for!
- 44 Peter Lovesey wrote an article about the race in *Athletics Weekly* for April 6, 1968. He quotes from articles and interviews with Dr. Bulger, the chief medical officer, and Jack Andrew, both of whom assisted Pietri across the line. He does not refer to Conan Doyle, which likely means that the myth had not then come into existence in English.
- 45 In response to a letter requesting information on his source for the allegation, pointing out its apparent inaccuracy, his response to me was: "You are absolutely right about Conan Doyle. Perhaps unbeknownst to you, since the publication of BOL#2, I have become one of the world's leading experts on the history of the Olympics. I am the author of *The Complete Book of the Winter Olympics* and *The Complete Book of the Summer Olympics*. The story about Conan Doyle does not appear in my books." [private communication August 3, 2002. Unfortunately, he did not provide any information as to his source for the original assertion]. He is correct, Conan Doyle is not referred to in Wallechinsky's account of the race in *The Complete Book of the Olympics* (2000 edition), London: Aurum Press, pp.72-73, or in Wallechinsky's other more recent books.
- 46 The suggestion that Conan Doyle was the doctor who assisted Pietri and provided him with a stimulant is obviously ludicrous – Conan Doyle had not practised medicine for many years by the time of the Olympics and obviously would not have had a medical bag with him at the track. However, it has been repeated in other places, for example, in an article in *World Coin News* for March 27, 1995. The sources cited by the author of that article, Edward C. Rochette, do not provide any support for that conclusion.

47 *Canadian Holmes*, (1980), Vol. 4, No. 1 (Michaelmas issue).

48 Stan Greenberg was actually an "associate" editor of this book, which was edited by Norris and Ross McWhirter. Nowhere in the numerous Guinness books on the Olympic Games, at least prior to 1996, is there a reference to Conan Doyle being involved in the Dorando Affair.

49 Mr. Blau advises that there is nothing in his records to indicate that he ever wrote to or received a response from Guinness.

50 Telephone conversation, April 11, 2002

51 Vol. 10, December 2001/January 2002, p. 6 "Conan Doyle and the Olympics". This article has apparently started to turn the tide on the issue, at least among Olympic historians. In Miller, David: *Athens to Athens: The Official History of the Olympic Games and the IOC, 1894-2004*, Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company, Ltd. (2003), at p. 55, the author states "Possibly having in mind the tale of Pheidippides, alleged runner of the original marathon bringing news of victory over the Persians to Athens, at which point he fell dead on the ground, officials, including a Dr. Bulger, megaphone in one hand (but not as has been reported, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, later creator of Sherlock Holmes), part-carried Dorando across the line." Of course, the author has introduced two new mistakes, since Dr. Bulger was not the one with the megaphone and Conan Doyle had long since created Sherlock Holmes.

52 He was almost certainly one of the medical team, since he can be seen assisting Dr. Bulger with Pietri lying on the track in one of the photos. He is also identified, but not by name, in the pamphlet *Answer to Peabody*.

53 Typical examples can be found in *Národná Obroda*, Bratislava, Slovakia, Jan. 20, 2000; *Aftonbladet*, Sweden, July 24, 1999; and *Saarsport Magazine* (n.d., [www.lsvs.de/saarsport/lo6doping.htm](http://www.lsvs.de/saarsport/lo6doping.htm) (Germany)). Most of this material can no longer, as of 2008, be found online.

54 The video, approximately 1 min., 40 secs., comes from the Olympic Museum in Lausanne and is used in its display of the 1908 Olympics. It was taken from rushes shot by Pathé and was also used in a French production, *Série Costelle*. Subsequently it was part of a documentary entitled "Stolen Gold", shown on the History Channel (U.K.) in 2002. This latter includes the actual scene at the finish line from a different angle, which shows definitively that the man sometimes identified as Conan Doyle in the background (who may or may not be Conan Doyle) did not assist Pietri at the finish line. Also, as of 2008, the official website of the Olympic Movement, [www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org), makes no mention of Conan Doyle in its accounts of the Marathon.

55 Sept. 1996, Vol. 6, No. 5, p.7

56 It was repeated in Tibballs, Geoff: *The Olympics' Strangest Moments*, London: Robson Books, 2004, p.38, in a quote that was virtually identical to the "father of Sherlock Holmes" version found on many websites.

London is showing the first signs of the Olympic Festival. ISOH Member Philip Barker sent us this photograph how the floating Olympic rings have passed the Tower Bridge.



## A Return to Munich in the Past – 40 years ago

At the end of February started in Munich the work on a documentary movie by the TV company: "The Biography Channel" about the Olympic massacre from 1972, during which eleven members of the Israeli team as well as a German police-officer were killed during a failed effort to free them. From the eight Israeli hostages, which the Palestine terror-organization "Black September" had captured, three wounded survived. For the shoots, eight Israeli witnesses from that time, travelled after 40 years to the Olympic City from 1972. At the time they could escape or had the luck not to be at where it took place. Producer Emanuel Rotstein has the intention to search for new angles, because he found out that the survivors do not play any role in the memorial culture of today.