

# KITEI SON AND SPIRIDON LOUIS POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE 1936 MARATHON IN BERLIN

by Karl Lennartz\*

## 1. Preliminary Remark

On the 15th of November 2002 the Olympic marathon champion of 1936, Kitei SON, died in Korea at the age of 90. Alongside Spiridon Louis and Emil ZATOPEK, Kitei SON was arguably the most outstanding marathon runner of the early days of this discipline.

Therefore a longer obituary and an investigation on the marathon race of 1936 seems appropriate.

## 2. Many best times in Japan

In the early 1930's the worlds top marathon runners already achieved times under 2:35:00h. Whilst the performances stagnated in the US, Great Britain and above all in Europe, a big boost in performance was recorded in Japan. During the Championships in Tokyo on November 3rd 1933, Kozo KUSUNOKI finished in 2:31:10h, thus improving the Japanese record. But also the following runners were still fast enough to earn their spot in the top-ten-list of that year:

- |                  |                              |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Kozo KUSUNOKI | in 2:31:10 (2nd of the List) |
| 2. Shoryu NAN    | in 2:32:33 (3rd),            |
| 3. Tamao SHIWAKU | in 2:32:44 (4th),            |
| 4. Tanji YAHAGI  | in 2:37:11 (8th).            |

Heading the list at the time was Leslie PAWSON (USA) at 2:31:01,6h.

In the following year this development continued: 18th of November 1934 in Tokyo:

- |                     |                   |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Yasuo JKENAKA    | in 2:34:30 (4th), |
| 2. Fusashige SUZUKI | in 2:36:30.       |

23rd of November 1934 in Osaka:

- |                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Tamao SHIWAKU     | in 2:32:56 (3rd), |
| 2. Shigenobu ARAI    | in 2:35:14 (5th), |
| 3. Shinichi NAKAMURA | in 2:35:19 (6th), |
| 4. Kozo KUSUNOKI     | in 2:36:07 (9th). |

The top runners in the world ranking were now Patrick DENGIS (USA) at 2:31:30h and David KOMONEN (CAN) at 2:32:58,8h.

The experts pricked up their ears as Kitei SON finished in 2:26:14h, on March 21st 1935, in Tokyo. There was doubt though about the length of the race. It seemed to have been too short. SON had finished in outstanding times previously, but always over slightly shorter distances: In his first "marathon" in Seoul on

10.10.1933	2:29:34, there on
22.04.1934	even 2:24:51 and on
08.10.1934	2:32:19.



Other Japanese races in 1935, that covered the full 42,2 km now saw many times under the 2:30:00 h mark.

On March 31st the 22-year-old Fusashige SUZUKI, who only on March 21st had finished second behind SON, set a new world-record in Tokyo, finishing in 2:27:49h.

Only four days later, on April 3rd 1935, SUZUKI and SON competed anew in Tokyo. But the winner was Yasuo IKENAKA, who on his part improved the world-record, finishing in 2:26:44h. The times of SUZUKI (2nd in 2:33:05h) and SON, who had been leading until the half-way-point, (3rd in 2:39:24h) were still remarkable. On the same day a second race took place in Tokyo:

- |                      |             |
|----------------------|-------------|
| 1. Tamao SHIWAKU     | in 2:31:45, |
| 2. Kozo KUSUNOKI     | in 2:32:05, |
| 3. Shinichi NAKAMURA | in 2:33:52. |

On June 5th 1935 Kenichi SAGARA finished in 2:34:37 h in Tokyo.

Towards the end of 1935 though, all these times were yet again beaten. Kitei SON returned to Korea and ran the shorter distance in Seoul

on 18.05.1935	in 2:24:28 (1st),
	in autumn there
on 29.09.1935	in 2:42:02 (42,2 km) and
on 09.10.1935	in 2:33:39 (2nd),
1 <sup>st</sup> Chosun RYU	in 2:31:27.

\* I owe a debt of gratitude to Brendan Birch for doing the translation.

After this, SON returned to Tokyo again to compete in the national championships of Japan. In spite of having a stitch during the first kilometers of the race, he finished in 2:26:42h, thus setting a new world-record. A good four minutes later Tomao SHIWAKU (2nd) and Shinichi NAKAMURA (3rd) crossed the line together after a sprint finish:

1. Kitei SON in 2:26:42,
2. Tomao SHIWAKU in 2:31:21,
3. Shinichi NAKAMURA in 2:31:21,
4. Shoryu NAN in 2:36:52.

On November 23rd the 2:30:00h mark was beaten for the fourth time:

1. Shinichi NAKAMURA in 2:29:55,
2. Kozo KUSUNOKI in 2:34:05,
3. Nobaru HIKOE in 2:34:45.

The top-ten-list of 1935 was almost completely in Japanese hands, with Japanese runners taking the places 1 to 7 and the tenth place. Solely the Americans John A. KELLEY (8th in 2:32:07h) and Patrick DENGIS (9th in 2:34:11h) were able to squeeze in between 7th and 10th place.

The Japanese continued to run well in 1936. On March 15th 1936 Tamao SHIWAKU finished in 2:26:53h in Sakaide on a probably shorter distance. Yasuo IKENAKA finished in 2:33:56h on March 29th in Tokyo. On April 18th in Tokyo the winner was

1. Kitei SON in 2:28:32,
2. Shinichi NAKAMURA in 2:32:48,
3. Fusashige SUZUKI in 2:37:01.

The deciding qualification-marathon for the Olympic Games though, took place on May 21st 1936 in bad marathon-weather. It was a surprise to see Shoryu NAN win the competition, as he had gone into the race with his best-time, of 2:32:33h, dating back into 1933:

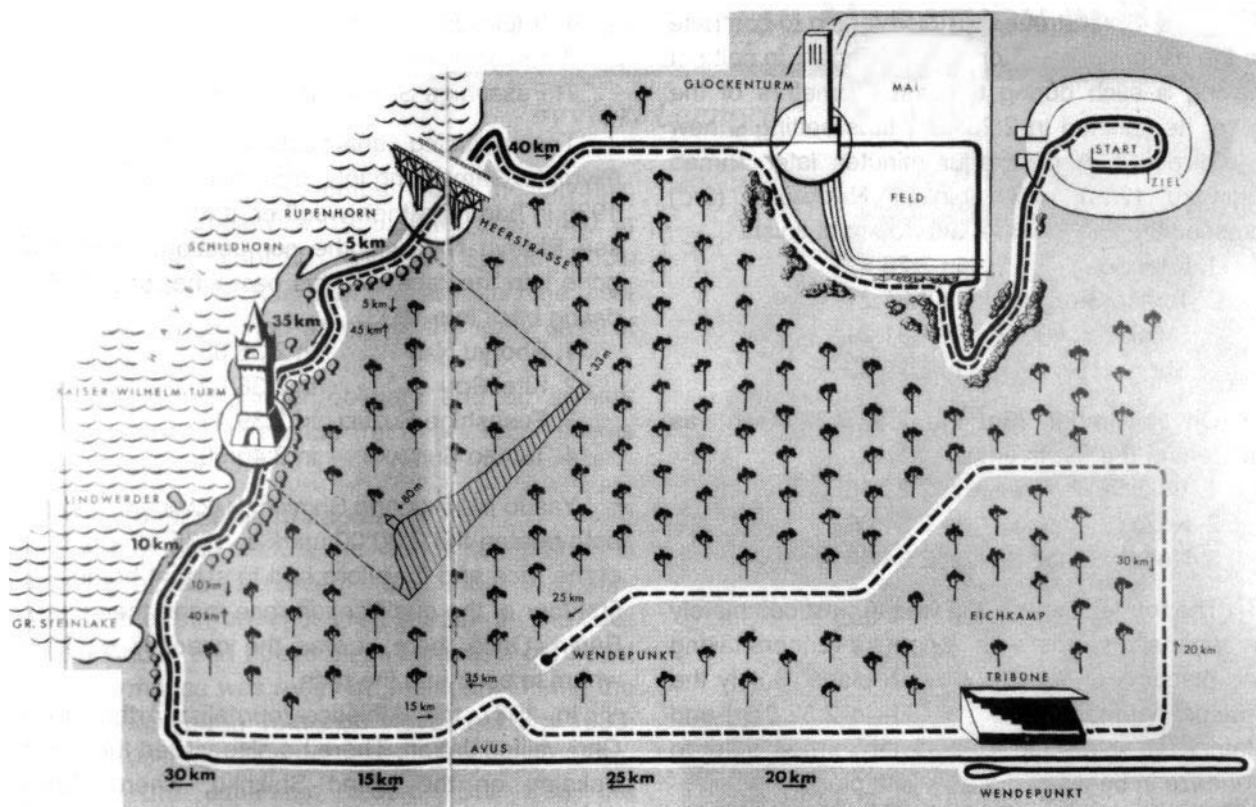
1. Shoryu NAN in 2:36:03,
2. Kitei SON in 2:38:02,
3. Fusashige SUZUKI in 2:39:41,
4. Tamao SHIWAKU in 2:40:50.

Yasuo IKENAKA and Shinichi NAKAMURA, who had both beaten the 2:30:00 mark in 1935, dropped out of the race and therefore had to stay at home. The first four of the qualification-race made their way to Berlin. Once there, it was the coaches decision, whom to send into the race.

In 1937 the Athletics-Journalist Arthur Ernst GRIX visited Japan. There he also visited the village Sakaido on the island Shikoku, where Tamao SHIWAKU had finished a slightly shorter race in 2:26:53 h on March 15th 1936. Here sea-salt was won by drying water on wide fields. Men had to rip open the salt crust by running up and down the field all day long, like draught animals, pulling long rakes. Kanematzu YAMADA, fourth of the Games of

1. Kitei SON*	JPN	03.11.1935	Tokyo	2:26:42
2. Yasuo IKENAKA	JPN	03.04.1935	Tokyo	2:26:44
3. Fasashige SUZUKI	JPN	31.03.1935	Tokyo	2:27:49
Kitei SON*	JPN	18.04.1936	Tokyo	2:28:32
4. Shinichi NAKAMURA	JPN	23.11.1935	Osaka	2:29:55
5. Tamao SHIWAKU*	JPN	03.11.1935	Tokyo	2:31:21
Shinichi NAKAMURA	JPN	03.11.1935	Tokyo	2:31:21
6. Choshun RYU	JPN	18.10.1935	Seoul	2:31:27
7. Johannes COLEMAN*	SOA	11.04.1936	Port Elizabeth	2:31:57
8. Kozo KUSUNOKI	JPN	03.04.1935	Tokyo	2:32:05
9. John KELLEY*	USA	19.04.1935	Boston	2:32:07
10. Henry GIBSON*	SOA	11.04.1936	Port Elizabeth	2:32:09
Shinichi NAKAMURA	JPN	18.04.1936	Tokyo	2:32:48
Fusashige SUZUKI	JPN	03.04.1935	Tokyo	2:33:05
Kitei SON	JPN	09.10.1935	Seoul	2:33:39
11. Ellison BROWN*	USA	19.04.1936	Boston	2:33:40
Yasuo IKENAKA	JPN	29.03.1936	Tokyo	2:33:56
Kozo KUSUNOKI	JPN	23.11.1935	Osaka	2:34:05
12. Patrick DENGIS	USA	19.04.1935	Boston	2:34:11
13. Kenichi SAGARA	JPN	05.05.1935	Tokyo	2:34:37
14. Duncan McNAB ROBERTSON*	GBR	11.07.1936	London	2:35:02
15. Ernst HARPER*	GBR	11.07.1936	London	2:35:03,
16. Bert NORRIS	GBR	13.06.1936	London	2:35:20
17. William McMAHON*	USA	19.04.1936	Boston	2:35:27
18. Melvin PORTER*	USA	19.04.1936	Boston	2:35:48
19. Shoryu NAN*	JPN	21.05.1936	Tokyo	2:36:03

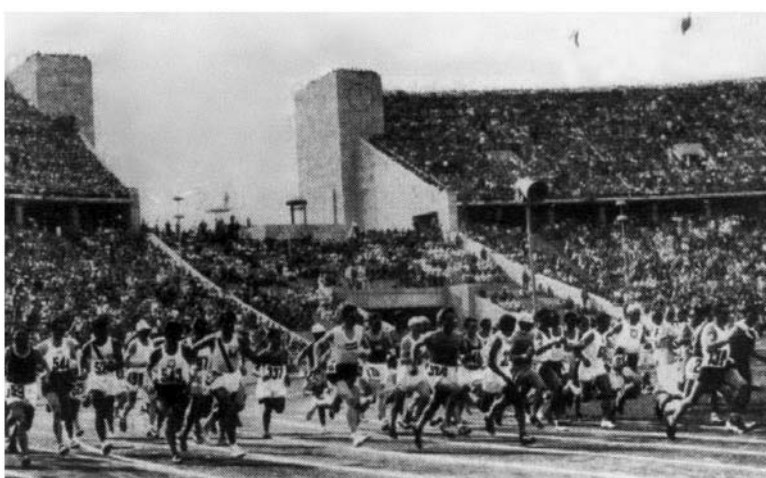
\*participant at the Olympic marathon 1936 in Berlin



Course of the Race

Amsterdam, and his disciple Tamoa SHIWAKU both earned a living doing this job. Just like Shinichi NAKAMURA, Toshio KAWAGUCHI (1936 - 2:30:12h on shorter distance) and ISUSHIMA (1936 - 2:34:16h). All in all 150 marathon runners are supposed to have lived in this village, running several extra kilometers around the fields after work.

Shortly before the Olympic Games of Berlin in 1936 the world-marathon-ranking (above) showed a clear "Japanese superiority"



Just after the start

### 3. The Berlin marathon-route and conditions

Zabala takes the lead in the stadium

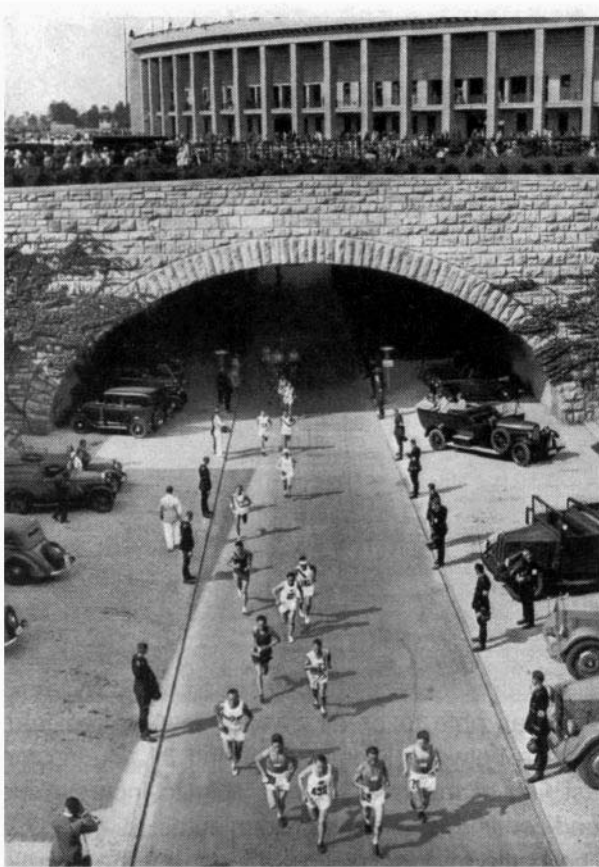
Just like many of the previous Berlin marathons, the Olympic marathon of 1936 led from the "German Stadium" through the "Grunewald" and back. The route was almost the same as during the German Championships of 1931, where Paul de Bruyn won in 2:47:19h.

From today's perspective it was not ideal though:

*"Except for very short stretches on cobblestone only tarmac and macadam-tarred roads (on the 'Avus Beton-straße'), accompanied to great extent by hard sand-lanes" <sup>1</sup>*



1 Organisationskomitee für die XI. Olympiade Berlin 1936 (Hg.), *Amtlicher Bericht*, Bd. 2, Berlin 1937, S. 646. [Organising Committee for the XI. Olympiad Berlin 1936 (Ed.), *Official Report*, Vol. 2, Berlin 1937, p. 646].



Zabala  
alone in  
front

early afternoon. And then the end of the so called 'Havelcourse' is reached." [...]

The marathon-runners

"turn left at the end of the 'Havelstrecke' until they reach gate #13 of the Avus, the big motor racing circuit. Here the athletes await their biggest challenge yet! 9 kilometers on a dead straight concrete road, there and back! On a hot day this 'Autobahn', rolled out in front of the runners like a shiny runway, opens the door for the tactical runner."<sup>2</sup>

As the  
athletes  
leave the  
stadium

Although the first ten and the last ten kilometers led along the winding "Havelchausee" through the forest and alongside the river "Havel", almost 50 meters difference in height (of these 30 up to a thousand meters) had to be overcome within short distance between kilometre five and seven resp. 32 and 35. The monotony of the long straights of the Avus between kilometre 13 and 21, then turning point and up to the 30 km mark, also constituted a problem for the athletes:

*"At the 'Rupenhorn', where the many sailing-boats lie, the road leads uphill a bit: we have reached Schildhorn. A short, rough ascent and the gravel-road leads into the forest, where a long and strenuous ascent at kilometer 7 leads up to the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Tower, the highest point in the 'Grunewald'. Down it goes again on the other side and the road turns towards the right, where it meets the Havel. On the right the beach and on the left wooded hills, this is how the runner passes by the 10 kilometer mark. Then a small ravine, which leads the road away from the Havel into the forest, and a long ascent is to be mastered again. Once again a shady road, whose high trees even defy the powerful sun during the*

The course was cordoned off "hermetically", as they put it, by the police and helpers, who spread out alongside the course: one every 100 metres. Many doctors and paramedics were standing by and also telephone booths were put up. The whole 42 kilometres were signposted and 15 control- and food supply-points were installed. A million spectators are supposed to have stood alongside the course during the race.

It was dry and sunny on August 9th 1936, the "marathon-Sunday", as it was called. There was hardly any wind blowing. Between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. the temperatures varied between 21 and 22.3°C.

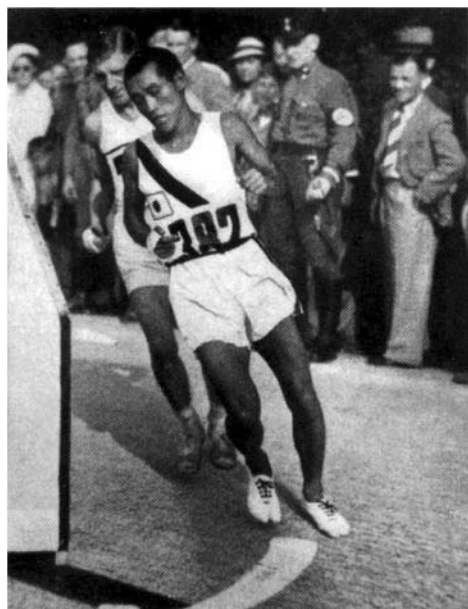
According to the programme, 59 athletes from 28 countries had entered for the competition, but at the start of the race on August 9th, 3 p.m. it was only 56 athletes from 27 countries.

#### 4. The progress of the race

Immediately after the start of the race the titleholder, Juan Carlos ZABALA<sup>3</sup>, shot to the front of the pack and consequently increased his lead, running kilometre times of 3:15 to 3:20.

2 Organisationskomitee für die XI. Olympiade Berlin 1936 (Hg.), *Olympische Spiele 1936. Offizielles Organ der XI. Olympischen Spiele Berlin 1936* (1936)15, S. 26 [Organising Committee for the XI. Olympiade Berlin 1936 (ed.), *Olympic Games 1936. Official Organ of the XI. Olympic Games in Berlin 1936* (1936)15, p. 26.].

3 ZABALA, Carlos (1911-1983), was Olympic champion in Los Angeles 1932 in 2:31:36 h (best time), came 6th in the 10.000 metres of Berlin on August 2nd in 31:22,0 min; he had been in Germany for months in advance, to prepare for the Olympic Games and had had astonishing results in the shorter distances: 19.04.1936 - Munich 20 km in 1:04:00,2 h (worlds best time), 27.04.1936 - Nürnberg, 25 km in 1:26:54 h, 10.05.1936 - Berlin, 10.000 m in 31:02,4 min (Argentinean record), 22.05.1936 - Nürnberg, 10.000 m in 30:56,2 min (Argentinean record).



Kitei Son  
and Harper  
at the half-  
way-point

Son and  
Harper  
facing the  
finish



The distance to the Portugese DIAZ<sup>4</sup>, running in second position, increased to two minutes. DIAZ had made the mistake of running in new shoes. At kilometre 20 he had to stop and put on different ones, which he borrowed from a Hitler-boy, to finish as 17th in 2:49:00h.

Was ZABALA that confident of his own victory, or was it for fear of the Japanese runners, whose recent results had not gone unnoticed? It took him exactly one hour to run the first 18 kilometres. Projected onto the full distance, this would have meant a time of 2:21:00h. But he had already reduced his pace at this stage of the race - 3:35 min/km - and had to continue to slow down to 3:45 min/km, before reaching the half-way-point.

In the meantime Kitei SON (JPN) and Ernest HARPER<sup>5</sup> (GBR), who had not gone all out at the start, were constantly closing the gap between themselves and ZABALA. They were averaging 3:30 min/km and it was quite obvious, that ZABALA had already lost. Shortly after kilometre 28 the two runners overtook the winner of 1932, who collapsed disappointed, pulled himself together again, only to drop out of the race a few kilometres further on, exhausted. After the Games it was said in the press, that ZABALA had been suffering of an

inflamed jawbone. Was that the reason for his tactics, to start of at a tremendous pace?

SON was able to break away a few metres from HARPER between kilometre 28 and 31. During the last fifth of the race he was able to increase his lead continuously to over two minutes.

The battle for third place was won by the second Japanese runner, Shoryu NAN<sup>6</sup>, who was being chased by the two Finnish runners, Erkki TAMILA<sup>7</sup> and Väinö MUINONEN<sup>8</sup>. He is said to have had to run in this group, in order to give SON the necessary back-up support. In any case the Finns would not have been able to come anywhere near SON'S time.

Let us "listen" to an authentic source of the stadium-finish:

*"The Olympic Stadium is already close by From the pinnacle of the marathon-tower a flourish of trumpets is to be heard. The Olympic signal announces the arrival of the first runner. Only seconds later a thin, tanned athlete, wearing white clothes with a red Japanese sun on the chest, crosses the marathon-gate. Kitei Son, who is greeted by tremendous cheers, runs the last 200 metres in brilliant shape and crosses the finishing line as if he had only run one lap in the stadium. Finishing in 2:29:19,2 he betters Zabalas existing record by over two minutes.*

4 . DIAZ, Manuel (\*1905), Portugese champion from 1937 to 1941, came second in 1937 at the Polytechnic Harriers Marathon in London, Best time 2:37:20h, later 2:30:36h (1937).

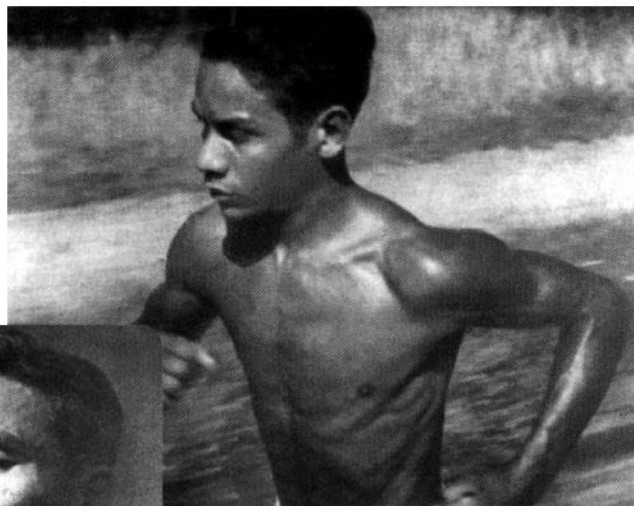
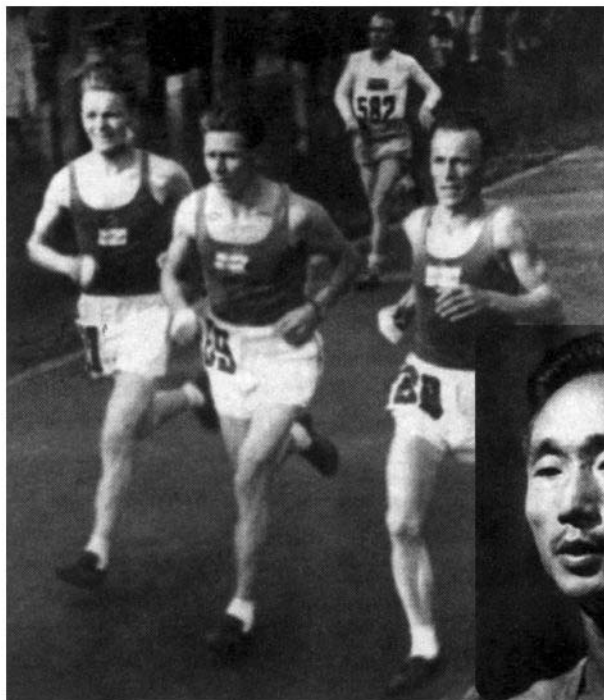
5 HARPER, Ernest (\*1902), 22nd in the Olympic Games 1928 in 2:45:44h, finished second in the British Championship in London on 11.07.1936 (2:35:04h); British Champion over 10 Miles in 1923, 1926, 1927 and 1929; 1927 - British Crosschampion, 1926 1st Cross of Nations, 25.08.1929 in Berlin 25 km in 1:23:45,8h (world best time).

6 NAN, Shoryu (\*1912), fastest time (2:32:33 h) on 03.11.1933 in Tokyo as 2nd of the Japanese Championships.

7 TAMILA, Erkki (\*1911) had finished the 25 km in Joensuu in 1:21:27h (world best time).

8 MUINONEN, Väinö (\*1898), stood at the beginning of his career, European Champion in Paris on 04.09.1938 in 2:37:29 h, achieved a personal best time on 21.07.1946 at 2:33:03h in Vuoksenniska, 2nd of the European Championships in Oslo one month later on 22.08.1946 in 2:26:08 (40 km), at the age of 51 still finished in 2:36:23h (8th) on 02.10.1949 in Turku.





The Indian Ellison "Tarzan" Brown

The three Finns in pursuit

Shoryu Nan, winner of the Bronze medal

following runners were the Finns Tamila and Muinonen, followed by the South African Coleman and in 7th position the English athlete Robertson, who had put on the pace in the closing stages of the race."<sup>6</sup>

The Japanese are wild with excitement. Harper, who finishes second, also makes a good impression and is greeted by the crowd in the same manner Son was greeted. During the last few kilometres Harper though, had to battle of Nan for second place, who himself had become stronger and stronger as the race progressed. Nan finished in third place to the great excitement of his fellow countrymen. The

The two German athletes, Paul de BRUYN<sup>10</sup> and Franz BARSICKE<sup>11</sup> (muscle injury) dropped out of the race. The only German runner to cross the finishing line was Eduard BRÄSICKE<sup>12</sup>. It took him just under three hours.

1. Son (Japan) . . . . .	2:29.19,2 <sup>1)</sup>		
2. Harper (Großbritannien) . . . . .	2:31.23,2 <sup>1)</sup>		
3. Nan (Japan) . . . . .	2:31.42,0		
4. Tamila (Finnland) . . . . .	2:32.45,0		
5. Muinonen (Finnland) . . . . .	2:33.40,0		
6. Coleman (Südafrika) . . . . .	2:36.17,0		
7. Robertson (Großbritannien) . . . . .	2:37.06,2	19. Luňák (Tschechoslowakei) . . . . .	2:50.26,0
8. Gibson (Südafrika) . . . . .	2:38.04,0	20. Meskens (Belgien) . . . . .	2:51.19,0
9. Tarkainen (Finnland) . . . . .	2:39.33,0	21. Takač (Tschechoslowakei) . . . . .	2:51/20,0
10. Enochsson (Schweden) . . . . .	2:43.12,0	22. Wöber (Österreich) . . . . .	2:51.28,0
11. Kyriakides (Griechenland) . . . . .	2:43.20,9	23. Gall (Rumänien) . . . . .	2:55.02,0
12. Khaleb (Frankreich) . . . . .	2:45.34,0	24. Nevens (Belgien) . . . . .	2:55.51,0
13. Palmé (Schweden) . . . . .	2:46.08,4	25. Andersen, H. (Dänemark) . . . . .	2:56.31,0
14. Tuschek (Österreich) . . . . .	2:46.29,0	26. Mendoza (Peru) . . . . .	2:57.17,8
15. Bartlett (Kanada) . . . . .	2:48.21,4	27. Lalande (Südafrika) . . . . .	2:57.20,0
16. Duval (Frankreich) . . . . .	2:48.39,8	28. Motmillers (Lettland) . . . . .	2:58.02,0
17. Dias (Portugal) . . . . .	2:50.00,0	29. Braesicke (Deutschland) . . . . .	2:59.33,4
18. Kelley (USA) . . . . .	2:49.32,4	30. Wyer (Kanada) . . . . .	3:00.11,0
		31. Leheurteur (Frankreich) . . . . .	3:01.11,0
		32. Rothmayer (Österreich) . . . . .	3:02.32,0
		33. Gancarz (Polen) . . . . .	3:03.11,0
		34. Beer (Schweiz) . . . . .	3:06.26,0
		35. Suarez (Peru) . . . . .	3:08.18,0
		36. Haralambieff (Bulgarien) . . . . .	3:08.53,8
		37. Swami (Indien) . . . . .	3:10.44,0
		38. Šulc (Tschechoslowakei) . . . . .	3:11.47,4
		39. Eha (Schweiz) . . . . .	3:18.17,0
		40. Wang (China) . . . . .	3:25.36,4
		41. Šporn (Jugoslawien) . . . . .	3:30.47,0
		42. Farias (Peru) . . . . .	3:33.24,0

Aufgegeben hatten: Zabala (Argentinien), Brown (USA), Oliva (Argentinien), Shiwaku (Japan), de Bruyn (Deutschland), Barsicke (Deutschland), Mendes (Portugal), Genghini (Italien), Bulzone (Italien), McMahon (USA), Acosta (Chile), Fialka (Polen), Webster (Kanada), Norris (Großbritannien).

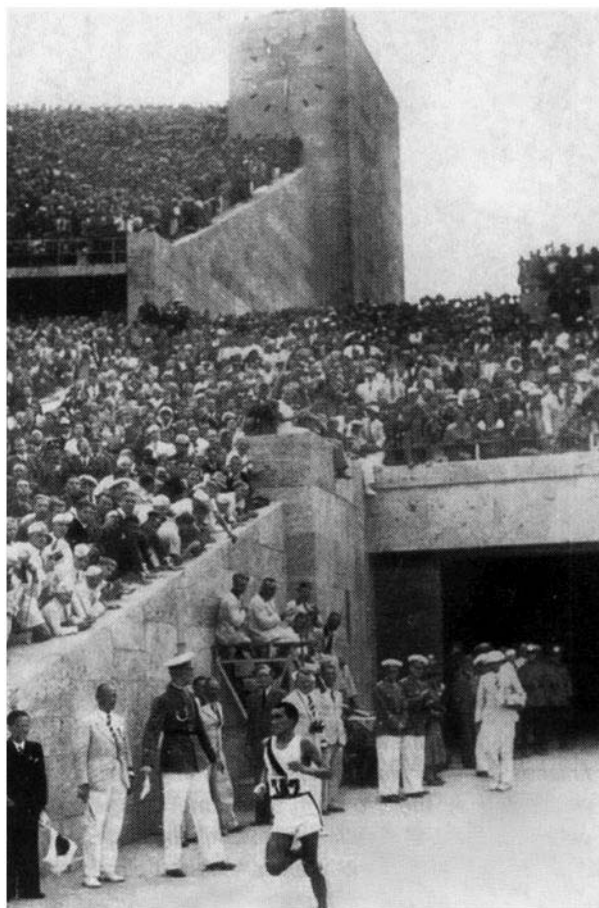
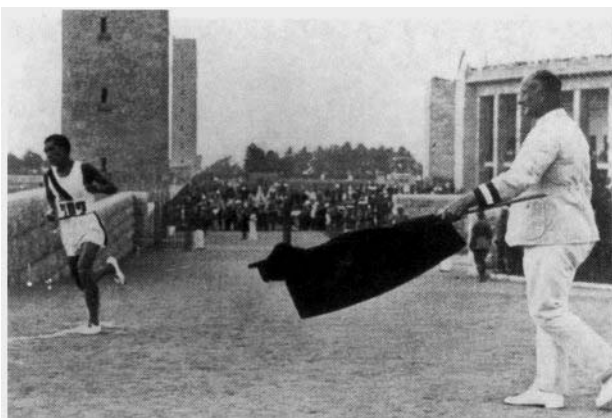
<sup>1)</sup> Besser als Olympischer Rekord.

Interim times, as displayed in the Official Report

9 Cigaretten-Bilderdienst (Hg.), *Die Olympischen Spiele 1936*, Hamburg-Bahrenfeld 1936, Bd. 2. S.55 [Cigaretten-Bilderdienst (ed.), *The Olympic Games 1936*, Hamburg-Bahrenfeld 1936, Vol. 2, p. 55.].

10 De BRUYN, Paul (1907-1997), had emigrated to New York in 1930 and worked there as a technician in a hotel. His talent for long distance running was discovered by chance. De BRUYN, who started for the *DSC New York* resp. the *Berliner SC*, was German champion in 1931 in 2:47:19,2 h. Surprisingly he won the Boston Marathon the following year in 2:33:36,4h (German best time), being the only German to ever win this marathon. He only came 15th in 2:53:39,0h in the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles. In 1934 he finished fourth in 2:38:26 h in Port Chester (his second-best-time).

11 BARSICKE, Franz (1905-1944), Member at the *Post SV Stephan Breslau*, had qualified for the race as German Champion in 1936 in 2:49:38,0h.



## 5. The Result:<sup>13</sup>

- |                                |       |            |  |
|--------------------------------|-------|------------|--|
| 1. Kitei SON                   | (JPN) | 2:29:20,   |  |
| 2. Ernest HARPER               | (GBR) | 2:31:24,   |  |
| 3. Shoryu NAN                  | (JPN) | 2:31:42,   |  |
| 4. Erkki TAMILA                | (FIN) | 2:32:45,   |  |
| 5. Väinö MUINONEN              | (FIN) | 2:33:46,   |  |
| 6. Johannes COLEMAN            | (SOA) | 2:36:17,   |  |
| 7. Duncan McNab ROBERTSON      | (GBR) | 2:37:01,   |  |
| 8. Henry GIBSON                | (SOA) | 2:38:04,   |  |
| 9. Mauno TARKAINEN             | (FIN) | 2:39:33,   |  |
| 10. Thore ENOCHSSON            | (SWE) | 2:43:12,   |  |
| 11. Stylianos KYRIAKIDES       | (GRE) | 2:43:21,   |  |
| 12. Nouba KHALEB               | (FRA) | 2:45:34,   |  |
| 13. Henry PALMÉ                | (SWE) | 2:46:09,   |  |
| 14. Franz TUSCHEK              | (AUT) | 2:46:29,   |  |
| 15. James BARTLETT             | (CAN) | 2:48:22,   |  |
| 16. Francois DUVAL             | (FRA) | 2:48:40,   |  |
| 17. Manoel DIAS                | (POR) | 2:49:00,   |  |
| 18. John KELLEY                | (USA) | 2:49:33,   |  |
| 19. Miloslav LUNAK             | (CZE) | 2:50:26,   |  |
| 20. Felix MESKENS              | (BEL) | 2:51:19,   |  |
| 21. Jan TAKAC                  | (CZE) | 2:51:20,   |  |
| 22. Rudolf WÖBER               | (AUT) | 2:51:28,   |  |
| 23. Ludovic GALL               | (ROM) | 2:55:02,   |  |
| 24. Robert NEVENS              | (BEL) | 2:55:51,   |  |
| 25. Anders HARTINGTON-ANDERSEN | (DAN) | 2:56:31,   |  |
| 26. Gabriel MENDOZA            | (PER) | 2:57:18,   |  |
| 27. Tommy LALANDE              | (SOA) | 2:57:20,   |  |
| 28. Arturs MOTMILLERS          | (LET) | 2:58:02,   |  |
| 29. Eduard BRAESICKE           | (GER) | 2:59:34,   |  |
| 30. Percival WYER              | (CAN) | 3:00:11,   |  |
| 31. Fernand LEHEURTEUR         | (FRA) | 3:01:11,   |  |
| 32. Wilhelm ROTHMAYER          | (AUT) | 3:02:32,   |  |
| 33. Bronislaw GANCARZ          | (POL) | 3:03:11,   |  |
| 34. Max BEER                   | (SUI) | 3:06:26,   |  |
| 35. Guillermo SUAREZ           | (PER) | 3:08:18,   |  |
| 36. Boris HARALAMBIEFF         | (BUL) | 3:08:54,   |  |
| 37. Arul SWAMI                 | (IND) | 3:10:44,   |  |
| 38. Josef SULC                 | (CZE) | 3:11:48,   |  |
| 39. Franz EHA                  | (SWI) | 3:18:17,   |  |
| 40. Tsung-Ling WANG            | (CHN) | 3:25:37,   |  |
| 41. Stane SPORN                | (YUG) | 3:30:47,   |  |
| 42. José FARJAS-RIOS           | (PER) | 3:33:24,   |  |
| Juan Carlos ZABALA             | (ARG) | abandoned, |  |
| Ellison BROWN                  | (USA) | abandoned, |  |
| Luis OLIVA                     | (ARG) | abandoned, |  |
| Tamao SHIWAKU                  | (JPN) | abandoned, |  |
| Paul De BRUYN                  | (GER) | abandoned, |  |
| Franz BARSICKE                 | (GER) | abandoned, |  |
| Jaime MENDES                   | (POR) | abandoned, |  |
| Aurelio GENGHINI               | (ITA) | abandoned, |  |
| Giannino BULZONE               | (ITA) | abandoned, |  |
| William McMAHON                | (USA) | abandoned, |  |
| Juan ACOSTA                    | (CHI) | abandoned, |  |
| Kazmierz FIALKA                | (POL) | abandoned, |  |
| Harold WEBSTER                 | (CAN) | abandoned, |  |
| Bert NORRIS                    | (GBR) | abandoned. |  |

12 BRÄSICKE, Eduard (\*1905), started for the *SV Werkverein der Bewag Berlin* resp. *Osram Berlin*, had run his fastest time at the German championships of 1932, where he finished second in 2:43:40h. He had qualified for the Olympic Marathon of Berlin in 2:55:37,0h (3rd) at the German championships of 1936.

13 Organisationskomitee für die XI. Olympiade Berlin 1936, *Amtlicher Bericht*, Bd. 1, Berlin 1937, S. 646-647.



Kitei Son crossing the finishing line

The presentation ceremony



Marathon - too dangerous? - nurses had to hand drinks to athletes

## 6. Rating and importance of the marathon of Berlin

For the spectators, the organisers, the press and the other media the marathon probably was the most important event of the Games 1936. Of course we do not want to forget the outstanding performances of Jesse OWENS.

In many of the pre-publications there was always talk about the runner of Marathon. Of course the mythical death of the messenger just after the battle of Marathon was of great ideological value for the NS-regime.

From 1912 to 1948 competitions in the different kinds of arts had taken place during the modern Olympic Games. Was it a coincidence, that the German actor, poet and director Felix *Dhünen-Sondinger* (1896-1939) received a gold

medal in the competition of lyrical work, for his verses *Der Läufer* [*The Runner*], which described the run from Marathon to Athens after the great battle?

The previous year the Austrian author Alexander *Lernet-Holenia* had written an Olympic hymn called *Der Marathonlauf* [*The Marathon*].

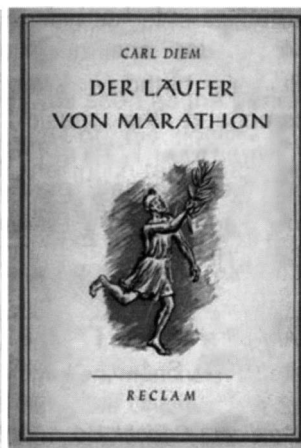
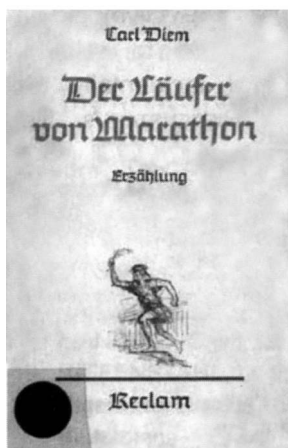
Carl DIEM, the Secretary General of the Olympic Games of Berlin, enlarged his 1923 novella *Der Läufer von Marathon* [*The Runner of Marathon*] and published it in the *Olympia-Zeitung* [*Olympic Newspaper*] in 1936 with the title "Wir haben gesiegt" [*We won*]. In the same year it was published as a book in the *Reichssportverlag* and later in the *Reclam-Verlag* in 1941 and 1943 with the old title *Der Läufer von Marathon* [*The Runner of Marathon*].

In his novella *Der Läufer* [*The Runner*] from 1939, Hermann STAHL describes how a German boy discovers his passion for running, trains nonstop and finally takes part in a marathon, only to die happily after having crossed the finishing line.

The importance of the marathon could already be seen during the weeks preceding the Games. As the Greek team arrived in Berlin, the *Olympia-Zeitung* of July 31st 1936, frontpaged a big photo of the old Spiridon LOUIS, who received a bouquet of flowers from the "Orderly Officer" of the Reception Committee. The signature of the photo shows us, that Louis had been invited to Germany as a guest. This gesture was later also taken over by Munich, who in 1972 invited the then paralised Olympic champion of Rome and Tokyo, Abebe BIKILA, to the Games.

As the author visited the descendants of Louis in 1989, he saw the invitation from the president of the organising committee, Theodor LEWALD, the Olympic passport and the ticket of honour.

During the opening ceremony on August 1st Louis, as it were, was the first athlete to enter the stadium, walking directly behind the Greek flag and next to the team captain.





After arriving in Berlin, Louis presents a twig of the olive tree from the grove in Olympia to Adolf Hitler at the opening ceremony



According to the *Official Report* the programme of the opening ceremony showed: "17.25: The "Führer" receives the Oiltwig of Olympia from the marathon-champion of 1896, Louis"<sup>14</sup>

In his book *Hitlers Olympiade. Berlin 1936* the American sport historian and marathon runner, Richard MANDELL, describes the scene as follows:

"The following incident swore to history and produced nostalgia. A thin man, wearing a Greek Fustanella, stepped forward from the Greek delegation. He had recently attracted attention, walking at the head of the Greek team as they entered the stadium. It was the aged Spiridon Loues! As the hero of heroes of the Games of 1896 stepped forward to meet Adolf Hitler tears trickled down his dark, wrinkled face. He presented the "Führer" with the green twig from the olive tree of the holy Olymp – the seat of the Greek gods of the antique. Loues said: 'I present to you this olive twig as a symbol of love and peace. We hope the people of the world will only meet for such peaceful contest.'" <sup>15</sup>

The photo of this incident was to be seen in all the newspapers and of course this created even more excitement and interest for the upcoming "Marathon-Sunday".

After the Games had finished, the Greek team let Louis write resp. wrote for him:

"When you invited me, I started of on a journey to Germany, which I was very anxious to get to know, full of expectation. But everything I saw beat these expectations. I thank you, that you gave me the opportunity to experience all this again. Until the end of my days I will have many a story to tell about this Olympic celebration."<sup>16</sup>

Being the "biggest track and field event of the Olympic Games", the marathon also played a special role in radio broadcasting:

"It was therefore decided upon, that a special music was to be crated in order to underline radio feature. The composer Herbert Windt was chosen to do the job.

The task would have been easy, had the composer portrayed the expected proceedings of the marathon in an orchestral succession: the course of events, the battle, tiredness and collapse and victory. Instead of wasting a richness of atmospheric harmonies, he confined himself to just a few topics, wich he "weaved" together contra-punctually and played recurrently. He arranged his composition in three settings, a short Scherzo at the beginning, a continuous, first slow, then faster "Laufschrittsatz" and a short but victorious and mighty end. The trick was, that a single running-rhythm, which never stopped and pulled the different parts together, dominated the whole composition.

The persons in charge of the programme now had to fit the different parts of the music into the alternating stages of the race: start, race and finish. The same procedure had to be applied for the transition between music and radio report. Here the music had to begin with last spoken word of the radio announcer"<sup>17</sup>

The radio feature can be heard on one of the Olympia LP's. WINDT'S music was also played by the *Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra* during the premiere of Leni RIEFENSTAHL'S Olympia-Film, which was shown on April 20th to celebrate HITLER'S birthday. WINDT had incidentally also composed the music for RIEFENSTAHL'S films *Triumph des Willens* [*Triumph of the Will*] (1934) and the Olympia-Films *Fest der Völker* [*Festival of the People*] and *Fest der Schönheit* [*Festival of Beauty*] (1938).

14 Organisations-Komitee für die XI. Olympiade Berlin 1936, *Amtlicher Bericht*, Bd. 1, S. 576.

15 MANDELL, Richard, *Hitlers Olympiade. Berlin 1936*, München 1980, S. 145.

16 *Diem-Archive*.

17 Organisations-Komitee für die XI. Olympiade Berlin 1936, *Amtlicher Bericht*, Bd. 1, p. 341-342.



Leni Riefenstahl shot this picture of the shadows of the two leading runners

The shoes with the split front

Of course the marathon played a big part in RIEFENSTAHL'S Olympia-Film. Richard MANDELL describes:

*"And finally the marathon. Kitei Son drags himself on and on. The camera focuses on his legs, his arms, on his face, which reveals only little of his racked, but untameable will. Even Windts music to the film tries to depict the battle between mind and body Exhausted marathon runners loose their natural running-rhythm. The body refuses to obey. Is that a simile? Is it supposed to characterise this event? But Kitei Son is able to increase his pace in the final sprint. His weaker rivals fall into the arms of their coaches, who await them with warm blankets and comforting words. The film comes to an abrupt end with shots of flags and the Olympic bell."*<sup>18</sup>

Leni RIEFENSTAHL confirms this interpretation in her memoirs from 1987:

*"I drove to Bad Harzburg for a few days with some of my employees, to discuss the marathon. On the way there I thought about how to dramatise a 42 kilometre long run in a film. I tried to put myself into the runners position: his weariness and exhaustion, how his feet stick to the tarmac and he tries to reach the stadium with all his will-power. I could also hear the whipping music, which keeps the tired body going throughout the race, before it goes over into the cheers of the crowd, as the athletes arrive in the stadium and cross the finishing line. Until then it was only an optical vision and we had to try to make it real."*<sup>19</sup>

The winner, Kitei SON, was seen as the perfect marathon runner because of his looks and posture. The Asian with the inscrutable face, as he was called, allegedly personified the ascetic hero, who the marathon runners were seen to be:

*"Kitei Son is certainly the ideal marathon runner.*

*Small and a lightweight, gifted with a very economical stride, which he can keep up over a long distance. For this long-distance-battle he also possesses the natural toughness of his race. The inexhaustible patience, that is always ready to take great strain upon itself and the exemplary and traditional practice of will-power, form the basis for the successes since 1928."*<sup>20</sup>

A "simple" gold medal was not prize enough for this effort. The newspaper "Vradini" from Athens donated a valuable antique helmet. Because the amateur-status did not allow this, the IOC intervened.

## 7. The "Japanese" Kitei Son

Being the designated host of the 1940 Olympics, the Japanese had put a tremendous effort into the preparation for the Olympic Games of Berlin – the marathon being the main focus, due to the excellent results since 1930.

In order to have enough time for preparation, coach SATO and the four athletes had already made their journey to Berlin some weeks in advance to the Games on the transsiberian railway. SON roused great attention when running, because of his strange running shoes. They were split at the front and the big toe had its own pocket. He was later asked about his shoes and admitted, that it had only been a gag.

On photos, however, it can be seen, that many Japanese long-distance-runners wore these shoes. This was due to the Japanese sandals, which had a binding for the first two toes. As it felt strange for many of the Japanese athletes to wear European shoes, they produced the running shoes in the same sandal-like style.

18 MANDELL, *Olympiade*, p. 240

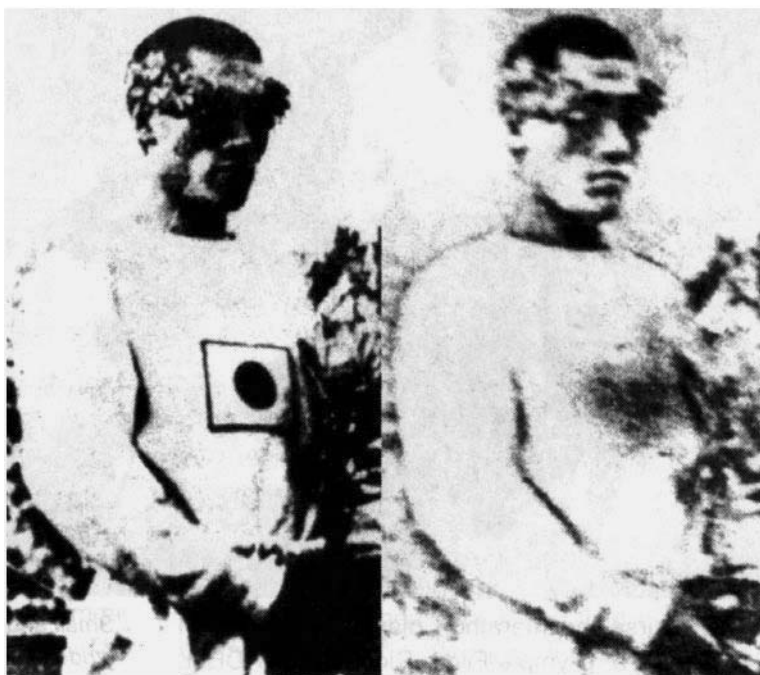
19 RIEFENSTAHL, Leni, *Memoiren*, München/Hamburg 1987, S. 260 [Memoirs, Munich/Hamburg 1987, p. 260].

20 Cigaretten-Bilderdienst (Hg.), *Die Olympischen Spiele 1936*, Hamburg-Bahrenfeld 1936, Bd. 2. S.55 [Cigaretten-Bilderdienst (ed.), *The Olympic Games 1936*, Hamburg-Bahrenfeld 1936, Vol. 2, p. 55].



Japanese helpers taking care of the runners

The photo in the newspaper (right), in which the emblem had been removed



On the day of the race nothing was left to chance. The other Japanese athletes had to spread out along the course. In order to reach as many different points as possible, coach SATO used a car. Team-captain HIRANUMA waited at one of the checkpoints. Here is where all the strategical "strings" came together.

But the winner Kitei SON and third-placed bronze-medallist Shoryu NAN were not Japanese, but born in Korea, which had been annexed by Japan in 1910. In Berlin SON did not hide the fact that he felt Korean. When signing autographs he always wrote his name in Korean and outlined the borders of his native country. Because of this, he got into trouble on his return to Japan. The newspaper *Dong-a-Ilbo* from Seoul, printed the photo of the presentation ceremony and removed the Japanese sun from SON'S tracksuit-top. As a result eight editors were arrested and the newspaper was not allowed to be published for the following nine months.

SON did not start again after Berlin, but he coached the Korean (South, although he was born in the North) marathon runners from London until Melbourne. During the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in London 1948, he carried the Korean Flag.

He is supposed to have taught literature at a Japanese university in 1937. In 1942 it was reported in a German newspaper, that he had been killed in the war. After the Korea War the North-Korea-born SON was a successful businessman in South Korea. He was the president of a mill company, based in Seoul, when

he visited Germany in 1956 for the first time since Berlin 1936. Later he owned a department store in Seoul. Two of his sons were cadets at the American military academy Westpoint. His daughter is married to Chang Hong LEE, fourth of the marathon of Melbourne and winner of the Asian Games in 1958.

As member of the South Korean NOC SON promoted his countries sporty interests all around the world. In doing so, he was also in Germany many a time, for instance 1981 as guest of honour of the first Berlin Marathon.

As had been dictated in 1928 by the IOC, the names of the Olympic champions had to be put up at the entrance of the stadium in Berlin. In fact this took place shortly after the end of the Games on the side walls of the marathon gate.

Since then "KITEI SON" is accounted for as Olympic champion in the marathon. During the late 60s South Korean politicians and the countries NOC tried to have the name changed to "KEE CHUNG SOHN" and the country-name changed from "JPN" to "KOR". Berlin's senate was unable to decide on this matter and the IOC was called upon as mediator. The IOC did not allow any changes to the original inscription, because in 1936 the athlete had started for Japan as Kitei SON. From a legal perspective it is definitely correct to insist on "JPN". In 1936 Korea was not a recognized country, had no NOC and had not taken part in the 1936 Olympics. But the correct name of the athlete is Kee Chung SOHN<sup>21</sup> and should have been changed on the tablet. In October 1970 the Korean representa-tive, Park

21 After World War II SOHN coached the Korean marathon runners and carried the Olympic Flame into the stadium during the opening ceremony of Seoul 1988.



The tablet at the entrance of the Olympic Stadium showing the names of the Olympic champions

Young Rok, had a stonemason change the inscription from "JPN" to "KOR", at night and in total secrecy.<sup>22</sup> The "damage" was soon after repaired though.

In 1982 South Korea, that has taken part in Olympic Games since 1948, was selected as host-country for the 1988 Olympics. The 70 year-old SOHN was member of the organising committee at the time.

In Korea the upcoming marathon was also very important. From autumn 1984 onwards they organised a pre-olympic marathon, and it was Kee Chung SOHN who honoured the winners (1984 – Kjell Erik STAHL, SWE, and Birgit LENNARTZ, FRG). In 1987 Korea organised the Marathon-World-Cup in Seoul.

Although it had been decided upon after the Games of Paris 1924, that special prizes of honour were not to be allowed, another exception was made in the marathon of Berlin 1936. The Greek newspaper *Vradini* had donated a antique helmet for the winner. It had been found during excavations in Olympia in the 1920s and was an armoured helmet with cheek- and nose-protection, dating back to the 6th century b.c. It was part of the booty of a war and had been displayed in a temple, serving as concecrational object. The newspaper had acquired it from an art dealer. The present was supposed to create a connection between the mythical run of the soldier at Marathon and the Olympic marathon.

Following the veto of the IOC, the Secretary General, Carl DIEM, took care of the helmet and took it to the aquarium on the Museum Island. After the war it was displayed in antique collection of the palace of Charlottenburg, the Stülerbau.

Since 1972 Korean officials wanted to take the helmet back home. It had been displayed during the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. Lenghty



The antique helmet, donated for the marathon champion

22 Letter from Gerd STEINS 21.11.1999.

correspondance between the German NOC, the IOC and the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz followed [Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation]. Finally, on August 17th 1987, the helmet was handed over to the winner of the 1936 marathon, Kee Chung SOHN by the German President of the NOC, Willi DAUME.

During the opening ceremony of the 1988 Olympics in Seoul it was Kee Chung SOHN who carried the torch. He entered the stadium, happily hopping like a little child and then handed the torch over to the 19-year-old runner, Chun-Ae LIN<sup>23</sup>, who carried the torch to the pedastal of the Olympic Flame, towering 22 metres above the athletes.



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<sup>23</sup> LIN, Chun-Ae (\*1969), medium-distance-runner, three times champion in the Asia Games of 1986 in Seoul - 17 years old, did not manage to qualify for the final heats.