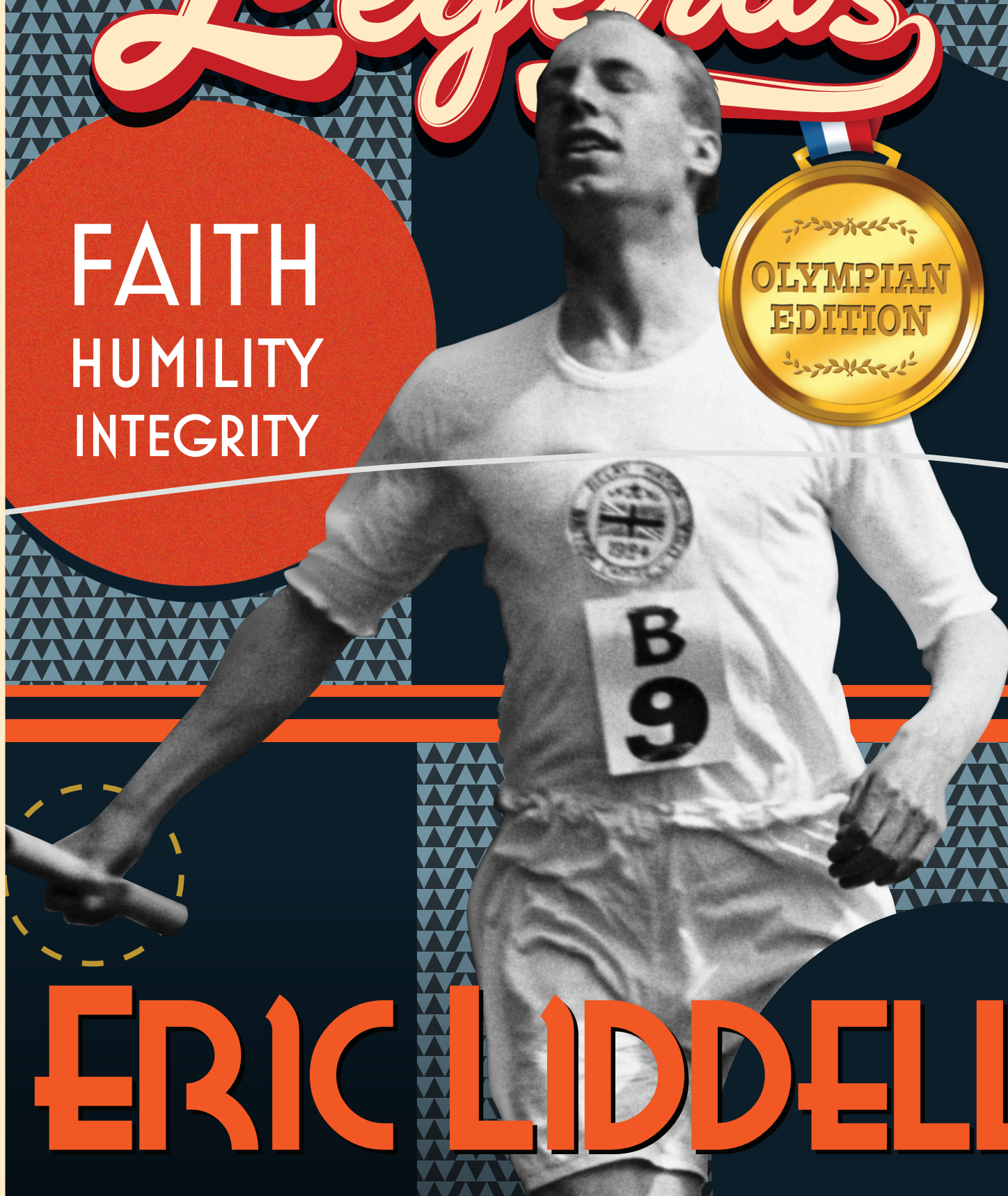


# SPORTS Legends

FAITH  
HUMILITY  
INTEGRITY



# ERIC LIDDELL



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## Childhood

Eric Henry Liddell was born on January 16, 1902, in Tientsin, China. His parents, Reverend James and Mary Liddell, were Scottish **missionaries** who spent their time in China teaching the surrounding villages about Christianity. Eric grew up completely surrounded by his Christian faith and enjoyed listening to the **Parable** of the Lost Sheep during family prayer time, a story that touched him deeply. Eric was known to be a shy and sensitive boy, but that didn't stop him from getting into mischief at times.

During the first five years of his life, Eric lived in a **compound** for missionaries and their families, in Siochang, China. He, his older brother Robert, and his younger sister Jenny were completely immersed in the culture, wearing Chinese clothing and learning to speak both English and Chinese. Eric and his siblings were free to run around and play within the compound grounds under the supervision of their Chinese **amah**, while their parents worked outside the station walls to spread their faith.





SCOTLAND

Drymen, Scotland  
and Tianjin, China  
are 5,027 miles apart.

CHINA

In 1907, the Liddell family traveled to Drymen, Scotland, where Eric got to meet many of his uncles, aunts, and cousins for the very first time. It was a joyful time for the whole family to be reunited.

The green countryside of Scotland was very different from the dry plains of China, but Eric was able to enjoy the town his parents had always called home. In the summer of 1908, though, their family reunion would sadly come to an end. Eric and Rob were enrolled in Eltham College, a Christian boarding school in England for the sons of missionaries, while their parents made the decision to return to China with Jenny to continue their missionary work. During Eric's twelve years at Eltham, his parents, sister, and new brother Ernest came to visit a few times, where the whole family was then able to spend time together at their home in Scotland.



## A Gifted Athlete

While at school, Eric began to demonstrate great promise as an athlete. He excelled in **rugby**, **cricket**, and short-distance running. He and his brother would often take 1st and 2nd places in annual running events. In 1920, Eric continued his studies at Edinburgh University, where he would go on to study science. During his freshman year, Eric was encouraged by a friend to enter two races in the university's annual sports day, and he ended up winning 1st place in the 100-yard dash and 2nd place in the 220-yard race. It was at this time that he began to gain recognition, and he became a celebrity for being the fastest runner in Scotland. Newspaper articles predicted that he might even become an Olympic champion one day. Through all of this, his character never changed, he remained humble, and he never let the attention go to his head. The director of his school even said,

"ERIC WAS ENTIRELY WITHOUT VANITY, YET HE WAS ENORMOUSLY POPULAR. VERY EARLY HE SHOWED SIGNS OF REAL CHARACTER [...] THERE WAS NO FALSE PRIDE ABOUT HIM, BUT HE KNEW WHAT HE STOOD FOR."



In 1922 and 1923, while also playing on the Scottish national rugby team, Eric realized that he didn't have enough time to train for both sports. He decided to make running his main focus. In 1923, he won the 100-yard and 220-yard races at the Amateur Athletics Association Championships. In the 100-yard race, he set a new British **record** of 9.7 seconds, which was a record he held for 35 years. All his training was setting him up for the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris, France, where he was slated to be a **contender** for the gold medal in the 100-meter sprint.

Eric Liddell, winner of the 100 yards flat at the AAA Championships at Stamford Bridge, London, 1924

## Staying Humble

What can you learn from Eric Liddell about being humble, even when you are really good at something?





# The Decision That Would Change It All

Months before the 1924 Olympic Games were to be held, Eric received some news that would drastically alter his Olympic path. The **preliminary trials** for the 100-meter race would be held on a Sunday. Most people wouldn't have given this a second thought, but for Eric, it was a dealbreaker. When Eric began training for the Olympics, it did not occur to him that the races could be held on a Sunday. When he learned what the schedule would be, he knew he could not compete. Eric's devout Christian beliefs meant he regarded Sunday as the Sabbath, a day set aside by God for worship and rest instead of work and play. Because of this, Eric made the decision to withdraw from the 100-meter race, which had always been his strongest event. Some admired his choice to stand firmly in his religious beliefs, while others felt he was throwing away his chances for winning a medal at the Olympics. Others even called him unpatriotic.





He also declined to run in the 4x100 and the 4x400 relay teams, which many thought he would have medaled in as well, because their finals were also scheduled for a Sunday. Since he was unwilling to compromise his beliefs, he set his adjusted Olympic sights on the 200-meter as well as the 400-meter, the latter being a race that he was not favored to win. The months leading up to the Olympics were the

time for Eric to focus on his training, and he knew he had a lot of work to do. He didn't have as much experience as his competitors in running longer distances, and even throughout all of his training, his fastest time in the 400-meter was adequate, but not what most would consider medal-worthy. That would all change on July 11, 1924—the day of the Olympic final.

Bottom: Eric Liddell winning the 440-yard race at the Amateur Athletics Association Championships at Stamford Bridge, London, UK





## Eric's Iconic Moment

As Eric was getting ready for the biggest race of his life, an Olympic worker approached him and handed him a small slip of paper. The handwritten message said,

*"He that honors me I will honor.  
Wishing you the best of success always."*

Eric was very familiar with this quote, as it was one of his favorites from the Bible. He was deeply touched by the man's gesture and was reminded that there never was a choice—he honored God above all else and so he would never have competed on the Lord's day.

As Eric walked onto the field for the 400-meter final, he could feel the electricity from the excited crowd in the air. The **spectators** were cheering for their favorite runners from all over the

world. As was his custom before every race, he shook each of his competitor's hands, wishing them well. Eric was positioned in the outermost lane, which is considered to be the worst lane for racers because it is very difficult for them to see the other runners. This makes pacing a challenge—not knowing if they should speed up or slow down. But this wasn't a concern for Eric, because he already had a plan. When asked what his strategy was, he responded,

**"THE SECRET OF MY SUCCESS  
OVER THE 400 METRES IS  
THAT I RUN THE FIRST 200  
METRES AS HARD AS I CAN.  
THEN, FOR THE SECOND 200  
METRES, WITH GOD'S HELP, I  
RUN HARDER."**

1924 Olympics  
Opening Ceremony





The runners took their positions at the starting line. The race official raised his arm in the air, holding the starting gun high in the sky, and then, BANG! They were off! Eric sprung forward from his starting position at FULL SPEED. Sprinting from the very beginning of a longer race is not a common practice because runners find it difficult to maintain that speed for the entire race. But in doing this, Eric created a commanding distance from the other runners from the very beginning. Two racers even stumbled in their attempt to catch up. But Eric set such a blistering pace that no one could touch him. Approaching the **final leg** of the race, Eric

could start to feel one of his competitors, Horatio Fitch from the United States, gaining on him, but the finish line was in his sight. Mustering up every last bit of energy he had, Eric tilted his head back, began pumping his arms wildly, and widened the gap between him and Fitch, before finally crossing the finish line in first place.

He had done it! At 22 years old, Eric Liddell had won Olympic gold. Not only did he win the gold medal, but he had set a new Olympic, European, and British record time for the 400-meter race of 47.6 seconds, while also winning the bronze medal in the 200-meter race.



## Signature Running Style

Eric's running style was unusual. Approaching the end of his races, he would tilt his head back, open his mouth wide, and pump his arms vigorously. Harold Abrahams, Olympic 1924 winner of the gold medal in the 100-meter race (from which Eric withdrew due to the final being held on a Sunday) remarked,

"PEOPLE MAY SHOUT THEIR  
HEADS OFF ABOUT HIS  
APPALLING STYLE.  
WELL, LET THEM.  
HE GETS THERE."

Left: Eric Liddell winning 400-Meter Race, 1924 Olympics



# Major Milestones and Records Achieved

## Scotland National Rugby Team

1922-1923 Played for Scotland in the  
Five Nations tournament

## Scottish Amateur Athletic Association Championships

1921 Scored five successive victories in the  
100-yard, 200-yard, and 220-yard races

1924 440-yard champion

1925 440-yard champion

## Amateur Athletics Association Championships

1923 Held British  
record for 35 years with a  
time of 9.7 seconds for the  
100-yard race

1924 440-yard champion

## 1924 Paris Olympic Games

Gold Medal: 400-meter  
Olympic, European, and British  
record time of 47.6 seconds  
Bronze Medal: 200-meter

## Scottish Rugby Hall of Fame

2022 Inducted into Scottish Rugby  
Hall of Fame



Eric Liddell paraded by fellow students around Edinburgh University after returning victorious from competition at the 1924 Summer Olympics, Edinburgh, 1924

## **Soli Deo Gloria**

As his time during the 1924 Olympics came to a close, he had a sense of accomplishment at what he was able to achieve, but for Eric, medaling at the games was not the most important prize in life. Even after such a tremendous athletic achievement, his devotion to God was still more important to him than his Olympic triumph. He later said:

"IT HAS BEEN A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE TO COMPETE IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES AND TO BRING HOME A GOLD MEDAL. BUT SINCE I HAVE BEEN A YOUNG LAD, I HAVE HAD MY EYES ON A DIFFERENT PRIZE. YOU SEE, EACH ONE OF US IS IN A GREATER RACE THAN ANY I HAVE RUN IN PARIS, AND THIS RACE ENDS WHEN GOD GIVES OUT THE MEDALS."





## Missionary Life in China

After the Olympics, Eric finished his studies and graduated from Edinburgh in 1924. He continued running for a little while but decided to return to China to begin his missionary work, following the example of his parents before him. He had always felt that God made him for China, and his calling was to spread the teachings of Christianity there. In 1932, he was ordained a minister, and in 1934, he married Florence Mackenzie (the daughter of Canadian missionaries) in China. He began teaching children, led Sunday school at a local church, and coached boys sports.

Eric Liddell marries  
Florence Mackenzie, 1934



In the late 1930s, at the onset of World War II, China became a very dangerous place to be. The Japanese aggressively invaded China and terrorized the population. As a missionary, Eric felt a duty to serve those in need, which meant he had to cross Japanese army lines. By 1941, the conditions had become so treacherous that the British government recommended that any British people living in China leave the area for their safety. By this time, Eric and Florence had two daughters, and she was pregnant with their third. As a family, a difficult decision had to be made—one that would unknowingly separate their family for good. It was decided that the Liddell women would leave for Canada to remove themselves from harm's way, while Eric chose to stay behind and help those in need of food and medical attention. Little did Eric know that he would never see his wife and daughters again.



Illustration of missionaries in China



## The Last Leg

In 1943, the unthinkable happened—Japanese troops reached Eric's town and he, along with nearly 2,000 others, were imprisoned in an **internment camp**. Everyone was terrified and uncertain about what the rest of their lives would look like. How long would they be held captive? How would the Japanese treat them? Only time would tell.

It turned out that conditions in the camp were horrible. Eric and the others would often go without food, running water, heat, and medical treatments. Even though Eric found himself in a terrible situation, he never lost his faith. He became a leader in the camp, continued to teach children about sports and science (creating his own chemistry textbooks since there were none), as well as helping the elderly. Many members of the camp have shared their stories about Eric and his selfless acts, like Stephen Metcalfe, who wrote:

"[ERIC] GAVE ME TWO THINGS. ONE WAS HIS WORN OUT RUNNING SHOES, BUT THE BEST THING HE GAVE ME WAS HIS BATON OF FORGIVENESS. HE TAUGHT ME TO LOVE MY ENEMIES, THE JAPANESE, AND TO PRAY FOR THEM."

Through all the hardships he endured while imprisoned, he maintained a positive attitude and gave many hope in the camp.

Eric greatly wanted to keep in touch with his family. It weighed very heavily on him that they were apart and that he hadn't yet met his youngest daughter Maureen. But communication was very restricted in the camp, and **internees** could only write short messages of 25 words or less. He wanted to comfort Florence and his girls to let them know he was doing well. He would write in short phrases describing his day-to-day life. One of Eric's messages, written on October 25, 1944, read:

"Glorious weather.  
Winter activities  
begin. Good start.  
Teaching. Winter  
games, children's  
evening clubs, religious  
services. Kept busy.  
Remembering you all.  
Special love for  
special occasions.  
- Eric"

But, unfortunately, Eric was not well. It was around this time that members in the camp noticed that Eric wasn't his usual upbeat self. He complained of headaches and his speech was much slower than usual. Eric's health continued to deteriorate, and it was discovered that he had developed a brain tumor. The lack of food and medical treatments in the camp most likely made his health decline even faster. Sadly, on February 21, 1945, Eric Liddell died in the camp at the age of 43, just five months before it was freed from Japanese control. His death was felt deeply by everyone in the camp, due to the example he set. Langdon Gilkey, who was imprisoned with Eric, described him by saying,

"IT IS RARE INDEED THAT A PERSON HAS THE GOOD FORTUNE TO MEET A SAINT, BUT HE CAME AS CLOSE TO IT AS ANYONE I HAVE EVER KNOWN [...] HE WAS OVERFLOWING WITH GOOD HUMOR AND LOVE OF LIFE [...] THE ENTIRE CAMP, ESPECIALLY ITS YOUTH, WAS STUNNED FOR DAYS, SO GREAT WAS THE VACUUM THAT ERIC'S DEATH HAD LEFT."

Internment camp  
where Liddell died

Photo credit: Rolfmueller





## Long-Lasting Legacy

When news of Eric's death reached Scotland, the country mourned the loss of their "Flying Scotsman."

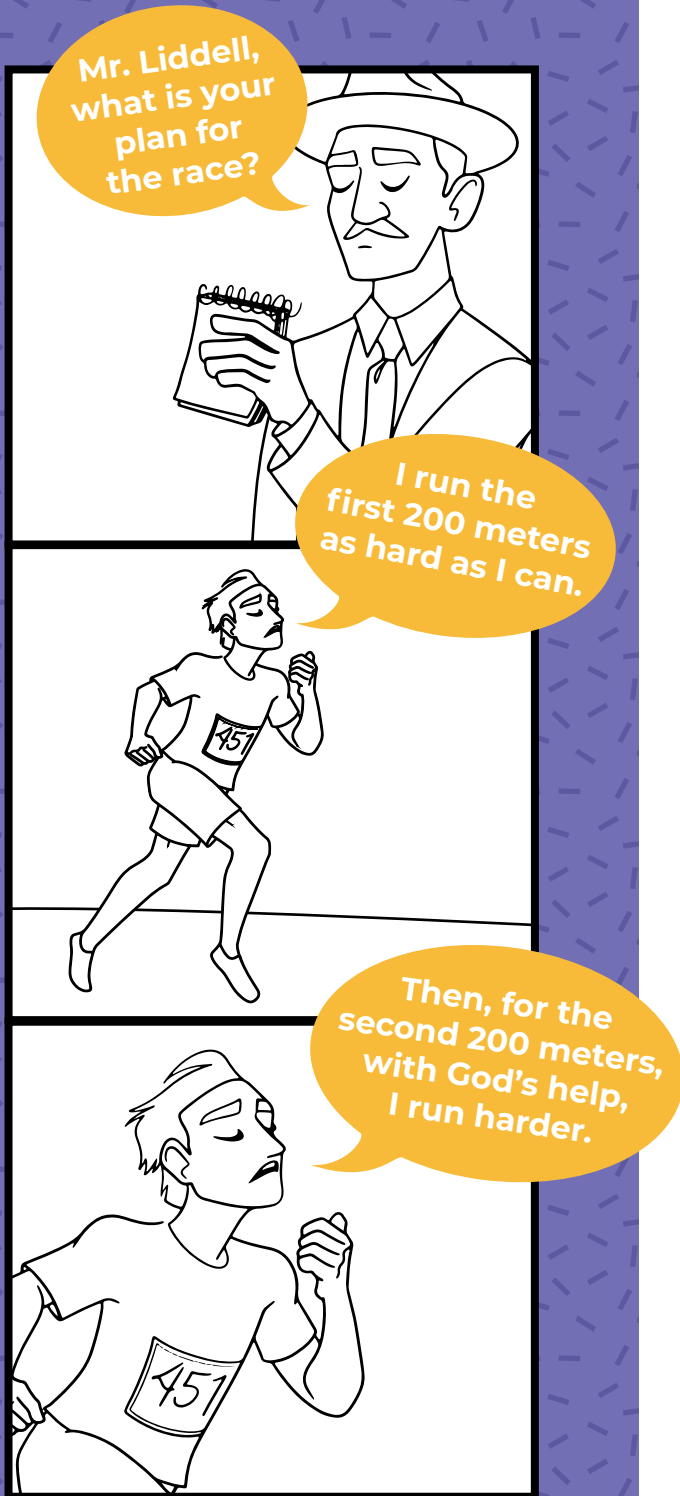
In 1980, 56 years after Eric's gold-medal victory, sprinter Allan Wells would finally bring home the gold for Scotland in the 100-meter race, the event that Eric refused to compete in because it was held on a Sunday. When asked if he had been thinking of Harold Abrahams, the Brit who did take home the gold in 1924 for the 100-meter, Allan calmly replied, "No, this one was for Eric Liddell."

In 1981, the movie *Chariots of Fire* brought Eric's story to the big screen for a brand new audience. It would go on to win four Academy Awards, including Best Picture in 1982.

Eric Liddell has served as an inspiration to many over the years, not just for his tremendous athletic achievements, but for his religious devotion, his selfless acts of kindness, and for putting his love of God above all else.

## There Are Some Who Say...

In 2008, it was reported that the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Winston Churchill was working on a way to get Eric released from the camp. It was believed that the British and Japanese came to an agreement on a prisoner exchange, but when the chance came for Eric to leave the camp, he gave up his spot so a pregnant woman could go home in his place. This does sound like something Eric would do, but survivors from the camp have said that this did not happen. What do you think?



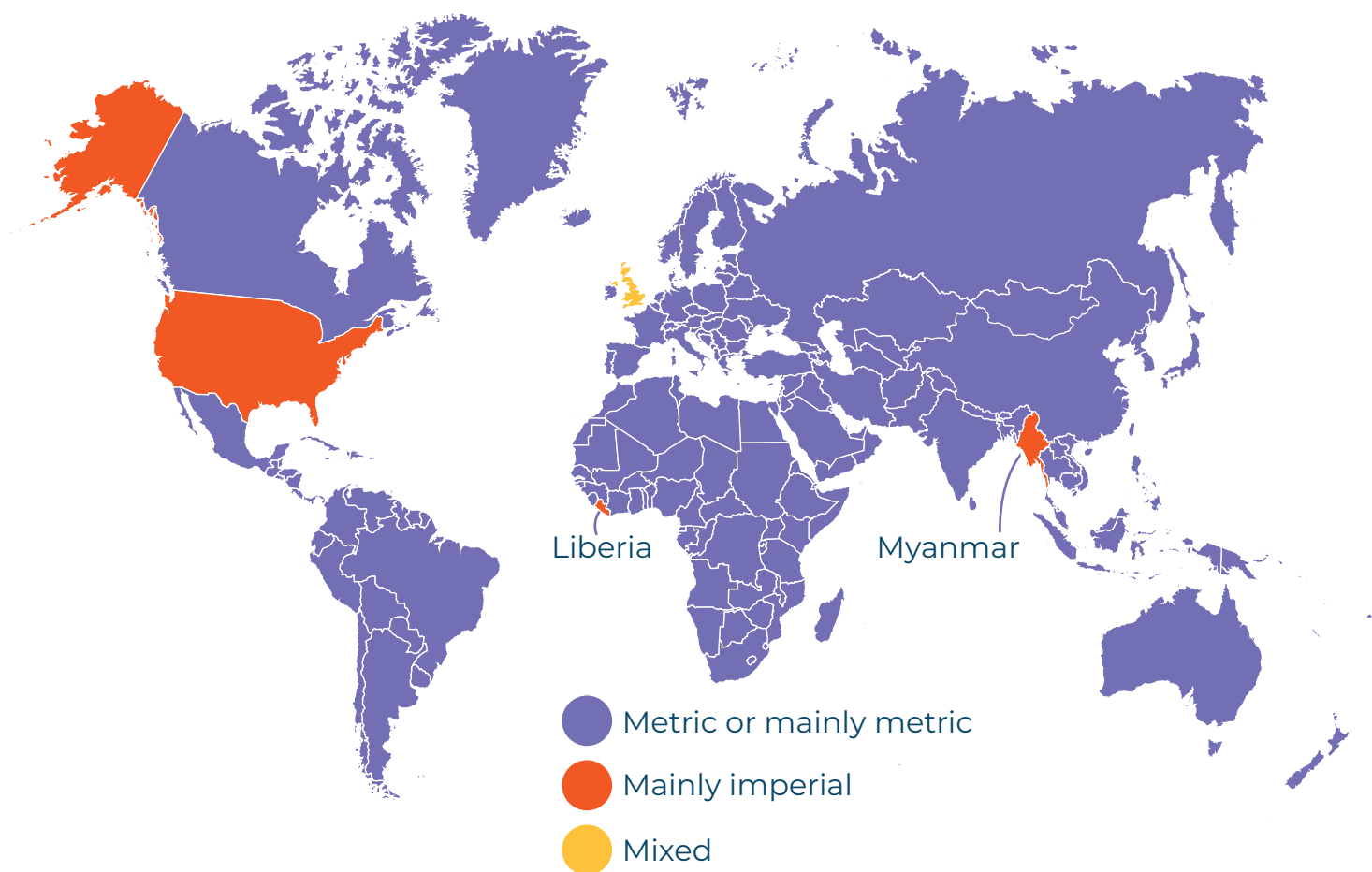
# Metric vs. Imperial

Did you know that most of the world uses the metric system? It is also known as the International System of Units. The imperial system is not as widely used throughout the world but is the measurement system employed by the United States.

Mathematical formulas can be used to convert between metric and imperial units. For example, Eric Liddell's gold-winning race was the 400 meter, which is a little under a quarter of a mile.

| Type        | Imperial           | Metric          |
|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| length      | inches             | centimeters     |
| length      | feet               | meters          |
| length      | miles              | kilometers      |
| capacity    | pints              | liters          |
| capacity    | gallons            | milliliters     |
| weight      | ounces             | grams           |
| weight      | pounds             | kilograms       |
| temperature | degrees Fahrenheit | degrees Celsius |

Check out this map to see which countries use the metric system and which use the imperial system as of 2019.





# Sports Tricks and Tips

## "On Your Marks"

1

Place the knee of your back leg on the ground.  
Make sure your back knee is in front of your front foot.  
Place your hands shoulder-width apart, directly over your hands.  
Make arches with your hands, with your weight in your fingertips.  
Keep your eyes looking straight down to where your first step will be.

2

## "Set"

Lift your hips so they are a little higher than your shoulders.  
Keep both legs bent (front leg at a 90 degree angle, back leg at a 120 degree angle).  
Your head should be in line with your spine.

3

## "Go"

Push off from your back leg, and drive forward.  
Swing your arms to increase your momentum.  
Your body should be at a 45 degree angle, to start.

## How Fast Can YOU Run?

100 meters: \_\_\_\_\_

200 meters: \_\_\_\_\_

400 meters: \_\_\_\_\_

800 meters: \_\_\_\_\_

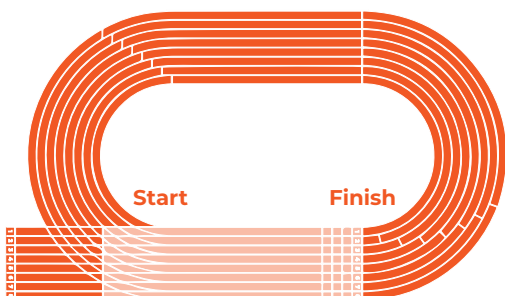
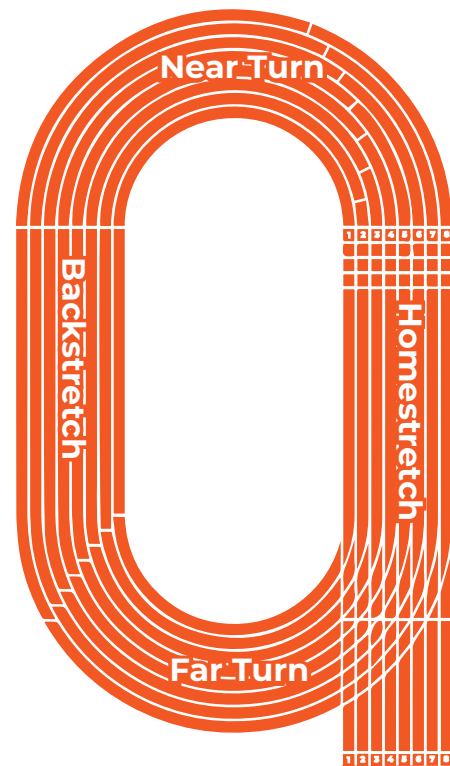
1 mile (approx. 1600 meters): \_\_\_\_\_

## Lean Forward to Sprint!



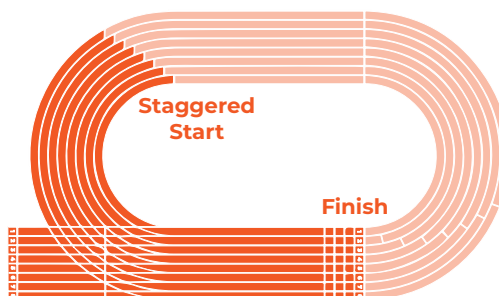
# Track Basics: What do the races look like on the track?

One lap on the innermost lane of a track is 400 meters, which is slightly less than a quarter mile. The straightaway (straight, non-curved section) where races finish is called the homestretch. The straightaway on the opposite side of the track is known as the backstretch. The first curve is called the near turn, and the second curve is called the far turn.



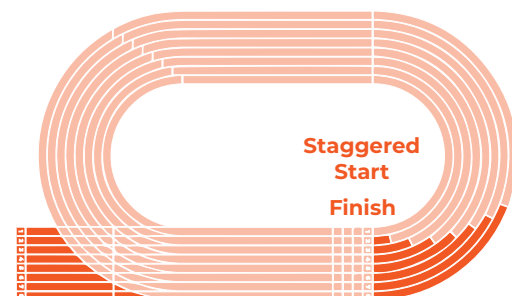
## 100 meters

The 100-meter race is run in a straight line down the homestretch.



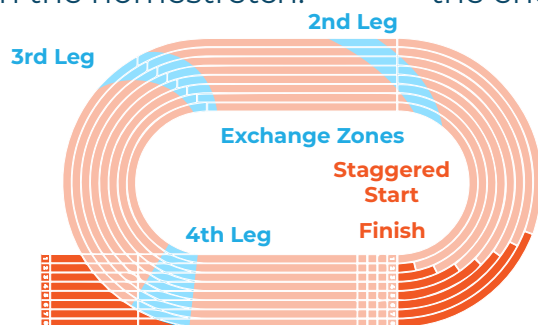
## 200 meters

The 200-meter race is run around half of the track, beginning on the end of the backstretch.



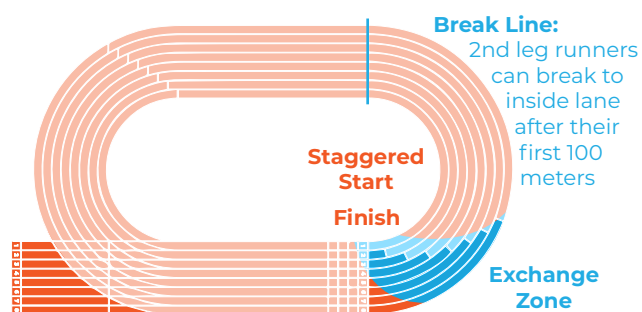
## 400 meters

The 400-meter race is one complete lap around the track.



## 4 x 100 Meters Relay

Four sprinters each run 100 meters to complete one full lap of the track. During their individual legs, each runner carries a baton that must be passed to the next runner.



## 4 x 400 Meters Relay

Four sprinters each run 400 meters, or a full lap around the track. Like the 4 x 100 relay, each runner carries a baton that must be passed to the next runner.





## Take a Stand!

Eric Liddell stood for what he believed in even when it was hard and everyone expected him to cave. Write about a time that you stood for what you believe in.



Lined writing area with horizontal blue lines.





## Glossary

**Missionaries:** People whose calling is to teach and promote Christianity in foreign countries.

**Parable:** A story that teaches a moral or lesson.

**Compound:** An open area that has a fence around it.

**Amah:** Similar to a nanny or person who helps take care of children.

**Rugby:** A sport played on a grass field between two teams of fifteen players each, where the team with the ball tries to move the ball towards the opposing team's goal.

**Cricket:** A sport played on an oval grass field, with a bat and ball, between two teams of eleven players each.

**Record:** The best performance that has been officially noted as of a certain point in time.

**Contender:** A person with a good chance of success in a contest or event.

**Preliminary Trials:** Competitions held beforehand to qualify for participation in the main event at the Olympics.

**Spectators:** People who are present at a sporting event to watch, like an audience.

**Final Leg:** The last part of a race.

**Internment Camp:** A camp where a government imprisons people considered suspicious or undesirable, usually during a time of war. The prisoners are often unfairly treated and suffer from terrible atrocities and even death.

**Internees:** People imprisoned in an internment camp.

## What can you learn from Eric Liddell?

# OLYMPIANS

KERRI  
STRUG

ERIC  
LIDDELL

LINOY  
ASHRAM

HERB  
BROOKS



**COLLECT ALL  
THE OLYMPIAN  
TOKENS!**

Cut out and paste tokens for each of the the 4 featured Olympians onto the spaces above.





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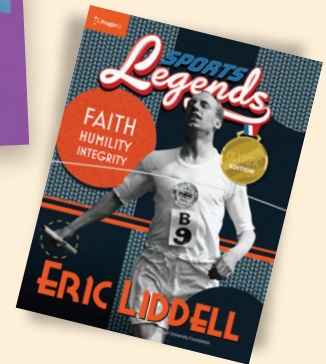
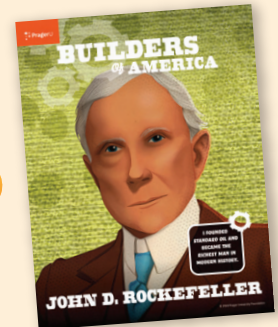
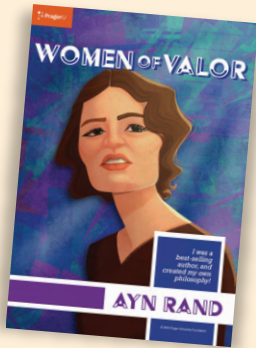
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