

Excerpt from: Track & Field Self-Guided Workouts: Motivation and Activities

Eric Liddell: Pure Gold

Eric Liddell was born in China in 1902 to Scottish missionaries. He went to school in China until the age of 5, when he was enrolled in a boarding school in England. Eric participated in cricket and made the Scottish national rugby team as a youth before his natural running ability began to emerge.

The 1924 Olympics were in Paris, France. Eric had become one of the top sprinters in the world and was the favorite to win the 100 meters. When the Olympics' schedule was published months before the games, a 100-meter heat was scheduled for a Sunday. However, Eric was a devout Christian and refused to run in a heat held on the Sabbath. A man of strong principles, Eric withdrew from his best event, the 100 meters. Eric had limited previous success in the 400 meters, but since the 400-meter was not being held on a Sunday, he could participate in that event. He had also been selected to run as a member of the 4x100-meter and 4x400-meter relay teams at the Olympics but declined to run those as their heats were to be run on a Sunday as well.

Eric first competed in the 200 meters and won the bronze medal in Paris. He went to the starting line of the 400-meter race as a big underdog. Before 1928, the 400 meters was considered a middle distance event in which runners raced the first curve and coasted through the backstretch. Eric ran hard the entire first 200 meters to get ahead of the favored Americans. The Americans challenged him all the way down the home straight, but Eric held on to take the win, breaking the Olympic record with a time of 47.6.

At the peak of his athletic career, Eric left Scotland to devote his life to being a missionary in China. Eric chose to live a dangerous life in China, serving his God. His greatness of heart and unwavering conviction are an inspiration to people of faith everywhere. In 1941, life in China had become dangerous because of Japanese aggressiveness. Despite suffering many hardships, Eric refused to leave. The Japanese imprisoned Eric, and suffering from overwork and malnourishment, he died of a brain tumor in a prison camp a few months before the end of World War II. Eric's story was portrayed in the popular movie, *Chariots of Fire*. Eric Liddell upheld the Olympic motto, "Citius, Altius, Fortius" which means, "Swifter, Higher, Stronger," throughout his life.

Questions for Thought:

1. Eric's beliefs were so strong that he was willing to give up Olympic glory. On a scale of 1-10 (10 high), how strong are your beliefs?
2. There is a saying, "if you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything." What do you stand for?
3. Eric had a passion to help people and gave his life for it. What sacrifices have you made to help people?

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