



Louis Tewanima holds the champion's trophy after winning a marathon in New York City in 1911.

Running to Compete

In the early part of the 20th century, the U.S. government forced many Native Americans to leave their homes and attend boarding schools. When U.S. troops showed up on the Hopi Reservation, Louis, a married man at that point, was arrested for resisting the government's order to send all Hopi children to school. Staying true to the Hopi value of peace, he cooperated with authorities when they made him leave his wife, family, cornfields, and sheep.

In 1907, Louis found himself riding on one of the locomotives that had amazed him as a boy. With no knowledge of the English language, he was headed east to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania.

The weather in Pennsylvania was much colder than what Louis was used to. He missed his family and his way of life. He turned to something familiar—running. He'd seen the school's track team practice, so he approached the coach, Glenn S. "Pop" Warner, and asked if he could run for him.

After watching Louis run, Warner immediately realized Louis had talent. Warner coached him on applying his stamina and strength to track and field. It

Miles from Home

Faced with hardship, Louis Tewanima turned to the Hopi tradition of running and became an Olympic medalist.

By Kim Valice

Louis Tewanima seemed born to run. As a boy, he'd venture far beyond his village of Shungopavi on the Hopi Reservation. It is said that his feet would blaze 56 miles across the rocky Arizona desert to the town of Winslow. Louis was awed by the massive locomotives he'd see there. For fun, he'd test his stamina by running alongside

the trains before watching them pass. Then he'd turn around and run the 56 miles home.

Louis was a member of the Hopi Tribe in Arizona. Like other Hopi people in the late 19th century, Louis ran for his emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. But when Louis was a young man, his running path took a detour.

wasn't long before medals, trophies, and prizes filled Louis's room at the Carlisle school, and he became known as one of the best distance runners in America.

Even when he was faced with obstacles, Louis prevailed. He once missed his train to a race in Harrisburg. Instead of calling it a loss, he ran 18 miles to the event, arriving on time. He proceeded to compete in the two-mile race, and he finished first!

Winning Silver

Pop Warner knew that the U.S. Olympic Team needed runners for the 1908 Summer Olympics in London, England. Louis trained, entered his first Olympics, and placed ninth in the marathon.

Four years later, he competed in the 1912 Summer Olympics in Stockholm, Sweden. This time, he ran the 10,000-meter race and finished in second place. For 52 years, Louis Tewanima's silver medal marked the best finish for the U.S. in that event at the Olympics. Billy Mills, a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, won gold for the U.S. in that event at the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo, Japan.

Home Again

Shortly after the Stockholm Olympics, Louis returned to his village. He reunited with his wife and family and settled into herding sheep and growing corn. In 1954, he was named to the all-time U.S. Olympic track and field team.

Despite the difficulties of his changing surroundings, Louis Tewanima proved to be a man of honor and strength, and many people recognize him as a hero to this day. 🍃

A Hopi Tradition Continues

By Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert

Every September, kids of all ages leap from the starting line of the Louis Tewanima Footrace on the Hopi Reservation in northeastern Arizona. Many have come from nearby Hopi villages, and others have traveled from faraway places to take part in the race.

Running is very important within Hopi culture. Long before they used modern cars, the Hopi relied on running to travel great distances, deliver messages, and care for their corn and melon fields. But the Hopi also ran for religious reasons. Hopi runners of the past would run far beyond Hopi lands as a prayer for rain. They believed that they could entice rain clouds to follow them home with their swiftness of foot.

Hopi youth are instructed to run on dirt trails according to Hopi customs and to study the graceful movements of deer and antelope in order to learn from them. Elders teach youngsters to run with good hearts, keeping the well-being of the entire Hopi community in mind.

And so at the annual footrace, high on top of Second Mesa, Hopi children run not just to honor the Hopi Olympian Louis Tewanima or for the chance of winning a prize. They also run for their people, for their villages, and to continue the long tradition of distance running in Hopi society.

“Hopis run because of our heritage, and when we run, it makes us feel closer to our culture.”

Meaghan Sakiestewa Gilbert (Hopi), Age 11

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