

NEW SCULPTURE MEMORIALIZES START OF BOSTON MARATHON

HOPKINTON ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION, JANUARY 2008

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Sculpture Epitomizes Hopkinton Motto, "It All Starts Here"

In April, a new sculpture will be unveiled in Hopkinton that commemorates the start of the Boston Marathon and epitomizes the town's motto "It all starts here!" The sculpture is a bronze life-size figure depicting the legendary George V. Brown as starter of the Boston Marathon, a role he held for over 30 years in the early 1900's. Brown helped establish the Boston Marathon as a world-class event and Patriots' Day staple, and earned worldwide recognition for fostering other major sports including ice hockey.

His range of accomplishments is almost unimaginable--Hockey Hall of Fame inductee, U.S. Olympic Committee Member and Track and Field Coach, Boston University's first Athletic Director, General Manager of the Boston Garden, officer in the Boston Athletic Association, and organizer of national boxing championships. An international figure received by presidents and kings, Brown was also known as a likeable conversationalist, regaling sports writers with stories of Jim Thorpe visiting Massachusetts after his triumph at the Olympics, and Tom Longboat jumping through a moving freight train on the marathon course. The new statue highlights that history for the millions today who benefit from Brown's contributions, including athletes, officials, and spectators. For more information, see the attachment "[About George Brown.](#)"

George V. Brown as he would have looked in the 1920s, wearing a classic fedora and a satisfied smile, poised to pull the trigger of his starter's pistol and unleash the world's fastest long distance runners on their 26.2-mile trek to the Back Bay. Photo courtesy of the HAA.



Sculptor Michael Alfano, acclaimed for his public monuments, portraits, and surreal artwork, created the statue. Not coincidentally, he runs the Boston Marathon and is a Hopkinton resident. “A monument in town acknowledging the marathon seemed natural,” said Alfano. He talked to residents about it and the Hopkinton Athletic Association (HAA) leapt on the idea. They commissioned the sculpture, securing an economic stimulus grant from the State of Massachusetts for promoting tourism in the MetroWest based around the marathon. Among other activities, the HAA provides much needed support to the town for the marathon, which hits Hopkinton like a tornado each April. For more information, see the attachment “[About the Sculptor: Michael Alfano.](#)”

“We wanted a permanent, public way to represent Hopkinton and its unique contribution to this world famous event,” said Tim Kilduff, president of the HAA, “and a statue of George V. Brown does that perfectly.” A lifelong town resident, Brown was a key proponent for moving the start line from Ashland to Hopkinton in 1924. He represents the start of Hopkinton’s relationship with the marathon, the physical start line for the race, and the historical start of the event. For more information, see the attachment [“When Brown Managed the Marathon.”](#)

“When we first started the project, we weren’t sure of the exact subject of the sculpture,” Kilduff recounted. Alfano developed a few modern, non-figurative maquettes, but because the sculpture might be installed with the actual start line on the common, it had to conform to the Historic District Commission’s strict guidelines intended to preserve the older look of the center of town. To find possible subjects, Alfano researched the history of the Boston Marathon and Hopkinton’s ties to it. He expected to identify a famous runner, but George V. Brown emerged as the ideal subject, in part because he was a supporter. The Boston Marathon isn’t just about the runners--the spectators and volunteers are integral to its appeal. Another possible subject was George’s son, Walter A. Brown, who became the race starter and played other key roles in the development of the Boston Marathon. For more information, see the attachment [“Family Ties: The Brown’s and the Marathon.”](#)

The sculpture will be unveiled on April 12th at a special performance by the MetroWest Symphony Orchestra marking the start of marathon week. Throughout the week, the sculpture will be shown at other special marathon events, to be announced. On marathon weekend, the sculpture will be on view on the Hopkinton Common, near the actual start line, where runners and spectators can pose with it for photo mementos. Said Alfano, “Only a few elite runners get to be at the actual start line for the race, so this monument can provide a facsimile of that experience for the rest of us.”

A permanent location for the sculpture is to be determined. One possibility is near the actual start line on the Hopkinton Common. It would be a popular draw for tourists not only on Patriot’s Day, but throughout the year. Running aficionados and visitors come to see the start line on Main Street in Hopkinton, which is painted with a unique design each April. By fall, the line has faded to the point that some visitors can’t locate it. Posing for a photo at the start line can mean dodging cars driving on Route 135.

Brown’s statue could end up in more than just personal snapshots by serving as Hopkinton’s standard backdrop for media coverage, becoming an icon equated with the town, in the same way that Boston’s North End is identified with the Paul Revere statue, or Gloucester with the Fisherman’s statue.

“It’s especially fitting to have the sculpture unveiled in 2008, given George V. Brown’s ties to the Olympics and the US Women’s Olympic Marathon Trials being held here in conjunction with the Boston Marathon,” noted Kilduff. This isn’t the first time Kilduff has established a tie to the Olympics through a sculpture. In 2006, Kilduff helped bring to Hopkinton the “Spirit of the Marathon,” created by Mico Kaufman, which honors legendary Greek runner and 1946 Boston champion, Stylianos Kyriakides. The bronze monument is a replica of the original, commissioned for the city of Marathon, Greece for the 2004 Olympics. Hopkinton and Marathon, Greece have become official sister cities, with ongoing cultural exchanges. In 2007, the HAA donated an exhibit of photographs for

their marathon museum, and in 2008, they will host six runners from Marathon for the Boston event.

A beaming Kilduff concluded, "We are extremely proud of our town's participation in the Boston Marathon, throughout its history, including the accomplishments of this famous son of Hopkinton, George V. Brown." More than just the start line of the marathon in Hopkinton, the Brown sculpture embodies an unusual mix of sports, art, public enthusiasm, business, history, and international relations. Hopkinton could shorten the town motto from "It all starts here" to "It's all here."

About George V. Brown

When the George V. Brown sculpture is unveiled in 2008, it will bring back memories of his funeral over 70 years ago, which an obituary noted was “just about the most representative ever gathered under one New England roof.” The organizers are anticipating the attendance and participation of representatives from the Boston Marathon, the Olympics, Boston University, the Bruins, the Boston Garden, the town of Hopkinton, arts and historical associations, and the Brown family. In 1937, attendees at his funeral reflected not only the variety of accomplishments from Brown’s life, but also his reputation as a likeable and honest man, and a popularity built in part on a knack for relating engaging tales from his sports experiences.

Brown appears to have been headed for a life in sports from his youth. Born in Hopkinton in 1880, he played on the high school football, baseball, and track and field teams. Upon graduation, Brown attended Bryant and Stratton Business College, and then began work as an athletic instructor at Harvard. Brown’s official relationship with the Boston Marathon began in 1899, the second year for the race, when he was hired to assist the athletic director at the Boston Athletic Association. In 1905, at the age of 25, Brown first served as the Boston Marathon starter, and did so every year until his death in 1937 at the age of 57. For 11 of those years, he also managed the marathon for the BAA.

Fostering another sport he loved, Brown founded a BAA football team. He was also a football official and he refereed games between many college teams in the Northeast including Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, Army, Georgetown, Syracuse, Fordham, and Jim Thorpe’s Carlisle Indians. He officiated the Boston College-Holy Cross game nine times. Never one to just do the job, Brown also served for a dozen years as an officer in the New England and Eastern Football Officials Associations.

Brown seemed to have a penchant for startups and took that talent to the nascent world of ice hockey. He established a BAA team, The Unicorns, in 1911, in the second season of operation of the original Boston Arena. He hired Harvard’s Alfred “Ralph” Winsor as player-coach and stocked the team largely with Harvard players who had played with Winsor for the Boston Hockey Club. In 1918, the first year of his athletic directorship at Boston University, the Terriers played their first game of hockey and began the program’s storied history. To this day, the Terriers’ George V. Brown Award is presented to the team’s Most Valuable Player each season.

Moving beyond Boston, Brown organized the US Olympic Hockey Team for the inaugural winter games held in France in 1924. Comprised largely of members from the BAA team, the US team won the silver medal, having been bested by Canada. Over the years, Brown organized many hockey contests, including Canadian-American games and those for the Boston Cubs. Brown was not part of the establishment of the NHL and Boston Bruins; at the time, he believed the popularity of amateur play would doom chances for the professionals. But his accomplishments were instrumental in paving the way for the league’s success. Both the US Hockey Hall of Fame in Eveleth, Minnesota and the Hockey League Hall of Fame in Toronto, Canada inducted him as a builder. George Brown hockey trading cards are still in circulation.

George V. Brown at the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, where he served as an official.



Ice hockey was not Brown's only involvement with the Olympics. From 1904 to 1936, he attended all the games and played an official role, serving as a member of the US Olympic Committee, manager, and coach. At the memorable 1936 summer games held in Berlin during Hitler's reign, Brown was assistant coach of the track and field team that starred Jesse Owens. For his contributions, the US Olympic Committee honored Brown with an official moment of silence upon his death.

The hockey games as well as the indoor track and field events Brown organized were often held at the Boston Arena in the Back Bay. That facility burnt down in 1918, and for the next two years, local ice hockey was played at the Pavilion, a small rink near M.I.T. The Arena president, Charles A. Abbey, was unable to raise sufficient funds to rebuild immediately.

In 1920, though, Henry G. Lapham, a Yale graduate and scion of the founding family of Texaco, became president of the BAA. The Brooklyn-born Lapham was also a member of the U.S. Olympic Association. He formed the New Boston Arena Company,

assembled a board of directors that included Joseph P. Kennedy, and appointed George Brown as general manager.

Lapham was reported to have said “Look, George, you got me into this and now it’s up to you to see that I don’t lose my shirt. From now on, you’re manager of the Arena.” The rival Boston Garden, originally known as the Boston Madison Square Garden, opened a decade later. During the great depression, Lapham was able to buy out enough of the original investors, and gained control of the facility in 1934. He renamed it the Boston Garden and appointed Brown as General Manager. Brown promoted all manner of events at the venues, from performances by ice skating legend Sonja Henie, to rallies with the famed evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, to boxing matches, which were in their heyday during that era. Brown did not just hold boxing matches, but for 20 years, he was a member of the various amateur unions, and was elected to conduct national amateur championships.

Brown seemed to be involved with nearly every sport and brought sports to nearly all he did. For over a decade, he was secretary of the Boston Interscholastic Rowing Association. Even in the military, Brown displayed his knack as a top-notch sports organizer. During World War I, he enlisted in the Navy’s Sixth Division and initially served as Director of Athletics for the Navy’s 1st District. Later on, he was named first assistant to Yale’s Walter Camp, the legendary father of football, and was Commissioner of Naval Training Camp Activities. His job was to provide sports for the troops to promote fitness, camaraderie, and entertainment. In that role, Brown invented the Chariot Relay Race, cited by the Navy as the most successful of its mass games, allowing thousands of men to compete at once. The event required teams of ten men with poles and ropes to pull a toboggan carrying one of their members for a distance of 100 yards. It was first demonstrated on the Boston Common in the summer of 1918.

The Chariot Race on the Boston Common in 1918 was invented by Brown for the Navy to allow thousands of men to compete at once. Photo from Athletes All – Training, Organization, and Play, Walter Camp, 1919, Charles Scribner and Sons, University of Michigan Press.



After his death 1937, the Boston Garden-Arena Sports-News wrote eloquently about Brown, "His memorials are to be found in the vast number of sporting organizations which he helped to found and then nursed to mature and lasting stature. He lives there..." Brown will also live on in the new sculpture memorial honoring him, providing viewers with a glimpse of how the sports they so cherish came to be. The monument also serves as an inspiration to all builders and supporters, from marathon volunteers to hockey parents, reminding them that their efforts are fulfilling not only in the present, but will be enjoyed by many more in the centuries ahead.

About the Sculptor: Michael Alfano

Sculptor Michael Alfano has public monuments throughout the East coast, but says he's especially pleased to create a sculpture for his hometown. "On most projects, I become very involved with the artwork and the commissioning organization for years. But after the dedication, I might not even see the sculpture again. It will be new for me to experience the ongoing reaction to the work and to engage with it as a member of the community."

Alfano has been sculpting for nearly fifteen years. Like the Brown statue, some of his public monuments and portraits honor important people, such as the slain Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat, the Pittsburg Steelers' "Mean" Joe Greene, and Mother Clelia Merloni, the foundress of an international Catholic order. Alfano's other public monuments address themes rather than specific individuals. These include Holocaust memorials and sculptures against drunk driving on Long Island, a peace sculpture for Georgetown University, and a September 11th memorial in Norfolk, Massachusetts.

In addition to creating monuments, Alfano sculpts artwork for sale in galleries and to collectors worldwide. These pieces are typically figurative-based with a philosophical twist, presenting a surreal image that lures in a viewer for further contemplation. "I aim for a simple form that resonates deeply," Alfano explained. "While I enjoy bringing creativity, design, and skill to the commissioned works, it's a different experience making a piece that is completely self directed."

On April 21st, Alfano will take his place among the 25,000 entrants in the Boston Marathon and start the race in the shadow of the Brown sculpture he created.

To view photos of Alfano's sculptures and for more information about his artwork, see www.malfano.com.

When Brown Managed the Marathon

Since its inception 112 years ago, much has changed about the Boston Marathon. But those aspects that remain the same could be considered the fundamentals: strong athletes, multitudes of fans and volunteers, a Patriots' Day running, committed sponsorship from the BAA, and a finish in the Back Bay. Hopkinton would like to add to that list the start line, which was not always in the town. The sculpture of George V. Brown can help cement Hopkinton's claim, "It all starts here," as can the town's ties to what is now their sister city, Marathon, Greece, where the marathon itself started.

Despite popular myth, the ancient Greek Olympics did not include a marathon race. Rather, the event was created for the inaugural modern games in Athens in 1896 as an homage to the ancient Greek messenger, Phidippides. When Persia invaded Greece in the 5th century B.C., Phidippides reportedly ran about 24 miles from the city of Marathon to Athens to deliver important news. At the 1896 games, members of the BAA who attended were impressed by the distance race and its popularity, and decided to conduct a marathon back in Boston. At the time, the BAA was a tony club, formed in 1887 for Boston businessmen, whose aim was to "encourage all manly sports and promote physical culture." During its first decade, the BAA conducted popular track and field events, so it was a suitable sponsor for a marathon. Mirroring the Greeks, who commemorated their battle messenger with the marathon, the BAA decided to hold the event on Patriots' Day, to commemorate the ride of Paul Revere and the battle of Lexington. While the BAA planned, the New York Knickerbocker Athletic Club held a marathon in September 1896, thus claiming the distinction of being the first US marathon. But the following year, on Patriots' Day in 1897, the BAA did hold its inaugural marathon. New York might have been first, but did not host another marathon until the 1970s, while the BAA continued their tradition, establishing the Boston event as the oldest annual marathon in the world.

Known then as the American Marathon, it started in Ashland and ended at the Irvington Oval, the BAA's track on Exeter Street. Only 15 runners competed the first year, on a course approximately 24.5 miles long, with thousands of curious spectators. No starting line, no starter's pistol, but a mark drawn in the dirt by the starter's foot, and a shout of "Go." Each participant was accompanied by a bicyclist assigned from the state militia to provide water and other support. While the lead vehicle today is electric powered, back then it was literally horse powered. Runners wore boots to help them endure the muddy, rutted roads. There were no wheelchair entrants and no one over the age of forty was allowed to enter. Neither were women runners permitted, but the women of Wellesley College were providing inspiration from the first year. Winners were often working class men who bested top college athletes.

During his years of involvement with the marathon, Brown saw the number of participants steadily increase to nearly 300 in the 1930s, but saw the number of spectators grow even more, from thousands to hundreds of thousands. In 1927, he saw the course distance increase to 26 miles and 385 yards to conform to the official length of the Olympic marathon course. Brown was around in 1936 when another famous runner, Ellison "Tarzan", received a condescending pat on the back from Johnny Kelley at the last hill in Newton, inspiring "Tarzan" to surge ahead and take the race, which is how Heartbreak Hill got its name. During his decades of involvement with the marathon, George Brown's position changed a great deal, as he went from being a BAA employee to member and club officer, but his role of race starter and staunch supporter endured.

Family Ties: The Browns, the Marathon, and American Sport

Upon George's death in 1937, his son Walter A. Brown assumed his father's role as starter of the Boston Marathon. Walter also served as president of the Boston Athletic Association (BAA), the organization that founded and conducts the Boston Marathon. During some lean years at the BAA, Walter provided much needed financial support, helping to keep the annual race tradition intact.

Like his father, Walter had a long and distinguished career in American and international sports. He too was General Manager of the Boston Garden and was inducted in the Hockey Hall of Fame. He coached the 1933 United States team that won the World Hockey Championship, defeating Canada 2-1 in Prague. It was the first time a Canadian team had ever lost a game in Olympic or international competition. He remained involved with hockey his entire life and was chairman of USA Hockey when America won its first Olympic Gold medal in 1960.

Walter was also the founding owner of the Boston Celtics of the National Basketball Association. He hired Red Auerbach as coach and fashioned one of professional sports' most enduring dynasties. He was responsible for drafting Chuck Cooper of Duquesne, thereby breaking the "color line" in the NBA. Reminded that the Celtics had selected a black player, he reportedly retorted, "I don't care if he's striped, plaid or polka dot!"

Walter was also inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame, making him one of the few, if not the only, member of Halls of Fame in two sports.

Indeed, with the many local and international sporting accomplishments of George and Walter Brown, both sons of Hopkinton, the town can assume a place of honor among communities like Springfield, Massachusetts, Cooperstown, New York, and Canton, Ohio. The sporting world comes to Hopkinton every Patriots' Day. These two gentlemen, in a very real sense, were the ones most responsible for bringing American sport and American athletes to the world.

In April, Hopkinton folk proclaim, "It all starts here." The rest of the year, they could well say, "It all started here."

The Brown family involvement with the Marathon continues to the present day. After Walter's death in 1964, George V. Brown II assumed the starter's role, and was followed by Tom Brown, Hopkinton postmaster and another of George's sons. Tom was also the president of the BAA in the 1980's, and in 1991, Tom passed the reins to Walter F. Brown, grandson of George, who continues to serve as starter each April.

Walter F. and another of George's grandsons, Tom Burke, visited Alfano at his studio to see the clay version of the sculpture. "It was very moving for me," said Walter, "because it looks a lot like my father, George V. Brown II, who closely resembled his father."

Burke, who continues the family's involvement with sports in the public relations field, provided information about George V. Brown for the sculpture project. Burke apparently inherited his grandfather's gift for entertaining with little-known tales from bygone days, but these yarns are about George himself, along with "Uncle Walter" and their world of sports business for over half a century.

Rosalie Brown, wife of Tom Brown, also lent support to the project, providing family photos, news clippings, and a small portrait sculpture of George V. for Alfano to refer to in creating the monument. The family has been very generous with their memorabilia and memories. Walter loaned to Alfano the original starter's pistol from the early 1900's that George V. Brown used to start the race to help make the one in the sculpture as authentic as possible.

Remarked Alfano, "Meeting with the family members made George V. Brown, the man inside the sculpture, really come alive for me."