

THE FIRST LONDON MARATHON

DEAD HEAT 1981

More than 7,000 people ran in the inaugural London Marathon on March 29th 1981 after the organisers received 20,000 applications, but two names have become synonymous with the inaugural event

Little did American distance runner Dick Beardsley and Norwegian Inge Simonsen know that morning that they were about to embark on a day that would see their names go down in the history of the London Marathon

Both became joint winners of the first London Marathon men's title, crossing the line in 2:11:48 holding hands in a display of sportsmanship which was unusual at the time and almost unheard of today.

Recalling the race Dick Beardsley says "*There was a very good field for that Marathon, there was a pack of eight guys or so at the halfway stage I decided to take off and the only guy to come with me was Inge,*" he said.

"The dead heat just happened, we were both running hard. I would try and break away and then Inge would surge and try and pull away."

"We ran hard to the finish and right before the finish line our arms came up together and it was the first Marathon win for both of us".

The Norwegian, Inge Simonsen got the single bottle of champagne. Beardsley received only expenses and a trophy "*about the size of a baseball. It's on my mantelpiece.*"

While that finish has passed into legend, it's less well known that a blazered official tried to disqualify them. The race referee, AAA president Squire Yarrow, (who had won a European Marathon silver in 1938,) was a stickler for protocol and wanted to disqualify the pair for inappropriate behaviour. and give victory to third-place Briton, Trevor Wright, who in 1971 was second in the European Marathon.

In the end, he warned that if ever they repeated this, they would be disqualified,

Beardsley later said "Inge and I became good friends after that, friends for life I guess, and whenever he was racing in the US we would see each other. We stayed close but I haven't seen him since they last brought all the champions back to London.

In November, 1989 Beardsley nearly died in a farm mishap which required five months to recuperate. Between July 1992 and February 1993, he was

involved in three serious automobile accidents, one a hit and run, each requiring hospitalization for back and neck injuries. While on a hike, he was hurt after falling down an embankment when the path collapsed. He underwent three back operations in 1994, and then had knee surgery in 1995.

After each of his injuries, Beardsley was prescribed medication for the pain. Over four years, his body developed a tolerance for the drugs, requiring higher doses to achieve the same effect. He was in denial that he had a drug problem, but his addiction caused him to forge prescriptions at drug stores to satisfy his need for pills until he was arrested on September 30, 1996. He was sentenced to five years probation and 460 hours of community service.

His first day of chemical-free sobriety was February 12, 1997.

Beardsley started the ' **Dick Beardsley Foundation**' in October 2007 to provide assistance to individuals suffering from chemical dependency who are unable to pay for a 12-step treatment program

Now 51, he is a fishing guide, fronts a TV angling programme, and is a motivational speaker.

Unsurprisingly the London marathon has a special place in Beardsley's heart and he still believes it is the best of its kind in the world today.

He said: "*London does an incredible job and puts together the best field in the world and can offer good money to winners. It is a unique race because as well as looking out for the elite runners they help to raise so much money for charities. It is a special event.*"

The text below is a recent blog from Dick Beardsley's web-site

Six months since I had a Total Knee Replacement on my left knee, it's doing super! My new right knee is now 2 years old and I don't even think about it anymore, my left one is almost to that point! I'm back training hard and running about 70 miles/week. I still have a long way to go to get where I'd like to be but its coming! know I may be pushing the envelope a bit but I'm listening to my body and back it off a bit when I need to. My hope is to be ready to run Boston in 2012,

Suggested Reading

Staying The Course: A Runner's Toughest Race

by Dick Beardsley, Maureen Anderson

This book is an amazing tale of a person's journey to overcome incredible hardships. The author and subject was a world class marathoner whose life spiralled out of control because of a series of horrific events and debilitating prescription drug addiction. This is not a book about running or sports, but it is about perseverance and rebirth.

Mike Towner (mostly plagiarised from selected internet text)

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