Abebe Bikila was an Ethiopian marathon runner who became a global sensation when he won the 1960 Olympic marathon in Rome while running barefoot. Born on August 7, 1932, in the small community of Jato, his running talent was discovered while he was serving in the Ethiopian Imperial Guard. Bikila's barefoot victory was not planned; he had been given shoes to wear for the race, but they did not fit comfortably, so he opted to run without them. His decision was symbolic, challenging the dominance of Western athletes and showing the world the prowess of an African runner. This victory also came at a significant time as it occurred while Ethiopia was celebrating the 25th anniversary of Emperor Haile Selassie's reign. Abebe Bikila's second Olympic triumph in Tokyo in 1964 is often regarded as one of the greatest Olympic feats. Not only did he become the first athlete to win consecutive Olympic marathons, but he also set a new world record, finishing in 2:12:11.2, all this just six weeks after undergoing an appendectomy. His rapid recovery and determination to compete stunned the world and solidified his status as a marathon legend. This victory was also a testament to his extraordinary physical condition and mental resilience, allowing him to overcome adversity and still perform at the highest level. Following his historic Olympic victories, Abebe Bikila became a national hero in Ethiopia and a symbol of African athleticism and perseverance. His success was a source of immense pride for Ethiopians and was celebrated with a national holiday in his honor. Bikila's achievements were particularly significant during a time when African nations were emerging from colonial rule and seeking heroes that could represent their aspirations and resilience. His story inspired many young Africans to take up athletics and demonstrated the potential for success on the world stage. Tragically, Abebe Bikila's running career was cut short by a car accident in 1969, which left him paralyzed from the waist down. Despite this devastating setback, Bikila's indomitable spirit shone through. He turned to archery and table tennis as means of participation in sports, refusing to let his disability define his life. In 1970, he participated in the Stoke Mandeville Games in England, an early precursor to the Paralympic Games, showcasing his athletic versatility and his unwavering commitment to sports. Abebe Bikila's influence extended beyond his Olympic victories. He played a significant role in popularizing marathon running around the world. Before Bikila, marathon running was not as widely recognized or celebrated as it is today. His dramatic victories and the compelling story of a barefoot runner from Ethiopia captured the imagination of people globally, contributing to the marathon's rise in popularity as both a spectator sport and as an event that thousands of amateur runners aspire to complete. The story of Abebe Bikila is one of overcoming odds. Born at a time when Ethiopia was recovering from Italian occupation, Bikila's international success in the marathon was not only a personal achievement but also a symbolic victory over the very nation that had occupied his homeland. Running through the streets of Rome, passing by the Obelisk of Axum—a monument taken by Italy from Ethiopia—he reclaimed a sense of pride and history for his country, making his victory resonate far beyond the realms of sport. Bikila's legacy is cemented in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, where a stadium bears his name. The Abebe Bikila Stadium, inaugurated in 1960, is a testament to his enduring impact on Ethiopian sports and society. It serves as a reminder of his contributions and as an inspiration to future generations of athletes. The stadium is not just a sports venue; it is a cultural landmark that stands as a symbol of the excellence and determination embodied by Bikila throughout his career. Abebe Bikila's life story has been the subject of various forms of media, including books, documentaries, and films. One notable film is the 2009 biographical drama 'Atletu' (The Athlete), which portrays Bikila's journey from his early life in rural Ethiopia to his Olympic triumphs and the challenges he faced after his car accident. His story continues to resonate, serving as a powerful narrative of human strength, endurance, and the capacity to defy expectations. In recognition of his outstanding contributions to sport, Abebe Bikila was posthumously inducted into the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) Hall of Fame in 2012. This honor reflects the high esteem in which he is held in the athletics community and acknowledges his influence on the sport of marathon running. His induction serves as a historical acknowledgment of his achievements and ensures that his legacy will be remembered for generations to come. Abebe Bikila passed away at the age of 41 on October 25, 1973, from complications related to his paralysis. His death was mourned across Ethiopia and the world of athletics. Every year on the anniversary of his death, runners in Ethiopia and around the globe pay tribute to his memory by participating in the Abebe Bikila Day International Peace Marathon. This event not only commemorates Bikila's life and contributions to the sport but also promotes peace and unity through running, echoing the spirit of Bikila's own approach to competition and life.