Veteran Favorites Dominate
Olympic Walking Races

Walking races at the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul were marked by tremendous performances but few surprises. In the 20 Km, Czechoslovakia's Josef Pribilinec blistered the field over the final 5 Km to win in an Olympic record 1:19:57. At 50, the diminutive Vyacheslav Ivanenko, of the USSR, finally bettered the GDR's dominant duo of Ronald Weigel and Hartwig Gauder to take the gold, also in record time--3:38:29. The six medalists in the two races were almost identical to last year's World Championships in Rome. Weigel competed in the 20 as well as the 50, taking second in both and preventing Spain's Jose Marin from returning to the medal stand at 20. The order was different, but the faces the same.

Pribilinec, who could not match Damilano's finish in Rome last year was the master this time, but not by much. Pulling out all the stops, he covered the final 5 Km in 19:18 (near 6:10 per mile), but was still only 3 seconds clear of the determined at the finish. Damilano, the 1980 gold medalist was equally determined, but had already dropped 8 seconds off the pace at 15 km, and trailed by 17 seconds at the finish. The other great veteran of the '80s, Marin, was not up to such a finish, but bested the rest of the field for fourth.

A very quick early pace in the race didn't seem to discourage many as a group of 18 went through 5 Km in 20:08. A second group of 10, including Tim Lewis, was just 14 seconds back. Gary Morgan and Jim Heiring went through in 20:25, but must have been a little discouraged to see nearly 30 competitors in front of them at that pace.

Although the pace slowed somewhat the second 5, some of the pretenders were already dropping away and the lead group was cut to seven. They hit 10 Km in 40:37. In addition to Pribilinec, Damilano, and Marin, this group included 1984 titlist Ernesto Canto, 1987 World Cup titlist Carlos Mercenario, Czechoslovakia's Roman Mrazek, and Alexei Perchine of the USSR. Pavol Blazek, Daniel Plaza, Carlos Mattioli, and Axel Noack were just 6 seconds back. Weigel was biding his time, going through with Canada's Guillaume Leblanc in 40:48. The three U.S. walkers were together, nearly 2 minutes off the pace of the leaders.

By 15 Km, Weigel had caught up, and together with Pribilinec and Canto moved away from the others. In order to do that, he did a 15:51 for the 5 kilometers, Pribilinec and Canto having increased the pace at the front considerably. Damilano was now 8 seconds back and had been joined by 1987 World Indoor 3 Km Champion,
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Mikhail Schennikov. The young Soviet ace had covered 5 Km in 10:56 to get into contention. Marin and Mrazek were another 3 seconds back, with Mercenario, Noack, and Giovanni DeBenedictis just 4 seconds behind them. So despite the very fast and quickening pace, 10 walkers were still in contention for the medals with 5 Km to go.

Pribiliniec, the 1983 World Champion, proved too strong for the others. Canto was disqualified, as in last year's World Championships, in trying to keep pace. The others could not quite do it. The Czech, who missed the World Cup race in New York last year with injury has come back as strong as ever. Damilano and Marin, the 1985 World Cup winner, continue to confound the experts who always seem to think their best racing is behind them. Both have been in contention throughout the '80s, and obviously weren't ready to concede anything this year. Canto, on top of the world in the early '80's, continues to have style problems, suffering his second straight DQ in a major race. Schennikov and Mercenario, who finished just behind him, are both very young and may be the faces of the future.

For the U.S., Gary Morgan had a personal best with 1:27:26 and Jim Heiring, beset by injuries the last 2 years, challenged him all the way, finishing just 4 seconds back with his best 20 in long while. But, they were only 37th and 38th. Tim Lewis simply did not have a good day, fading badly over the second half to finish 44th. Last year with his best 20 in long while. But, they were only 37th and 38th. Tim Lewis simply did not have a good day, fading badly over the second half to finish 44th. Last year with his best 20 in long while. But, they were only 37th and 38th. Tim Lewis simply did not have a good day, fading badly over the second half to finish 44th.


At 50, Ivanenko has been in the shadow of Weigel and Gauder, who have been trading international wins at the distance for the past 6 years, challenging them until the last few kilometers, but unable to match their finish. On this day he was the master. He started to make his move with 15 kilometers to go and after pulling slightly clear of Weigel at 40 Km was able to gradually increase his lead to the finish.

At the start, Mexico's Martin Bermudez, the 1979 World Cup champion, and Hernan Andrade moved quickly to the front. At 5 Km they had a 22:27 and a 16 second lead. Everyone else was apparently keying on the favorites, as a group of 25 walkers started to make his move with 15 kilometers to go and after pulling slightly clear of Weigel at 40 Km was able to gradually increase his lead to the finish.
With 5 kilometers to go, Marin had 3:17:22. Weigel 3:17:40, and Gauder 3:17:43. Gauder was just 5 seconds ahead of the determined Potachev. Marin slowed more, but not much, to the finish and was never threatened by Weigel. He had covered his final 20 km in 1:23:39 and his final 15 in 1:02:39. Everyone else slowed markedly over the last 5, not surprising.

Marco Evonuik hung on very well after his game effort to stay on the lead. (He was still only 40 seconds back at 30 kilometers.) His 3:56:55 for 22nd place was 2 seconds under his own American best. Carl Schueler, walking a slower early pace, was close to his own personal best as he finished one place back of Marco in 3:57:44. Andy Kaestner was under 2 hours at the halfway point, but must have been a bit discouraged to have only one competitor behind him at that pace and he was unable to match his great Trials performance. Another great performance for Canada, as Francois LaPointe finished 14th in 3:48:15.


Thierry Toutain, France 1:24:41 2. Sergio Spagnulo, Italy 1:25:14

20 Km, Barcelona, Bratislava, Czech.

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11. Hermes Nelson 4:37:50

50 Km, Palma, Spain, June 18-1. Jose Marin 1:25:46

2. Miguel Prieto 1:26:38

20 Km, Sofia, Bulgaria.


20 Km, Yverdon-Bains, Switzerland.

Fontainebleau, France, July 30-1. Philippe LaFleur 1:29:52

French 20 Km.

Aug. 20-1. Alfons Schwarz, GDR 1:25:06

Spanish 20 Km, Championship, Vigo, Aug. 12.

1. Phillippe Lafleur 1:29:52 French 20 Km.


3. Pueyo 1:23:19


3. Pelflugi Casimiro Alongi Memorial International Racewalks, Dearborn, Mich., Sept. 15:

20 Km. O'Brien 1:38:15 1

Pablo Vidales, Mexico 1:35:21 7. Michael Stauch 1:36:38


Graciela Mendoza, Mexico 22:54 2. Debbi Lawrence 23:01


5. Terry McHoskey 53:10 6. Sal Corral 55:00

Louise Aubin, Canada 24:53 11. Lora Rigutto 25:14


Bocci 28:50 2. Roberta Boyle 29:46


.finishers.

5 Km, Dearborn, Mich., Oct. 8-1.


Robert Morse 29:53

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(49 racewalk finishers, plus thousands of recreational walkers.)

5 Km, Dearborn, Mich., Oct. 8-1.

Andrea Nranian 39:57

2. Dave Lawrence 59:28 3. Doug Fournier

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MORE OLYMPICS STUFF

How do we assess the U.S. performance in Seoul? Probably not what most people were hoping for, but certainly better than we have done in some international competitions in the past—at least on the basis of times. In the 50, Marco Evoniuk and Carl Schueler walked as well as they ever have. Gary Morgan had a personal best and Jim Heiring was closer to his best of several years ago than we might have hoped, considering his injury problems. For whatever reason, Tim Lewis was below par, but he has certainly proven his capability to perform well internationally in the past. Andy Kaestner was not that far off his best.

But, not to fault these athletes and their efforts, the fact remains that for some reason we seem to continually lose ground to the rest of the world. While times improve and we have greater depth, we are not keeping pace with similar improvements elsewhere. Go back to 1964 and Tokyo. Ken Matthews won in 1:29:34 and we had Ron Zinn just 3 minutes back in sixth, and just a minute and a half out of second. Four years later, Rudy Hulua would have had a medal at 20, but for a running Mexican, and Larry Young got the bronze at 50, with Goetz Klipfer tenth.

When asked about the "amazing times" and if "the judging had anything to do with them", Martin said:

"For the most part, the athletes walked well. There were only a few who were definitely questionable. In the 20 Km, there weren't enough judges to do the job the last kilometer. The walkers went together in a pack for 18 km and then accelerated. In our country, we would have had three judges at the finish to make sure anyone who got gross was disqualified. I will say that Ivanenko looked fabulous in the 50. On the other hand, I would have DQ'd Ron Weigel. Everybody loves Weigel and he is a great guy, but I think he should have been disqualified from both races. (Ed. Weigel has had some trouble with the judges in the past.)

As to the reference to the "amazing times", your editor didn't see them as such, although the depth was impressive. Although the Olympic records were shattered, world bests were not matched. Weigel has gone under 3:39 twice in the past and 15 of 20 athletes have ben under 1:20 before, including Ernesto Canto's 1:18:40 on the track four years ago.

I'm sure most of you picked up on the outstanding TV coverage. It was so good, I know of at least three letters to NBC sports, including the following one from your editor.

Mr. Bob Costas
NBC Sports
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10020

Dear Bob,

You were right, but your sarcasm was really not appreciated. Indeed some of us had "waited all day" for results of the 50 Km race walk, as you stated at 12:30 am on Friday, Sept. 30. As does any sport, even this often maligned and misunderstood event has its fans—and its superb athletes. It really doesn't deserve a put down on national TV from a person I thought was rather sensitive.

I can appreciate that not everything in the Olympic arena can be covered and that you have sound marketing reasons for what you do. Thus, I suppose, making any mention of racewalking is a bonus. But I can't excuse off-hand remarks that serve to degrade a legitimate sport.

For obscure reasons, I harbored some hope that there might be a live cut to the Stadium at about 9:40 pm EST, the time I figured the 50 Km race should be finishing. Hope springs eternal, you know. Track is, after all the premier sport of the Games, and one would think that a gold medal finish occurring during prime time, which few did, would deserve a minute or so anyway. But, of course, I saw nothing. So, being an 8 to 5 person in need of rest, I was in bed by the time you did "recognize" the event. Thus, my remarks are based on what I heard from my wife. Forgive me if she erred in her description of the coverage, but I consider her a reliable source.

I suppose one should be thankful for the few seconds that were shown, but why couldn't you treat it like any other event. No gold medalist is less worthy than another, and, as an announcer, you have no right to even hint that an event is somehow without merit. It's grossly unfair to the athletes involved, as well as the sport, and shows a very insensitive attitude to the degree of accomplishment.

Stop and think for a moment about what these athletes do. For 31 miles, they walk at nearly 7 minutes a mile, a pace most people on running fitness programs can't maintain for even a mile. Their level of fitness matches that of marathon runners, road cyclists,
Don and Debbi Lawrence sent the following letter to Michael Weisman, NBC Executive Producer:

We would like to express our sincere dissatisfaction with the coverage of the Olympic racewalks. This sport is gaining in popularity. Millions of Americans across the country are walking for fitness, and many are engaged in this form of exercise for competition. The Olympic racewalking athletes represent an "Olympic dream" for many of these fitness buffs. This walking segment of the public is interested and excited about racewalking!

At the Seoul Olympics, our sport did not get the respect that one of the most grueling of athletic events should. The 20 Km event was scheduled for showing at 11:50 pm EDT, and never made the slot. The 50 Km finish was aired, for a few brief moments during the "wee hours" of the night. However, clown-like background music and the sarcasm of Bob Costas crushed the potential excitement. This is true disappointment.

The 50 Km event is longer than the marathon, and the athletes are on the course nearly twice as long to complete the distance. Racewalking requires as much stamina and strength as many other major events in the Olympics. We are athletes ourselves, and know the dedication necessary to obtain berths on international and Olympic teams.

Please televise the national and international level racewalks, or at least give results and include the Americans. We wish our sport to grow, and with your support, it will.

Let's give the public something that they deserve to see...a few respectable minutes of the sport that represents a majority of the television audience—walking!

And Jim Hanley, an old reliable in supporting the sport against the many slings and arrows that come its way, sent the following:

Oct. 1, 1988

NBC SPORTS
30 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA
NEW YORK, N.Y.
10112

Right up there with the Korean boxing delegation attacking a referee and Ben Johnson's taking steroids, NBC's treatment of the race walkers during the 1988 Olympic Games was clearly a scandal.

The 20 Km. Walk "coverage" consisted of the winner hitting the tape and an announcement of the three medal winners (two of whose names were badly mispronounced!) Since this race came on a day when only three track & field finals were scheduled, one might have thought that athletes going for medals would be getting more air time than meaningless qualifying heats in other events. Wrong!

The 50 Km. "coverage" was worse. Bob Costas commented:

"They're walking!"
A camp for eleven race walkers may seem insignificant. It is not... The message carried back by the parents, coaches and athletes to their home communities should stimulate walkers at the club level. This was only the first step. With imagination and creativity at the coming TAC convention in Phoenix, let us extend the possibilities of the camp concept to other sections of the country.

Youth participants at the race walk camp were: Neil and Sean Albert of Paramus, NJ; Melissa Baker of Shoreham, NY; Chris Braudis of Columbia, MO; Lisa Frank of Napa, CA; Tim Martin of Centerwich, NY; Diana and Kara Mc Geever of Lake Ronkonkoma, NY; Sean Ryan of Lake Placid, NY; Scott Stewart of Loveland, CO; and Dulce Wassil of Albuquerque, NM.

FROM HEEL TO TOE

One more thing on the Olympic front—and it's good news—great news! The women's 10 Km walk will be an official part of the 1992 Olympic program and a fixture thereafter. People eventually wake up, but it's sad it has to take them so long... We really seemed to have trouble with the results from the National Masters Championships in Orlando. Now we find that we omitted the 20 Km in the 70-74 age group. The race was won by Canada's venerable Max Gould in 2:11:49, with Don Johnson second in 2:17:00 and Harry Drazin third in 2:37:24... Monterey's Giulio dePetra, the Italian consul there, competed in the European Master's Championships with notable success—silver medals in the 75-59 division at both 5 and 20 Km. His times were 23:21 and 2:09:04.

LOOKING BACK

20 Years Ago (From the Oct. 1968 ORW)—The Mexico Olympics saw an excellent performance by the U.S. racewalking contingent. In the 20 Km, Soviet ace Vladimir Golubnichiy won his second Olympic gold in 1:33:59 (remember the altitude slows times), holding off local favorite Jose Pedraza, who finished in a near flat out run in 1:34:00 to the cheers of his countrymen and consternation of the judges, who apparently feared for their heads. Nikolai Smaga, USSR, was third in 1:34:03 and Rudy Haluza a brilliant fourth for the U.S. in 1:35:01. Tom Dooley was 17th in 1:40:08, and a sick Ron Laird 25th. At 50, East Germany's Christoph Hohne was unchallenged, as he overcame the altitude and extreme heat to win by 10 minutes in 4:20:14. Antal Kiss of Hungary was second and Larry Young third in a gutsy 4:31:56. Eighth at the mid-point, Larry was able to hold his pace and move through the second half. Goets Klopfer passed three men in the final 5 Km to take 10th in 4:39:14. Dave Romansky, also sick, was a distant 26th.

15 Years Ago (From the October 1973 ORW)—With Hans-Georg Reiman and Karl-Heinz Stadtmuller taking one-two at 20 Km, East Germany swept to victory in the Lugano (World) Cup. That performance gave them a nine-point edge on the Soviets, which held up through a strong Soviet performance in the 50 for a final four-point margin. Italy was third, West Germany fourth, and the U.S. fifth. Reimann won in 1:29:36. Ron Laird outdueled Nikolai Smaga to capture his second Lugano bronze in 1:30:45. With Todd Scully seventh in 1:32:23 and Jerry Brown 14th in 1:34:05, the U.S. was third after the 20. The 50 went to West Germany's Olympic champion Bernd Kannenbichler in 3:58:51, with Otto Bartaeh (USSR) and Christopher Horan...
Floyd Godwin 4:23:48 in 20th, and Bill Weigle 4:28:40 in 24th. East Germany also captured the Lugano-Chiasso Relay, an annual affair in Switzerland. The U.S. was sixth in this one as Ron Laird ran into stomach problems on the first leg, and, after spending much time in the bushes, struggled in 16 minutes back of the leaders.

Shaul Ladany won the 100 miler in Columbia, Missouri in 19:38:26, with Chuck Hunter, John Markon, and John Argo also going all the way. Jerry Brown captured the National 30 Km in Columbia, his third championship of the year, finishing in 2:28:12. Floyd Godwin was a minute and a half back, and a promising newcomer, Dan O'Connor, edged Augie Hirt for third, another 10 minutes back. The day before, Ellen Minkow won the women's 10 Km title, also in Columbia, with 56:19.

10 Years Ago (From the Oct. 1978 ORW)—Allen Price won the National 100 miler in record time-18:57:01—with Paul Hendricks second in 19:10:37. The race saw a record 10 finishers, including the first woman Centurion in this country, Elsie McGarvey, who finished in 22:52:31. Leonard Busen and Bob Chapin joined the two leaders in finishing under 20 hours. The U.S. defeated Canada in a dual meet, which included races at 10 and 30 Km. The 30 went to Canada's Marcel Jobin in 2:19:33, but the U.S. took the next three spots—Dan O'Connor 2:24:05, Marco Ewoniuk 2:24:05, and Carl Schueler 2:33:54. Jim Heiring (44:44) led a U.S. sweep of the 10, with Ron Daniel doing 46:32 and Pete Doyle 47:56. In San Francisco, Neal Pyke set an American 1 Hour record, covering 8 miles 1081 yards. The old record was 8 miles 746 by Ron Laird, a mark that Wayne Glusker missed by only 15 yards in second place. Tom Dooley was just a yard behind Wayne.

5 Years Ago (From the Oct. 1983 ORW)—In World Cup competition, the Soviet men and Chinese women prevailed. In the women's 10 Km, the Chinese edged the Soviets by two points, with Youg Ju Xu taking individual honors in 45:14, a world best at the time. Natalia Shiripova was second and Aussies Sue Cook and Sally Piersen third and fourth. Maryanna Torrellas was the first U.S. finisher with 47:52 in 16th, and the team finished eighth. In the 20, Josef Pribiliniec drew away from Ernesto Canto in the final 5 Km to win by 11 seconds in 1:19:30. Anatoiliy Solomin, USSR, was just 3 seconds in back of Canto, and Maurizio Damilano came fourth. Jim Heiring was 16th in 1:24:51 and Todd Scully 24th in 1:27:29. Tim Lewis was just a yard behind Wayne. In Bergen, Norway. A week later, Raul Gonzalez won the Alongi Memorial 20 Km in Dearborn in a relaxed 1:27:55, with Carl Schueler second in 1:29:05.

IT'S RACING YOU WANT? HERE THEY ARE

Sat. Oct. 29-5 Mile, Tacoma, Wash. (F)
Sat. Nov. 12-10 Km, Miami (S)
Sun. Nov. 13-5 Km, Riverside, Calif., 8 am (D)
Sun. Nov. 13-15 Km, Schenectady, N.Y. 10:30 am (C)
Sun. Nov. 19-4 Mile, Ft. Worth, Texas (K)
Sun. Nov. 20-5 Km, Seattle (F)
Sun. Nov. 27-20, and 50 Km, Columbus, Ohio, 8 am (H)
Sun. Nov. 27-35 Km, Houston, Texas (K)
Sun. Dec. 4-10 Km, Coconut Grove, Florida (S)
Sun. Dec. 11-5 Km, Miami (S)
Sun. Dec. 18-National TAC 100 Km and Gulf Association 50 Km, Houston, Texas, 6 am (K)
Sun. Dec. 24-10 Km, Weston, Florida (S)
Sun. Dec. 24-20, and 15 Km, Seattle, 1 pm (F)

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