Drama at World Cup as Soviet women, Italian men prevail; Mexicans shine individually

San Jose, Cal., June 1-2 (Your editor reports from the scene)—After two days of exciting competition, the 1991 World Cup of Racewalking ended dramatically when Andrei Perlov, on his way to a gold medal at 50 Km and an apparent team title for the Soviets, was swept from the course by Chief Judge Gary Westerfield just 10 Meters from the finish. As a result, the brilliant 24-year-old Carlos Mercenario of Mexico, who won at 20 Km in New York 4 years ago, took the gold, becoming the first man to win World Cup titles at both distances. (This was the fifteenth for men and seventh for women.)

The Italians, coming through strongly over the second half of the 50, as they normally do, captured their second team title, after taking a commanding, and surprising, lead in the 20 Km. The Italians last won in 1981; but were second in three of the intervening Cups and third in the fourth.

The Soviet women won their third straight Cup in the 10 Km, and made it four of the last five. Here, they left little doubt, taking first, third, and fourth in the race. Winner Irina Strakhova had been second in New York 4 years ago and won the World Championships that year, but had done little since. The surprising runnerup was Mexico's Graciela Mendoza, who had the race of her life, moving through the field the second 5 Km. But she never quite got in position to challenge Strakhova.

In the 20 Km, Mikhail Schennikov, USSR, took over from France's Thierry Toutain with 4 Km to go and then withstood a strong challenge from Mexico's Ernesto Canto to capture the gold. The Soviet ace had been second 2 years ago. Canto, the 1981 winner and 1983 runnerup, and the world record holder at the distance on the track, put in a strong bid for another title. Mexico's gold and two silver medals from the three races was bettered only by the Soviets two golds and a bronze. The other medals went to France (Toutain), Australia (Simon Baker), and Germany (Ronald Weigel), the latter two in the 50.

Racing got underway at 9 on Saturday morning with the 20 Km. After a couple of very cool days, it was already quite warm at that time and the sun promised to heat things up further as the race went along. With that mind, the favorites were content to start the race at a rather conservative pace. After the first 2 Km lap, Hungary's Sandor Urbanik was out about by himself in 4 minutes flat with about 30 others bunched 7 second behind. Urbanik still led the pack by about 15 meters after 2 laps, but had slowed to 16:20. Tim Lewis was the leading U.S. walkers at this point in 16:34, near the head of a second pack.
The younger Soviet was just a little bit quicker. A great effort by the conservative plan today, much the same as Schennikov. But when the final surge came, the younger Soviet was just that little bit quicker. A great effort by the veteran, nonetheless.


By the time the women's 10 Km started at 11:15 it was quite hot and the sun was blazing. Before it was over, some of the athletes suffered quite a bit. This race, walked over the same course as the men's race, but with an earlier turnaround to make it just a 1250 meter loop, broke up much quicker. After a quick 5:12 (41:35 pace) on the first lap, only a dozen walkers were in the lead group. Alina Ivanova, USSR, was leading, with Beate Anders, Ger., and Australia's Kerry Saxby, two of three favorites for the title, also at the front. Ivanova still led at 1500 meters in 10:31, but now only Saxby, China's Chen Yueling and Jin Bingjie, and Elena Saito, USSR, were with her. Strakhova trailed this group by about 10 meters, several strides ahead of Anders. The third favorite, world track record holder, Nadezhda Ryashkina, was back in tenth and not looking comfortable.

Yueling made a move about 100 meters into the fourth lap and had a clear lead at 5 Km in 21:17. Saxby was 6 seconds back, walking cautiously because of two early red cards, and Strakhova another four seconds back. Following closely
were Ivanova, Saiko, Olga Kardapoltseva, and Bingjie. Graciela Mendoza had passed Anders for eighth spot, but still well off the pace. Yueling led for another lap, but during the sixth lap, she, along with Ivanova and Bingjie, were disqualified.

The pace was slowing in the heat, and at 71/2 km, with 2 laps to go, Strakhova led in 32:39. Saiko was second and Mendoza had moved all the way to third, ahead of Saxby, Kardapoltseva, Anders, and Ryashkina.

With a lap to go, Strakhova led by 7 seconds in 38:20, with Mendoza right on Saiko's heels. Saxby was still leading Kardapoltseva, but none of the others seemed close enough to challenge the first three. Over the final 1250 meters, Strakhova was able to extend her lead and the surprising Mendoza outsprinted Saiko for the silver medal. Kardapoltseva easily moved away from a discouraged Saxby for fourth.

The 32-year-old Strakhova has a personal best of 43:35. She set 56s and weighs 120 pounds. After the race, she said: "Today, I wanted to prove that my success in 1987 (at the World Championships) was not a fluke. A lot of people thought I was lucky to win then. The heat was a major problem today, since we train in much cooler weather. Since the laps were so short with a lot of curves, that affected the times." About the disqualification of Yueling and Ivanova, she said: "It can happen to anyone; it had no effect on my strategy."

Mendoza had the race of her life, finishing in 44:09 despite the heat and the fact she had never broken 45 before. Debbi Lawrence led the U.S. contingent, who wound up sixth in the team standings, with a brilliant 15th place finish in 46:13, not far off her best. She said: "With the weather being so warm, I knew if I went out too fast I'd die. I wanted to go out relatively easy for the first half, then give it everything I had to the finish. I was hoping to break my American record of 45:32. I was on pace to do that until about the 8 kilometer mark. I'm happy though because my differential from the winner is the closest I've ever been in a major international race."

The results:

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The 50 Km started at 8 on Sunday morning. The air was still comfortably cool at the start, but it obviously was going to be quite warm again before the finish, and, as in the 20, the athletes were quite conservative at the start. Everyone chose to ignore Algeria's Bounrdr Arezki who led through laps of 9:29, 9:31, and 9:06, at which time he was about 30 seconds ahead of everyone else. Arezki had finished 79th in the 20 Km on Saturday with a 1:32:23 and was obviously no threat. He hit the 10 Km mark in 46:04 with a 46 second lead, but dropped out shortly thereafter. The pack behind him included about 20 walkers and all of the favorites. There were four Soviets, three Germans, and three Spaniards among them.

The pace started to quicken at this point, lap times dropping from well over 9 minutes to about 8:50. By 20 Km, the pack was down to just 10 athletes and the time was 1:30:56, a 44:06 for the second 10 Km. Walking abreast in the lead were the Soviets Perlov, Potashov, and Spitsin. This pack also included defending titlist Simon Baker, 1985 winner Hartwig Gauder, 1987 20 Km winner Carlos Mercenario, and a fourth Soviet, Vitaliy Popovich. Ronald Weigel, the 1987 50 km winner, was already struggling to stay close to the pack. The first Italian was better than 2 minutes back and the other were 4 to 5 minutes behind, and people started to wonder about their ability to hold their team lead.

The Soviets really started to push the pace and by 30 Km, only five walkers were on the lead. Perlov, Potashov, and Popovich were in front in 2:14:15 (43:19 for the third 10 Km) with Baker and Mercenario right on their heels. Spitsin was just over a minute behind in sixth, giving the Soviets a seeming lock on the team title with all the Italians still well back. Gauder and Weigel were seventh and eighth, but about 2 minutes behind. Mexico was still in the team picture, with Rodriguez in ninth and Bermudez eleventh.

The pace continued at sub 8:40 laps with the same five hanging tight and the field stringing out behind them. Defending titlist Baker was the first to yield and when they came through 36 km he was 9 seconds back. The real sensation came the next time around when Popovitch was gone completely-pulled by the Judges. But the Soviets still looked secure for the team title with three of the first five and the Italians still well back.

The three leaders hit 40 Km in 3:57:20 (43:05 for the fourth 10 Km) and all still looked strong. Baker was now a full minute down and Weigel had rallied to edge by Spitsin for fifth. They had 3:01:44 and 3:01:50. Following were Rodriguez 3:03:37; Pericelli, the first Italian to move among the leaders, 3:04:01; Bernd Gummelt, Germany, 3:04:21; a fourth Soviet, Grigoryev, 3:04:21; and Gauder 3:04:25. The third Mexican, Bermudez, was 13th. The Soviets were still well in command for the overall team title, although the Germans and Mexicans were in position to challenge for first in the 50. (Four Soviets, three Germans, and three Mexicans in the first 13.)

After another lap, Potashov began to fade and it became a two-man race. Baker was still losing ground but was well clear of Weigel who was easily opening
ground on Spitsin. Perlov, looking very strong, took command as they started the 23rd lap and with two laps to go was 19 seconds clear and apparently on his way to a very impressive victory. He had done the last two laps in 8:27 and 8:28, a sub 42:30 pace, a pace even the swift Mercenario could not live with at this stage. The lead grew to nearly a minute with a lap to go, although Perlov slowed to 8:45 on that lap—the effort was telling on him, too.

It was also telling on his form and with about 500 meters to go, Chief Judge Westerfield had the word that Perlov had collected his third red card. He showed him the red flag at that point, but Perlov refused to leave the course. Gary hopped back in his golf cart to pursue him, the vehicle wouldn’t start. By the time he was going again, he wound up hopping out of the cart about 80 meters from the finish and taking off in a desperate sprint to intercept the Soviet walker before he broke the tape. The aging Westerfield, running as fast as his little legs would carry him, barely gaining on the walking Perlov. He caught him with about 20 meters to go, again stuck the red flag in an unbelieving face, and finally had to actually block Perlov off the course just 10 meters from the tape. Many in the crowd, not understanding the sport fully, or that it wasn’t actually a last second disqualification, booed Westerfield. Unfortunately, since Gary had done a yeoman job to prevent the wrong man from breaking the tape.

Mercenario came along about a minute-and-a-half later, already knowing he was the winner from having seen the judging board and overjoyed with the gold, which was well deserved. It was a magnificent effort on his part for one with so little experience at the event.

Potashov crossed the line in second place, 2 minutes after Mercenario, but it was soon learned that he too had collected a third card on the last lap, and the Soviets were completely out of the team picture. As it turned out, even if Perlov and Potashov had finished one-three, they would have finished three points back of Italy, since Spitsin faded at the end and the Italians, as usual, came on strongly in the final 10 Km. What had seemed a sure team title with 15 Km to go, turned into a disaster and a final sixth place finish. Don’t count your eggs too soon in a 50 Km race. Baker hung on for the silver medal, to go with his gold from 1989, although Weigel was closing ground fast at the finish. In a post-race interview, the witty Weigel noted that he crossed the line thinking he was fifth, found out 2 minutes later he was fourth, and after another 2 minutes learned he had the bronze. He was eagerly waiting another 2 minutes hoping for the silver and maybe another 2 for the gold, he said. The Germans exiled, as Guzzetti followed Weigel across the line and Gauder captured sixth, back of the fast finishing Perricelli. This gave them the team title for the event and second overall, just ahead of the Mexicans, who had seventh (Rodríguez) and eleventh (Bermúdez, the 1979 winner) in the event.

Carl Schueler led the U.S. with a 4:08:51 in 31st, but Dan O’Connor was the only other finisher. Nonetheless, the team moved up to 15th in the final standings.

Mercenario, just a month past his 24th birthday, is 5’9, 136 pounds. He had a previous 50 Km best of 3:50:10. After the race, he said: “I knew on the last lap that Perlov had been disqualified because I saw it on the board by the water stop. I was always checking it. I’m sorry that Perlov was DQ’d because he and I are friends. We have competed together many times, and I like the Soviets because they are very down to earth. I know how he feels. I was DQ’d in Rome (1987 World Championships, after he had won the World Cup). I don’t worry about time. This is my first World Cup 50 Kilometer race and I can’t believe it.” Mercenario and Weigel agreed that disqualifications are an accepted part of the sport, and, while you don’t wish them on anyone, you always know that you may either suffer or profit from them.

Schueler said: “It was too hot and I went out too fast. With 15 Km left, my legs went dead and my quads tightened up. I wanted to go 4:05, but it’s pretty tough when your legs tighten up.” The results:


Chief Judges: Georg Frister, Germany; Peter Marlow, GB; Gary Westerfield, US (Gary had arrested, if noted). I’m not sure how the other two split on the other two
Lawrence noted after the race: “Toward the end of the race, I could feel Lynn near me. I knew then that I had to shift strategies. I thought back about indoors and I knew I could recover my leg speed. . . I usually look at my watch each lap to keep on pace. With 10 laps to go, I took my watch off and told myself to just go.” Weik commented: “I had planned my race according to split times I had figured out beforehand. I haven’t been close enough this year to Debbi to know how she would react once I got close to her. Because it was so hot, I didn’t give the record much thought (Weik missed the old record by less than 3 seconds). A lot of times I thought Debbi was going to falter, but she just kept picking herself up.”

On Friday, Tim Lewis won his straight 20 Km title, just 2 weeks after his World Cup effort. Gary Morgan challenged him, but Tim was too strong at the finish. Dave McGovern held off Andrzej Chylinski to make his first international team. Other members of the World Cup team who chose to compete did not do as well as Lewis. Doug Fournier was seventh, Curtis Fisher tenth, Dan O’Connor eleventh, and Don Lawrence DQ’d.

Results:


15 Km titles to Lewis and Herazo

Portland, Oregon, May 12 (From Jim Bean)—Tim Lewis and Victoria Herazo prepped for their World Cup efforts with impressive wins in the National TAC 15 Km racewalks today. Lewis walked a very fast 1:02:35 with nearly even 5 Km splits of 20:53, 20:38, and 20:54 to leave Andrzejj Chylinski nearly 2 minutes behind. Herazo was even more impressive with an American record 1:11:13.

On a cloudy, damp day, Lewis wasted little time leaving the field. He was on his own from 100 meters into the race. In a battle for the other spots, Gary Morgan led the pack through 2.5 Km in 10:50, some 25 seconds behind Lewis. Allen James was 7 seconds behind Morgan, and Chylinski, Bruce Harland, Jonathan Mathews, and Herm Nelson were another 10 seconds back. With Lewis still pulling
away, Morgan and Chylinski went through 5 Km together. James was on his own in fourth, with Matthews, Nelson, and Harland spreading out behind.

On the third lap, Chylinski did a 10:31 to pull away from Morgan, as both of them moved away from James. At 10 Km, Lewis was cruising in 41:41, a minute ahead of Chylinski, who had pulled further ahead of Morgan, now losing ground to the steady James. Lewis finished strong with a 10:19 on his final lap, his fastest of the race. Though slowing, Morgan managed to stay ahead of James. Matthews and Nelson were alone in fifth and sixth.

Herazo blitzed the field early, just as Lewis had. Second place in the women's race was a battle between Wendy Sharp and Debby VanOrden. The rest of the field separated early, with Kim Wilkinson fourth, Cindy Paffumi fifth, and Daniela Hairbedian sixth. Results of the races:

**Men**


**Women**


**OTHER RESULTS**

**Maine State 5 Km, Brewer, June 1**


FROM HEEL TO TOE

Here we are, with our extensive coverage of the World Cup, almost out of space for this issue and a stack full of goodies we could still bring you. We are going to leave room to get at least partial results of the 1990 postal 1 hour conducted by the New Jersey TAC Association, which are finally available, with apologies from the sponsors for being so late. What we have room for will follow—the full load of results will come next month. Also we have to hold an excellent letter from Rich Torrellas explaining the Chylinski saga in more detail. Rich also sent the following note: "In certain situations, people simply do not like surprises. I assumed that the only solution to this problem would be to hold the race in September, mentioned last month, is not a National Championship race..."

Negativity, I was certain, would reign supreme. I could not have been more wrong. Except for an uncalled for comment by one athlete taking part in the race, our 20 Km walkers behaved in a most admirable manner. I could not have been more proud of their maturity, fortitude and their adaptability. They reacted well and were rewarded with excellent performances. In addition, our athletes have taken Andrzeiz in as one of their own and made him a friend despite his threat as an athlete. From Carl Schuler to Ray and Wendy Shapiro to Tim Lewis to Curtis Fisher to Debbie Van Orden to Leonard Jansen, they have shown him a kindness and courtesy beyond limit. To say that I am proud of you all would be an understatement..." Also on hold is a letter from Paul Malek giving his side of the story on his 50 Km disqualification, a story that deserves to be told. And some other interesting things are on hold, including the usual feature Looking Back.

Matter of fact, we are holding so much stuff, we may not have room for it all next month...Henry Laskau was again on the ballot for the National T&F Hall of Fame, but again was not elected. Most unfortunate. Note that the 100 miler in Columbia in September, mentioned last month, is not a National Championship race...On the 1 Hour, rather than starting to list results, which are quite lengthy, and then cutting off somewhere part way through, I will publish the cover letter from them, which gives the highlights of the event and plans for this year's event.

Dear Walker:

Thank you all for hearing us in this first year without Don Henry. This job is a lot bigger then anyone could imagine. It requires 100 man/woman hours or more to commit.

Donna Cerullo
Harry Dronin
Don Johnson
Nancy Eyrer
Avna Shapiro

When you study this document you will quickly notice how large this event has become. Mexico City: Our numbers included Juniors from age B to Masters age B4. There were over 2,000 runners in Mexico City! Our numbers included Juniors from age B to Masters age B4. There were over 2,000 runners in Mexico City!

This year's results were set as follows:

- Men Open: Dave McGovern, Natural Living, 12749 meters
- Men 50-54: John Kissel, Austin R.R., 12324 meters
- Men 55-69: Bob McElroy, Shore A.C., 10667 meters
- Men 70-74: Howard Channel, Front Range W., 9825 meters
- Women Open: Victoria Herazo, Victoria Walkers, 7854 meters
- Women 40-49: Heather McDonald, Cal Walkers, 12464 meters
- Women 50-59: Joann Nedeles, Golden Gate R.W., 11410 meters
- Women 60-69: Betty Newman, Victoria Walkers, 9851 meters

I hope you all will return next year. I know we will do better on the reporting. Remember you can enter as many times as you like for the same fee. Those of you who are lucky enough to have a five year age group birthday can even be in two different age groups. Just race before and after your birthday!

Lets get even more people involved this year. This is a people's race and should include as broad a range of abilities as possible. Look at my results. We are hoping some entry blanks, Be our ambassador. There will be one rule change for 1991. By request, we are now requiring 3 judges to comply with T&F standards. This will come in handy if someone sets a record.

Please help us out with the scoring by:
1. Use only our entry blank (copies are fine), separate lap sheets are OK but we find it much easier if we get your personal statistics in our own format.
2. Fill out everything on the registration form. Please include your sex, and your age on the day of the race.
3. If your entry is the second of the year please indicate this in large letters on subsequent entries.

Sincerely Yours,

Jerry Kass

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