Rohls Rule the Roost

Manassas, Virginia, March 28—Moving from the nation's capital to Bull Run Park, this year's National Invitational Racewalks were blessed with beautiful weather, but, unfortunately, a less stellar field than usual. One of America's favorite racewalking couples walked off with the honors--Michael Rohl winning the men's 20 Km and Michelle the women's 10.

The women's race had a stronger field than the men's, but the 32-year-old Rohl, walking very well again after taking most of last year off for maternity purposes, was dominant. Her 46:55 left second-place Joanne Dow 47 seconds back at the finish. However, the 35-year-old Dow was just 22 seconds off her 1997 best, a promising start to the year for her. Teresa Vaill, also 35 and not heard from last year, had a good start to a comeback year with a 48:02 in third. Jill Zemmer, 23 and the pride of Yellow Springs, Ohio, was also off to a good start, taking fourth in 49:31.

The first three were together through 4 Km, where Vaill led in 18:23 (after a 9:05 for the first 2), followed by Rohl (18:25), and Dow (18:26). But Rohl pulled steadily away from that point passing 6 Km in 27:45 and 8 in 37:15. Dow was able to get away from Vaill over the final 4 Km as both slowed significantly.

Mike Rohl won the 20 in 1:37:06, with competition only from the 43-year-old veteran of international races, Steve Pecinovsky. Steve's 1:37:29 was his fastest since 1993. The most impressive performance was turned in by 1968 Olympian Dave Romansky (59), who finished seventh in 1:46:35. One place further back, Max Green, 66, was as tough as ever with his 1:54:47.

Rohl and Pecinovsky battled through 8 Km, where Mike led by 1 second in 37:31. But by 10 Km, Rohl's 46:55 had him 18 seconds up. He had stretched that lead to 66 seconds as they started the final 2 Km lap, but Pecinovsky finished strongly with a 9:47 for the final lap, while Rohl struggled home in 10:29. Results of these and accompanying races:

**Women's 10 Km:**

**Men's 20 Km**
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**Women's 5 Km:**
1. Elizabeth Paxton (14), Cypress, Cal. 27:21 2. Lindsay Bellis (17), Marlton, N.J. 30:23

**Men's 10 Km:**

**Women's 5 Km:**

**Men's 5 Km:**

Other results:

**National Masters Indoor 3 Km, Boston, March 28:**
Put your best foot forward at some of these competitions

Sat. May 9   5 Km, Albuquerque, N.M. (W)
5 Km, Littleton, Col., 8 am (H)
Sun. May 10  Jack Mortland Walks, 5 Km, 10 Km, Ohio and North Region 20 Km, Yellow Springs, Ohio (M)
5 Km Miami, 7:30 am (Q)
5 Km, Houston (Y)
10 Km, Palo Alto, Cal. (R)
Mon. May 11  1 Hour, Ft. Monmouth, N.J., 7 pm (A)
Tue. May 12  1500 meters, Atlanta, 5 pm (D)
Sat. May 16  5 Km, Duluth, Georgia (D)
8 Km, Anderson, Ind. (Y)
5 Km, Denver, 8 am (H)
Sun. May 17  Western Regional 10 and 20 Km, Palo Alto, Cal. (R)
5 Km, Needham, Mass. (N)
5, 10, and 20 Km, Point Pleasant, N.J. (A)
10 Km, Dearborn, Mich. (Z)
1550 and 3000 meters, Columbus, Ohio (AA)
5 and 15 Km, Riverside, Cal., 7:30 am (B)
4 Mile, Denver, 8:30 am (H)
Tue. May 19  1500 meters, Atlanta, 5 pm (D)
Sat. May 23  5 Km, Ann Arbor, Mich. (O)
Sun. May 24  National USA Track & Field 15 Km, Elk Grove, Ill. (S)
Metropolitan 20 Km, New York City, 8:30 am (F)
Sanford Kaelb 9 Km, Lakewood, N.J. (A)
Alongi in Marin 5 Km, Kentfield, Cal. (P)
10 Km, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 11 am (DD)
Mon. May 25  10 Km, Boulder, Col., 7:30 am (H)
Tue. May 26  1500 meters, Atlanta, 5 pm (D)
Sun. May 31  New England 5 Km, Brookline, Mass. (N)
5 Km, Columbus, Ohio (BB)
3, 5, 10, and 20 Km, Houston (Y)
From Heel To Toe

Whoops! Well, I just noticed that I got the wrong heading on this item last month--I had two "Looking Back" features in that issue, but the first one should have been "From Heel To Toe". I imagine astute readers figured it out--and, of course, we have nothing but astute readers. Shoe commentary. Jim Mann, former national team member, is now a production manager for Nike. Asked, via the Internet, about the future of racewalking shoes, he replied as follows: "As a retired walker, I wish there were "racewalking shoes" being produced. But, as a businessman, the reason is numbers. For example, we have a minimum order for new models of 3,000 to 5,000 pairs. In the past, racewalking shoes could not cover that amount. Also add that in only 1 to 2 years the consumer would want a new model. Then add that in same year mold costs of 100K plus for a normal size run plus sales would be minute and centralized and we unfortunately run into a costing issue. Is it fair? No. But, from a business standpoint it makes great sense. Also, most walkers (excluding national and world class) can use a running or run/walk model, so the masses are covered. In the past, I have worked on ideas to get walking shoes into circulation by Nike, but it never came to the market. What does the future hold? We shall see. I do know that there is nothing from us on the horizon as of now."

The Really Long Race

Reader Robert Phillips in Latonia, Kentucky sent along the following article regarding the Paris-to-Colmar race, which he pulled from a 1993 magazine. First, that brief article:

"There are long walks, and then there's the Paris-to-Colmar racewalk competition in France. This whole-of-a-walk is 523 kilometers (324 miles) long, and competitors have only 3 days to reach the finish. No picnic.

The race--held on and off since 1926--was walked this year in early June. The racewalk pushes competitors to their limits; there are only two official rest periods, called repos. The walking weary and their support staff get 3 hours off at 272 km and 1 hour at 418 km. "Sleep deprivation plays a large role in the success of failure of the athlete," says Dr. Howard Palamarchuk, a podiatrist from Pennsylvania, who helped administer much-needed foot care to the racewalkers along the course.

The race has long served as a sort of walking laboratory for foot-care research. The most notable product to be tested at the race is the 44-year-old French podiatric cream, called NOK by Akilene, which prevents irritations caused by chafing and perspiration. In a field of European race
walkers, French entrant Noél Duval edged out Polish racer Zbigniew Klaps and won in 62:18—which is a blistering pace in a not-too-blistering race.”

Robert was interested in more on the challenge of such races. Well, we haven't seen the results of this race for a few years, but we used to carry them regularly and had some interesting commentary through the years. The last was following that 1993 race, when Howie Palamarchuk wrote his report of the race for us (July 1993 issue). We noted then that the extraordinary ultradistance competitor, Colin Young, had once written an article for us on his experiences. It is well worth repeating for those interested in real endurance tests. The article titled "A Hard Day and Night and the Like" appeared in our March 1974 issue. We prefaced it by noting that Colin, an Englishman, had probably walked as many ultra-distance races (100 miles and up) as anyone active at that time. We would add now that Colin is a real racewalker with good times at distances from 2 miles on out, though interestingly enough in light of his great endurance, he seems to be better in the 10 to 20 km range than at 50. We also noted that, in a cover letter to the article, Colin stated that "The lads I met out in Lugano (U.S. lads) said they would be interested in my approach to the ultra-distance affairs and asked that I submit an article to you." So here it is again, 24 years later (note that the race was Strasbourg-to-Paris until 1979, with varying routes, but always in the 500 to 525 km range):

It was with some surprise and a great deal of pleasure that I found the majority of your letters about Colin expressing interest in more on the challenge of such races. Indeed, it is a lesson to us that the readers of Ultra-Marathon are interested in a wide range of ultra-distance events. Colin had previously written an article on the subject, but we had not carried it in our pages. So, here is another opportunity to share his insights on the sport of ultra-distance walking.

Regarding recovery, following the "hardships" of the immediate finish, I quickly stiffen up, get cold, and very sleepy and generally endeavor to get to bed as soon as possible. (An editor’s note from the original: Which reminds your editor of a syndrome Blackburn and I have discussed. More later) Following 8 hours or so of not too restful sleep, I am normally in good shape apart from general stiffness. My first training session is accomplished 48 or 72 hours following the finish and, apart from having to concentrate on maintaining arm action, I usually move well and have recorded a 24:50 for 20 miles a fortnight after a 24 hour and a sub 50 minute 10 km just 2 days after. Weight loss is in the region of 5 to 8 pounds, but weight is back to normal within 2 to 3 days.

The Strasbourg-to-Paris is, however, a race apart. To be anywhere near the front, one does not start from start to finish other than the compulsory rests (one of 1 1/2 hours and one of 1 hour) and I have found no benefit from these. They only prolong the agony!! As will be understood, the ability to go without any sleep is a great asset and the top European performers do this for 3 or 4 days literally without a wink... must have a good doctor, or something, in their set-up!!

Naturally enough, on the three occasions I have raced, although I am sure my wife would not agree), I am generally more with it than after a 24 hour race. The travelling to Strasbourg from London is a tiring business and I have always felt quite done in after 80 miles or so. It is also difficult to judge the pace in the early miles, but, in any case, whatever the speed you still get very tired. The first compulsory stop of 1 1/2 hours after 110 miles (Ed. Note the above article says 3 hours after 272 km, which would be about 170 miles perhaps the regulations have changed) does me no good as it is like completing a 24 hour, stopping for an all too brief period, then restarting with the prospect of 2 more days to come! Every succeeding year I have attempted to eat more because the man who eats well, has no foot troubles, maintains a steady pace, and can overcome lack of sleep is going to be in the frame at the finish. You cannot hope to train for an S-P, one just hopes the selection race, a 24 hour, plus general background of distance racing, training, and sheer guts will prove enough. Having said all that, it still remains the most memorable race I have ever competed in. Where else can one be watched by a total of half a million spectators? A championship distance expert I would love to be, but I am not sorry I am an ultra-distance man because the men you race against and the people who help are a fantastic bunch of friends.

(Ed. Perhaps in the future Colin will honor us with an update on this article. Or, perhaps nothing has changed. And, another note from the original: Oh yes, the syndrome I mentioned. I am not sure how this has escaped these pages before, but Jack and I have both found that after a
particularly hard race of 15 km and up, we too feel a greater than usual urge to get into bed. But sleep is only the second thing on our minds. Not that it matters, since we are generally starting a several hundred mile drive anyway. Is this post-race horniness typical of other walkers? And does it carry over into the ultra-long ones, Colin? Further note: As I recall, neither Colin or anyone else ever answered that query. Anyone care to comment now. Perhaps we will hear from Bob Carlson who has penned a few items on the subject of sex and exercise.

Instructing the Beginner

(While searching out the Colin Young article, I came across the following article, which I wrote and published in the August 1974 ORW. It described how I felt then about introducing the beginning racewalker to the sport, and I think I have pretty much the same philosophy today, so here it is again. This is where you start before you turn to all the great books and videos that are recently out to help one advance to a higher level.)

Ever been asked by a beginner how to walk? If you have been racewalking long, you no doubt have. It is naturally assumed that one who can do it can teach it—a premise that ain't necessarily so. I, for one, am lousy at imparting the basics of a skill to others. Especially a skill as apparently unnatural as racewalking.

But is it unnatural? Certainly it appears to be. But I have found a system, if it can be called that, that seems to refute this premise and that requires you to impart no knowledge at all in getting one into an acceptable style.

In most cases, it seems to me, it is next to useless to start with a detailed description of the mechanics involved in racewalking—hip rotation, pulling and pushing with the supporting leg, knee lock, arm action, etc. Racewalking is a skill that one must feel and such a discussion initially is probably not going to help at all. Later in refining style—yes. At this stage—no. I have seen individuals who have been told all there is to know about rules and mechanics, but with no feel as to how to apply this knowledge, merely fighting themselves—stiff, mechanical, hips rotating in opposition to leg movements—everything wrong. Where do you start in trying to straighten out a completely misdirected effort?

Now there are a few fortunate individuals to who the racewalker's gait seems quite natural. They can see a walking race and quickly imitate what they have seen (good, legal style, we hope). They might ask how they are doing and, after telling them "great", you may be able to

No one can judge from 10 feet in the air. But I let it pass. In any case, it brought back to me again the lifeguard whistled him down for running. I was sorely tempted to argue on the boy's behalf. (Maybe if I could provide a bus to catch, it would help.) If they can do this, they should naturally drift into a decent, legal racewalking style. Certainly in most cases, further work will be needed to correct some faults and to loosen and adjust the style to further increase speed. But basically, they should quickly be racewalking, if a bit awkwardly. Too often when worrying about mechanics, they wind up doing anything but racewalking.

I have had some success employing this concept in trying to teach people to walk, although it doesn't seem to work as well in practice as in theory. I think the biggest problem is that people come with their minds already somewhat clouded by what they have seen, or heard, about rules and mechanics. Therefore, although I stress the importance of concentrating only on increasing speed without running and not worrying about how they are doing it, there is a strong tendency to try to apply what knowledge they already have. This interferes with the natural, smooth progression into racewalking. They wind up fighting themselves while worrying about what they are doing, and I don't think racewalking is something that can be forced. The "feel" must come naturally. So says Mortland, anyway. Unfortunately, not being a hypnotist, I have not solved this problem of freeing the mind. Actually, I must admit, I have probably helped with the mind-clouding bit by imparting mechanical details myself before hitting them with the Mortland method. I really never thought of this aspect before I started writing this.

However good the method, or the coach/teacher, you must remember that just as there are some individuals to whom racewalking comes quite naturally, so there are those who will never really learn to walk. W had a fellow, John Berry, walking with us several years ago. He was very long legged and very strong and turned in some very respectable times at both 20 and 50 over a 3 or 4 year period. But he never really racewalked during that time. He was legal, but just had an ultra-fast stroll with his long legs. His hips never really came into the action at all. Whether this was because of his skeletal and muscular structure, or because he was never able to get the proper feel, I don't know, but from a selfish standpoint, Jack B. and I were happy he never did learn to racewalk. He would have been very tough to handle. We have had, and I have seen, many others in the same category, but none who could go as quickly as John. Most get discouraged and don't last long in the sport. I doubt that any amount of coaching or work will loosen these people to a true racewalking style. Which is not to say these people cannot enjoy the sport, derive its benefits, and achieve some success, as did John. (Ed. 1998 addendum: People don't tend to get so easily discouraged today with all of the 5 Km races and so many of all ability levels getting into them. Now, while there may be a lot of people in front, some of them way in front, there are probably going to be a lot behind as well.)

Conversely, there are those, and we have them in the OTC too, who have picture book style. Perfect examples for your next racewalking instructional film. But for some reason, they never seem able to apply this picture-book style to maintaining real racewalking speed over any
appreciable distance. Perhaps the style is so easy, fluid, and natural, they can never get the idea of really going into oneself to push to the limit. Or perhaps, as Doe Blackburn suggests, they merely are not obsessed like the rest of us. A bit of a mystery, but, I guess, completely off the point of this article.

In summary, getting beginners off to a proper start is most important and beginners really have no place to turn other than walkers they see. Racewalking coaches do not lurk behind every tree (1998 update: but there are quite a few more today than 25 years ago). Racewalking, at least for me, is a very difficult skill to teach if one approaches it from a purely mechanical viewpoint. Thus, I have derived the "Mortland" method, which is hardly a method at all. However, you might try it the next time you are approached by a beginner. It is at least a point of departure and is practically guaranteed not to teach bad habits that must then be unlearned.

Shift It! Shift It!

(Speaking of beginners, one of the hardest things for them is often getting up the nerve to do it in public and risk ridicule. This article addresses that issue. It appeared in Bob Carlson's Front Range Walkers News and was written by FRW member Steve Gardiner in Billings, Montana.)

Like most walkers, I suppose, I was self-conscious when I first started swinging my arms and picking up the pace. I wondered what others might think or say as they saw me on the streets. I endured a few comments and I have to admit I gave it too much concern until I passed the man walking his dog on Poly Drive.

I had been a runner for several years and first tried racewalking at a state games track meet. I didn't know the first thing about it, but I picked out a fellow who did and tried to follow him, imitating his arm and hip movement. It was exhausting, but fun, and I thought I might like to learn more about the sport—some day. That same day came sooner than I expected. In the same track meet, I had entered the triple jump. On the second jump, I made my approach and planted my left foot. Instantly my hamstring ripped and I hobbled off in pain. I limped everywhere I went for the next 2 weeks. When I felt better, I tried to jog, but the pain was too much. I decided to just walk a few blocks, and before I knew it, I was walking faster and swinging my arms. No pain.

I found a book on racewalking and practiced each day. At first, I went out in the late evening, the darkness helping me with my self-consciousness. I went out several evenings until finally my schedule forced me to either skip a workout or go during the afternoon. I was enjoying the workouts, so I went out racewalking in broad daylight.

I was on a road near the edge of town and traffic was light. I racewalked until a car approached and then jogged until it passed. I shouldn't have mattered, but there were no other racewalkers in our town and I was still self-conscious.

In a few days, I realized I would either have to quit racewalking or ignore the oncoming traffic and the occasional odd look or comment if I ever hoped to become a better walker. I chose the latter.

As more people saw me racewalking, I heard comments like, "I saw you running the other day and something looked different." "Doesn't that hurt your hips?" "Are you trying to lose weight?"

I thought maybe such comments would be limited to rural areas like where I lived, but then I drove to a larger city for a race. I was in a group of walkers when a car drove by and one occupant yelled, "All of you speedwalkers look ridiculous."

By then, I was able to let the comment bounce off because I was feeling the effects of several months of racewalking. I felt good and had grown to love the rhythm of a good walk.
Columbus. Steve Pecinovsky topped him, however, with a 47:03, but did not satisfy hard-nosed judge, Dr. John Blackburn. Jack Blackburn won the old man’s battle over Mortland in 50:08.

15 Years Ago (From the April 1983 ORW)—Jim Heiring caught Ray Sharp with just 600 meters to go and then hung to win the National 25 Km in Washington, DC. Heiring’s 1:50:38 beat Ray by just 1 second. Dan O’Connor had 1:53:24 and Tim Lewis 1:55:11. Steve Pecinovsky, Sam Shick, Tom Edwards, and Mike Morris also finished under 2 hours. Sal Corallo won the Master’s title in 2:17:32. At the same site, Susan Liers-Westerfield won the Women’s National 20 Km in 1:50:28, with Teresa Vaill recording the same time. Chris Anderson and Carol Brown were not far behind. Sharp came back in 2 weeks to win the National 35 Km in Cleveland in 2:55:00 with Morris 1:40 behind. Wayne Glusker had 2:57:38 in third. Jack Blackburn’s 3:33:58 won the Master’s title when his obliging teammate, Jack Mortland, dropped out shortly after passing 30 Km in under 2:59... Dan O’Connor travelled to Tokyo and came second in a 20 Km with a 1:27:37.

10 Years Ago (From the April 1988 ORW)—The Olympic 50 Km Trials in Indianapolis saw Carl Schueler take command from the start and move to an easy win in an impressive 3:57:48. Marco Evonini and a surprising Andy Kaestner captured the other two Olympic berths in 4:03:33 and 4:05:07. Jim Heiring, Henn Nelson, Paul Wick, Eugene Kitts, and Mark Fenton followed. Schueler went through 25 Km in 1:56:53, but without competition couldn’t maintain that pace. There were 16 finishers and 1 DQ from the 22 starters... Gary Morgan was an impressive winner at the Mortland Invitational 20 Km in Columbus, covering the distance in 1:27:30. Steve Pecinovsky was second in 1:30:54 and Dave McGovern third in 1:32:15. Of 34 starters, 31 finished. The women’s 10 Km went to Maryanne Torrellas in 48:03 with Debbi Lawrence 20 seconds back. Canada’s Pascale Grand was right on Debbi’s heels in 48:25... Sharp came back in 2 weeks to win the National 35 Km in Cleveland in 2:55:00 with Morris 1:40 behind. Wayne Glusker had 2:57:38 in third. Jack Blackburn’s 3:33:58 won the Master’s title when his obliging teammate, Jack Mortland, dropped out shortly after passing 30 Km in under 2:59... Dan O’Connor travelled to Tokyo and came second in a 20 Km with a 1:27:37.

5 Years Ago (From the April 1993 ORW)—The World Cup was held in Monterrey, Mexico, and the home team ignored stifling heat that brought many elite walkers to their knees to romp home in the men’s competition. The Italian women had a strong team effort to win that competition. Elena Salvador led the Italians, although finishing just sixth. But with Anna Rita Sidoti in seventh and Elisabetta Perrone in tenth, the Italians finished three points clear of China and Russia, who did not pack their teams nearly as well. China’s Yan Wang won in 45:10 over Finland’s Sari Essayah (45:18) and Russia’s Yelena Nikolayeva (45:22). Debbi Van Orden led the U.S. contingent with 50:22 in 44th, two places ahead of Dana Yarbrough. The U.S. team finished 13th. Mexico with first and third in the 20 and first, third, and fourth in the 50 finished 149 points ahead of second place Spain with Italy third in the men’s competition. Daniel Garcia won the 20 in 1:24:26, 6 seconds ahead of Spain’s Valentin Massana. Alberto Cruz was third for Mexico in 1:24:37, with Poland’s Robert Korzenowski fourth. Jonathan Matthews was the first U.S. walker in 41st (1:31:28). Carlos Mercenario beat Spain’s Jesus Garcia at 30:55:28 to 3:52:44, with German Sanchez (3:54:15) and Miguel Rodriguez (3:54:22) completing the Mexican team effort. Canada’s Tim Barrett was a brilliant fifth in 3:55:12. Andrzej Chylniski led the U.S. in 38th (4:17:36). The U.S. team was 11th... Teresa Vaill broke her American 5 Km record as she won the Penn Relays in 21:28.17, nearly 4 seconds ahead of Debbi Lawrence’s old record. Gretchen Eastler was just 19.4 seconds back. The men’s 10 Km went to Curt Clausen in 43:31.40.