Veteran Walkers Prevail With Record Times

Paris, France—There were no big surprises among the gold medalists in the racewalks at the World T&F Championships held here. Three seasoned veterans of international competition stepped to the top of the awards stand. Russia’s Yelena Nikolayeva, the 1996 Olympic gold medalist, finally struck gold again in the women’s 20 Km, breaking the championship record in the process. Jefferson Perez of Ecuador walked the fastest 20 in history as he added World Championship gold to his Olympic and World Cup golds. And the seemingly unbeatable Robert Korzeniowski walked the fastest 50 km in history as he added his third World Championship victory to two Olympic golds (plus an Olympic gold at 20 Km).

In the men’s 20, Spain’s Francisco Fernandez went into the race as the favorite. Last year he walked a world’s road best of 1:17:22 and earned the World number one ranking. And in this race he set out to prove his dominance setting the pace for the first 17 kilometers. But Perez, the hero of all Ecuador, was right with him. When Perez made his move with 3 km to go, Fernandez had no answer. By the finish, Perez was 39 seconds in front and 1 second under the Spaniard’s former world best. Only Russia’s Ilya Markov has scored a more decisive win in World Championship 20 Km history with his 45 second margin in 1995. Markov could manage only eighth today. Another threat for the title, Bernardo Segura of Mexico was on the sideline. The world record holder (1:17:25.6 on the track where records must be established) and two-time World Cup winner (1999 and 2001) did not satisfy the judges on this day, repeating his DQ in the 2000 Olympics.

Perez said he did not really expect to win, so to shave a second off the world best came as a huge surprise. He gave credit to Fernandez, who he said made it very hard for me. He made the pace from an early stage and I was just trying to maintain my momentum. I was certainly not thinking about the world record at that stage. In fact, I did not even think I would win, so I cannot tell you how happy I feel. I am so tired, but so happy. I have so much respect for Fernandez, and without him making it so hard for me I would not have broken the world best.

Perez retired after the 2000 Olympics to complete his degree in business management, but came back strongly last year to win the World Cup and, in a toss-up, get a number two world ranking behind Fernandez, who did not contest the Cup race. This race completed the triumvirate of World titles for the 30-year-old Ecuadorian hero—1996 Olympics, 1997 and 2002 World Cups, and now the World Championships. And, he was World Junior Champion in 1992—so make it an assortment of four.

He credits concentrating on high mileage in training for his strength at the finish. After the race, he said, “This victory means so much to the people of my country. We have poverty, we have starvation, but success in sport can lift people’s spirits. It is the most important thing in many people’s lives. It was a very difficult course, and the fast pace made it harder, but when you have people back home desperate for you to win, you have to work through the tiredness and the pain.”
Not to be lost in the performances of Perez and Fernandez were those of Russia's Roman Rasskazov and Mexico's Noe, who also pressed the pace and finished just 7 and 14 seconds behind Fernandez in a battle for the bronze. They had nearly a minute-and-a-half on the rest of the field.

The lone U.S. competitor, Kevin Eastler also covered himself with glory as he finished 18th in 1:22:25. Only Tim Lewis with a 1:21:48 in 1986 and a 1:22:17 in 1989 has gone faster among Americans. And Kevin becomes the first U.S. walker ever to achieve an Olympic A standard, which has been lowered to 1:22:30 for the 2004 Games. Coming into the season, he had a personal best of 1:26:38 from 2000. His 25:35:52 in the US Championships in June took care of that and today he made another whopping improvement. With Kevin still a couple of months short of his 26th birthday, there's no reason to believe further improvements aren't in his future.

Judging was apparently tight. (Or, some will probably say that the judges are finally doing their job. I even know some who would say that they should have tossed the whole field and maybe we can return to racewalking as it should be. But, that's another story described at length in the past and probably again in the future.) Anyway, there were nine disqualifications among the 38 starters, another seven in the women's 20, and an amazing in the 50. In addition to Segura, the 20 Km DQ list included Viktor Burayev and Vladimir Andreyev of Russia and Julio Martinez, Guatemala.

Turning to the women's race, the 37-year-old Nikolayeva took charge early and at 10 Km was leading Ireland's Gillian O'Sullivan and defending titlist Elisabetta Perrone by 20 seconds. She stretched the lead to 48 seconds over O'Sullivan with 5 Km to go. Russia's Tatiana Gudkova was now third as Perrone dropped out. The medal race was settled when Valentina Tsybulskaya moved past Gudkova in the final stages. By the finish, the first five were well spread out. Nonetheless, there were eight under 1:30. Following O'Sullivan, who walked a brilliant race in chasing Nikolayeva, were Tsybulskaya of Belarus, Russia's Gudkova, Romania's Claudia Steful and Italy's Rossella Giordano.

Nikolayeva is the oldest World Champion in history, replacing Jamaica's Merlene Ottey who won the 200 meter dash at age 35 in 1995. Nikolayeva was first ranked in the world's top 10 in 1987 and has been there 10 times since, six times in the top three. But despite all that success, her only gold on the world stage was in the 1996 Olympic 10 Km. That was also the only year she was ranked number one. Perhaps she will repeat this year off this stellar performance.

In winning his third World Championship at 50, Poland's Robert Korzeniowski bettered his own world best of 3:36:39 set in last year's European Championships, by 36 seconds. He was pushed almost all the way by Russia's German Skurygin, who missed the mark by just 3 seconds. Skurygin had won the 1999 World Championship race, but two years later was stripped of that honor on a doping charge. He came back last year with a second in the World Cup race. Led by Germany's Andreas Erm (3:37:46), three others were under 3:40 in easily the fastest race in history.

However, the glory all goes to Korzeniowski, who set the pace after the first 5 Km. At that point, seven walkers were already clear of the field as they went through in a somewhat leisurely 22:33 (a 3:45:30 pace, obviously not really leisurely, but these guys knew they would be going faster if they were to medal). Besides the three medalists, the lead pack included Latvia's Algars Fadejevs, Russia's Aleksiy Voevodin and Denis Nizhegorodov, and the leader, China's Chaohong Yu.

By 10 Km, Korzeniowski was leading in 44:33 with the lead pack still intact. The pack dwindled to six by 20 Km with Yu's disqualification, after passing 15 in 1:06:47 with Korzeniowski still leading.

At this point Korzeniowski made his move with Erm in pursuit. The pattern of the rest of the race had been set. The Pole opened a small gap and kept pushing. The Russians, until then chatting amongst themselves as they walked, rapidly adopted more serious expressions.

By 25 Km (1:50:14), Korzeniowski had six seconds on Erm and 30 on the Russians. Fadejevs had gone and Voevodin was losing touch as Skurygin made his counter move. At 30 (2:11:20, a 2:11:06 for 5), Korzeniowski's lead over Erm had stretched to 18 seconds, and he had more than a minute over Skurygin. But, the Russian had saved his strength, and began to make up ground. He caught Erm and by 40 (passed by Korzeniowski in 2:53:36) was only 19 seconds back and 16 ahead of Erm. By now, Korzeniowski was looking worried, for the gap came down to eight seconds and then six at 45 Km (3:14:51).

But, Korzeniowski still had another gear. He turned the screws again in the final few kilometers to stave off the challenge. He entered the brightly lit Stade de France wearing sun glasses and a broad smile, crossing the line 39 seconds clear for a historic victory. He had covered the second half of the race in 1:45:49-5 X 5 Km in 21:10 with no intervals.

As noted earlier, there were 15 disqualifications in the race out of 39 starters. Another five did not finish. The most prominent DQs were Poland's Tomasz Lipiec, Latvia's Modris Liepins, New Zealand's Craig Barrett, and our own Curt Clausen, the bronze medalist 4 years ago.

"I had difficult moments, not really physically but mentally, because I knew I was on course for the world record and Skurygin was really strong. The crowd kept telling me to push harder and I did what I was told," said the 35-year-old, three-time World Champion following the race. "This is my third and last WC gold. I'll now say goodbye. I still enjoyed it and found new motivations, but next year is the last season I'll compete Internationally. I had no other possibility than to set a new world best performance. The others kept pushing me, so I had to take a risk and pick up my speed. I never thought we would go this fast. It was surely the toughest race of my life. The last 12 Km, to
tell you the truth, I was afraid because I was walking the fastest 50 Km race ever, and the Russian
was still catching up with me.

Wome'n's 20 Km, Aug. 24: 1. Yelena Nikolayeva, Russia 1:26:52 2. Gillian O'Sullivan, Ireland
Collado Gentile, Guatemala 1:41:19 DQ--Hongjuan Song, China; Natalya Fedoskina, Russia; Ying
Yuan, Malaysia; Mi-jung Kim, Korea; Maria Cruz Diaz, Spain; Norica Cimpean, Romania; and Kelian
Gao, China. DNF--Olgar Kardopoltseve, Belarus; Kjersti Platzer, Norway; Elisabetta Perrone, Italy;
Maria Gargaslo, Spain; Maria Sanchez, Mexico; and Olimpia Ivanova, Russia.

Men's 20 Km, Aug. 24: 1. Jefferson Perez, Ecuador 1:17:21 2. Francisco Fernandez, Spain
Markov, Russia 1:20:09 9. Jose David Dominguez, Spain 1:20:15 10. Alejando Lopez, Mexico
Ronald Huayta, Bolivia 1:31:13 DQ--Dae-ro Lee, Korea; Eichi Yoshizawa, Japan; Bernardo Seeger,

10th in a National title at age 48 vs. his first National title in 1977, when he won with a modest
49:46 with a less than stellar field present. I was sixth in that race with a 52:09 at age 42,
and was apologetic that anyone of that age and at that speed should be in the top six at a
national. Hey, Steve is 9 seconds faster than me 6 years later and he's only slowed a bit more than
previously. But, he was a whole lot faster in between.)

Rohl and Clausen both took home $1000 for their efforts. Rohl added $100 with her sixth in the 10 Km run the next day. McGovern's efforts were good for $400 both days.

Pan American Games Racewalks

Santa Domingo, Domingo Republic--An impressive win by Jefferson Perez in the 20 Km prevented a Mexican sweep of the Pan-Am Games walking events. Joining Perez with golds were
Mexico’s Victoria Palacios in the Women’s 20 and German Sanchez in the 50. In the 20, Mexico’s Bernardo Segura and Alejandro Lopez captured the silver and bronze medals.

With very high temperature and humidity, Perez struggled along with everyone else and was well satisfied with his time of 1:23:06 in such conditions. He noted that it was one of the most difficult races of his life, particularly in the closing minutes, which became a real struggle. Segura struggled, too, but his efforts couldn’t quite keep him in contact with Perez. He finished in 1:23:31, 62 seconds ahead of Lopez.

The conditions seemed to be particularly hard on the U.S. walkers, who were considerably further off their best than were the leaders. Tim Seaman came in 7th in 1:33:24 and John Nunn eighth in 1:35:34.

The next day conditions were still nearly unbearable and the women started very conservatively on their own. At 5 Km, seven of the ten competitors were bunched together in a slow 25:08. The pace heated up considerably on the second 5, with 10 Km reached in 48:52 (23:44 for the second 5), but six of the seven were still right together.

However, when Palacios pushed it even faster to reach 15 Km in 1:12:23 (23:25), only women countrywomen Rosario Sanchez and US vet Joanne Dow were still with her. The race between the three continued the rest of the way with Palacios pressing hard to get away, finishing with a 23:03. Dow battled to stay on terms with the other two, but gradually dropped away. Still, her 1:35:48 was a great effort in the conditions. Palacios broke away from Rosario in the final stages to win by 5 seconds in 1:35:16. The other U.S. walker, Antiono Martinez, walked a very steady race to take eighth in 1:42:45.

Dow commented after the race: “I thought I’d be 5 minutes off my time in the Nationals (she was only a minute off) due to the heat and humidity here. The Mexicans walked a smart race and that helped keep it under control. I walked the shortest race of the group. I followed the tangent and stayed with the curve of the road.”

In the 50 two days later, German Sanchez claimed the gold with a 4:05.01 effort, not bad in the still steamy conditions. Mario Santos of Brazil was second in 4:07:37 and Guatemala’s Julio Martinez captured the bronze. For the U.S., Philip Dunn was fifth in 4:25:49 and Sean Albert was DQ’d at about 35 Km.


Walk the Walk

Sat. Sept 6  5, 10, and 20 Km, Edmonton, Canada (C)
          1 Hour, McLean, Vir., 9 am (O)
          8 miles, Mackinac Island, Mich. (D)
Sun. Sept. 7  1 Hour, Kentfield, Cal. (P)
          5 Km, Stapleton, Col., 8 am (H)
          Drazin Memorial 5.2 Miles, Interlaken, NJ, 11:45 am (A)
Sat. Sept. 13  2.8 miles, Seattle, 9 am (C)
          5 Km, Portage, Mich. (D)
          Colorodo Masters 10 Km, Chatfield, 8 am (H)
Sun. Sept. 14  National USATF 40 Km, Ocean Twp., N.J., 87:30 am (A)
          5 Km, Denver, 9 am (H)
          15 Km, Oakland, Cal. (CC)
          1 Hour, McLean, Vir. (O)
Sat. Sept. 20  5 Km, Denver, 8 am (H)
          National USATF 5 Km, Kingsport, Tenn. (F)
Sun. Sept. 21  5 Km, Denver, 8 am (H)
          10 Km, Long Beach, N.Y. (K)
Sat. Sept. 27  North Region 5 Km, Chicago (L)
Sun. Sept. 28  5 Km, Denver, 8 am (H)
          10 Km, Houston, Tex. (V)
          1 Hour, Royal Oak, Mich., 10 am (W)
Sat. Oct. 4  5, 10, and 20 Km, Edmonton, Canada (C)
          Illinois 1 Hour, Chicago area (L)
          Ozark 1 Hour, St. Louis (I)
          New Hampshire Marathon and 5 Km, Bristol, 9 am (N)
Sun. Oct. 5  1 Hour, McLean, Vir. (O)
          Half-Marathon, Sandy Hook, NJ, 9 am (A)
          Half-Marathon, Sacramento, Cal. (E)
          Detroit Marathon (W)
          Indiana 1 Hour, Franklin (S)
          West Region 1 Hour, Aurora, Col. (H)
Sat. Oct. 11  Ohio 1 Hour, Yellow Springs (M)
          2.8 Miles, Seattle, 9 am (C)
          5 and 10 Km, Rio Rancho, N.M., 9 am (BB)
Sun. Oct. 12  1 Hour, Banks, Ore. (C)
Sat. Oct. 18  Ontario 20 Km Championship, Welland, 11 am (IB)

Correction. The results of the National 20 Km originally distributed and printed in the Ohio Racewalker were in error as regards Mike Stanton. Mike was listed in 12th place with a 1:38:34. However, he had walked a lap too far. The error was corrected right after the race, but did not get into the results that were distributed. So, Mike was actually 11th in 1:36:33. Ohio walker
ranked third in the world. This item from Vince Peters to his Ohio constituency: "Nice headline isn't it. And true. Oh! I was this fall at Rio Grande University, is the third ranked walker on an outdoor track in the world so far this year. Granted, there really weren't many 3 km races on the track to date, but his 11:58 is the fastest time in the USA this year and actually a world class time." Vince picked up the ranking on an internet site of racewalking lists.

"Thanks. Thanks to all of you who include notes of appreciation on your renewal slips. It's always nice to know one's efforts are appreciated.

Recently, I saw something on the internet about a backwards walker. I knew I had published something on such a man many years ago, but couldn't identify it to plug into the internet dialogue. Then, in looking through some of my other material, I came across Vol. 1, No. 1 of the Walking! Journal (yes, the exclamation is part of the title) published in Athens, Georgia in the summer of 1983. One surprise was that I was listed as the Racewalking contributor, a position I don't remember ever holding. I'm not sure there was ever another issue of the publication, at least I don't have any more. But getting back to where we started, lo and behold that issue had an article on Plemmie L. Wingo, the very man that I published material on those many years ago. I believe it was 1984's edition. On that visit he walked around the world backwards deserves a little more publicity even though he's not around anymore. So here, for your edification, is the article from the long forgotten Walking! Journal.

GNIKLAW
SDRAWKCB

by Duane Valenty

It's not the same. Ask a man named Plemmie L. Wingo, whose lifelong hobby it has been "Children and adults stare. Dogs bark, people doubt your sanity," says Wingo, now in his mid-80s with his feats that no athlete has yet challenged.

Why for goodness sake? Well, the man with the unusual name and hobby to match, the only man in the world to walk around the world backwards, began during the Depression when, out of work, he had the unusual idea and got Ripley of "Believe it or Not!" to sponsor him. Toting a sign advertising the Fat Stock Show at Fort Worth, he made headlines. Trekking around the globe came next, and it not only made him famous, but he feels it has kept him young.

"I always kept in good condition. I tell people I ran my meter backwards so long I didn't get old!"

The Big Trip began early, 1931 from Fort Worth, Texas, and ended October 24, 1932 at Istanbul, Turkey. Only a year or two ago, at 81, to demonstrate he could still do it, he made a 500-mile walk from San Francisco to Santa Monica, CA. At his destination, as a surprise, he found Ripley's had a wax figure of him, which is now in one of their museums. He had worn out 13 pairs of shoes and 10 sets of metal taps.

Plemmie has written a book on his experiences which he hopes to see published soon. His adventures required fortitude--especially when, for the hundredth time, some would ask if he had visited "any backward countries."

"I never cheated, never snitched a ride, never turned to walk forward," he says. "I just did my own stunt for my own satisfaction, over 8,000 miles in all." (Ed. That's not quite around the world, but quite a feat nonetheless.)

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Guinness Book of Records decided no one else would likely make that claim, and his name and feat went into its pages. Doctors took note, too, since he had consulted them before striking out on his jaunts.

"Those I consulted said walking backwards would be very tiresome, a strain on the person, to say nothing of involving probable falls or stumbles. So I went into training in a remote area for 6 months until I had little difficulty in going backwards as well as forwards."

As aids, he devised a small rearview mirror attached to his glasses and carried a cane.

Stepping out looking quite dapper, he usually sported a ribbon or two telling what he was doing and who he was. A sense of humor and his fortitude were inner baggage, especially needed when he started his first backwards hike without money.

"It was cause for me to do anything legal or honorable to make it. So sometimes I wore placards from one town to another to charge for advertising. I even walked on an 18-inch-wide ledge or a 12-story building backwards to advertise merchants in one town." Traffic used to move aside for the "crazy man going backwards," but today things are harder he says. "With population and car increase it's a problem getting on highways. You have to find alternate routes or you can get into trouble."

Aware of the risks, he exercised caution and kept his mind on what he was doing. There were a few falls, as would happen over 8,000 miles going frontwards, no doubt, and some narrow escapes, but nothing serious.

Once he left from Yuma, Arizona to walk 200 miles backwards in eight days with temperatures at 2 pm passing 120 degrees!

Between hikes, Wingo and his ever-patient wife, who accompanies him by car on some of the more recent walks, managed restaurants and a boys' camp. Whenever he was ready to quit for the night on his long peregrinations, he would leave a marker to begin the next day and hitchhike to a motel. He made many friends and received more invitations to dinner and a night's lodging than he could accept. But people could be odd, too.

"Some, when they would see me, would go in their houses and peek out curtains. Sometimes they passed the street and when we were about even I'd shout a shrill good morning or afternoon. They would then ignore me and I walked faster like they were really afraid of me!"

It takes courage to walk backwards and it probably will be a long, long time before anyone walks Plemmie Wingo out of the record books.

LOOKING BACK (But not backwards.)

35 Years Ago (From the August 1968 ORW)-Larry Young was hot at the Olympic Training Camp in Lake Tahoe's high altitude. He turned in a 1:16:53 for 10 miles, 1:34:42 for 20 Km, and 2:27:46 for 30 Km. Don DeNoon gave him a close race in the 20 and also did 21:50:5 for 5 Km, beating Tom Dooley by 1.5 seconds. The National 40 Km, firmly enshrined in Long Branch, N.J., went to Dave Romansky in 3:30:34, with Goetz Klopfer less than 3 minutes back. The NYAC won the team title with Ron Daniel, Ron Kulik, and John Knifton finishing 3:46, 3:40.

30 Years Ago (From the August 1973 ORW)-The feature story was on the possibility of walking being removed from the Olympics. As it turned out, we did lose the 50 Km in Montreal in 1976, but it was back in again for Moscow in 1980 (minus any U.S. athletes, thanks to Jimmy Carter's boycott). A lot of hard work by a lot of people over several years prevented something worse happening. In the absence of the Olympic event, the IAAF held a world championship 50 Km in 1976. Randy Mimm and Mitch Patton were walkers on the first U.S. Junior T&F team to tour Europe. They had 10 Km races in West Germany, Poland, and the USSR, both turning in their best times in the final meet-49:47 for Patton and 49:52 for Mimm. In Long Branch, John Knifton overcame Ron Laird to win the National 30 in a course record 3:29:45. Ron had 3:31:14.
Gary Westerfield and Todd Scully were way back in third and fourth... Shaul Ladany won both the 20 and 50 km walks in the Maacabiah Games in 1:35:54 and 4:30:31.

25 Years Ago (From the August 1978 ORW)—Still in Long Branch for the 40 km national, Dan O'Connor prevailed in 3:15:25. Carl Schuerer was 1:2 minutes back, beating Ron Daniel and Bob Kitchen. England's Olly Flynn won the Empire Games 30 km in Edmonton in 2:22:03. Australians Willi Seawall and Tim Erickson came next. Canadian Marcel Jobin had a bad day, and, after setting the early pace, settled for ninth... Jim Heiring, having previously concentrated on shorter races, moved up to 30 km with some success, winning the National title in 2:30:50. Augie Hirt was well back in second, ahead of John Knifton. Otto Bartsch and Anatoliy Solomin won Soviet titles at 50 and 20 km, respectively, in times of 3:56:36 and 1:23:30. The latter was the second fastest ever road 20 km at the time... Dave Cotton won the British 50 in 4:14:25, with a U.S. contingent of Dan O'Connor, Augie Hirt, Bob Kitchen, and John Knifton finishing 12th, 13th, 16th, and 24th.

20 Years Ago (From the August 1983 ORW)—In the first ever World Championship Track and Field Meet in Helsinki, Mexico's Ernesto Canuto won the 20 km walk in 1:20:49. He got away from Czechoslovakia's Josef Pribil in the last 2 kilometers to win by 10 seconds. The Soviet Union's Yevgeniy Yesuykov beat Spain's Jose Marin for the third medal. Canadian Guillaume Leblanc was eighth. Jim Heiring was the first U.S. walker with 1:25:49 in 19th... Five days later, the DDR's Ronald Weigel won the 50 in 3:43:08, as Marin came back to capture the silver (3:46:42). Sergei Junk of the Soviet Union was the third medalist in 3:49:03. Maraco Evoniuk, who also walked the 20 km (he dropped out in 13th place when he was told he had another loop to complete near the end—he did not) was the first U.S. finisher with a brilliant 3:56:57 in eighth... There was no women's race in those ancient times... Teresa Vaill won the 5 km at an International Racewalking Festival on Long Island in 52:09. Finally, we repeat one of many attempts at racewalking limericks through the years:

Before going out for a stroll,
Heed this advice rather droll.
Put some grease where it's needed,
Let this not go unheeded,
Lest your skin pay a terrible toll.

10 Years Ago—(From the August 1993 ORW)—The World Championships were held in Stuttgart, and the Spanish men dominated with two golds and a bronze. In the 20, Valentin Massana left the field well in his wake as he won in 1:22:31. Italy's Giovanni DeBenedictis was 35 seconds back at the finish, 12 seconds clear of Spain's Daniel Plaza. Jaime Barroso completed a near sweep for the Spanish in fourth. Allen James, the only U.S. entrant, finished 17th in 1:26:53. In a closer race, Jesus Garcia won the 50 in 3:41:41 with Finland's Valentin Kononen (3:42:02) and Russia's Valery Spitsin (3:42:50) getting the silver and bronze. Canada's Tim Beckett, 19th in 20, finished seventh in 3:50:23. For the U.S., Jonathan Matthews had 4:02:52 in 19th and Henn Nelson 4:21:08 in 31st. Finland's Sara Essayah won the Women's 10 in 42:58, 10 seconds ahead of Ileana Salvador, Italy. Spain's Encamacion Granados captured the bronze in 43:21. Teresa Vaill was 2nd in 46:58, Debbi Lawrence 3rd in 58:53, and Sara Standley 43rd in 51:01... Gary Morgan won the National 25 km in 3:02:31, 5 minutes ahead of Philip Dunn... Winners at the U.S. Olympic Festival were Deb Van Orden (47:20), Jonathan Matthews (1:32:52), and Andrzei Chylinski (4:19:48).