Seaman, Vaill Lead Olympic Trials

Sacramento, Cal., July 17-18—Tim Seaman, John Nunn, and Kevin Eastler will represent the U.S. in the 20 Km racewalk at the Athens Olympics in August. Teresa Vaill will apparently be the lone U.S. woman in the 20 at Athens. With 26 of the nation's finest walkers competing over two days, those four separated themselves.

The Trials aren't the cut and dried affair they once were—finish in the top three and you're on the team—now they are complicated by "A" and "B" standards. To send three athletes, they must all meet the A standard. A single athlete can go if they have met the slower "B" standard. The men's race on Saturday saw three men with the A standard going into the race. When they finished one-two-three, the team was set. In the women's race, only Joanne Dow had the A standard, but she needed to win to secure her place on the team. When Teresa Vaill, who had a B standard going in, upset her on Sunday, Vaill made the team—a Trials win trumps an A standard, provided the winner has the B. If you don't follow all that, just accept the fact that Vaill is our representative. (Although, at this writing, the USOC web site lists Dow and not Vaill. That has not been explained, but it is apparent. However, Vaill could lose her spot if someone else were to make the A standard in the next week. Two A's trump a Trials win.)

The veteran Vaill, at age 41, had a very determined effort in the Sacramento heat to score a well-deserved win. As expected, the race quickly became a three-women affair between Vaill, Dow, and three-time Olympian Michelle Rohl. Rohl was setting the early pace, leading the first 2 km lap. Vaill then took over the lead, but the three stayed together. At 5 km, Vaill and Rohl were 23:13 with Dow at 23:14. Susan Armenta was a distant fourth at 24:03, 9 seconds ahead of Bobbi Jo Chapman and Julene Moore, who had another 4 seconds on Sam Cohen.

The relentless Vaill, slowing only slightly in the hot conditions, pushed to a 9 second lead over Rohl at 10 km (46:45), with Dow, having trouble with her breathing, nearly a minute back in 47:36. Chapman was now fourth at 49:24, 42 seconds ahead of Armenta, who was holding her lead on Cohen and Moore. Over the next 5, Vaill was able to accelerate slightly, and at 15 km was 21 seconds ahead of Rohl at 1:11:05. Dow was now out of it at 1:12:51 and Chapman had nearly a minute on her two pursuers. By the time they had gone another lap (16 km), Vaill's lead was up to 41 seconds and Rohl had a second red card. Vaill slowed only slightly on the final lap and continued to pull away. When Rohl got her third red and disqualification before they finished the penultimate lap, Teresa's spot was secure. Dow came in second, nearly 3 minutes behind.

A great race for Vaill, unfortunate for Dow, as both were seeking to cap great careers with their first Olympic team. At ages 41 and 40, we would not expect them to have a shot in 2008, but who's to say. Likewise, the younger Rohl at 38.

Vaill had failed three times in the Olympic Trials, failing to finish in 1992 and 2000 and finishing sixth in 1996. But, that was about all that was lacking in her career. This meet was also the National Championships and marked her 20th national title, beginning in 1984. She has been
Bobbi Jo Chapman had a solid race in third, finishing just 19 seconds back of Joanne Dow with a strong finish. There were 14 starters with Cheryl Rellinger the only qualifier not coming to line.

The men’s race started at a leisurely pace with the three favorites, Seaman, Eastler, and Nunn, accompanied by 50 Km ace, Curt Clausen, through a 22:23 first 5 km. Benjamin Storey was close behind them. Seaman decided to make it an honest race at that point, doing a 20:55 for the next 5. That opened things up, but Eastler was still just 5 seconds back at 10, with Nunn another 10 seconds behind. Clausen and Storey were now well off the pace.

Another 5 in 20:57 by Seaman sealed the issue as he went through 15 km in 1:04:25, 27 seconds ahead of Nunn. Eastler, not having his best day, was 1:25 behind in third. Clausen had 30 seconds on Storey for the fourth spot.

Seaman eased off a bit on the final 5, but still lengthened his lead to 43 seconds at the finish as he hit 1:25:40. Eastler struggled over the final 5, but was never in danger of losing third to Clausen, who would have needed an A standard, in any case, to make the team. Kevin just had to finish. Twelve of 13 qualifiers started the race. Philip Dunn, with a minor injury, didn’t want to aggravate it and jeopardize his 50 Km race in Athens. Some athletes quote following the race.

Tim Seaman: “This is 20 kilometers of pain sometimes and doubt sometimes and frustration sometimes. It was a very difficult race today. Four of the top 22 guys in American were competing today. It was a top-notch field. I didn’t sleep last night. In the first 5 kilometers, I threw up. I wasn’t sure if it was nerves or the Lucky Charms or both. In the first 10 to 15 kilometers, I felt very strong. Kevin Eastler: “It’s a great feeling to make the team. It’s been a dream of mine for a long time. It really hasn’t sunk in yet. In the next few days, the sense of elation will sink in. It wasn’t my best day, but I finished the race. I had to finish. Everyone at this level is very competitive, so I feel good about finishing the race today.”

John Nunn: “I’m certainly thrilled to make the team. This is a dream come true. I’ve waited all my life for this. I remember watching the 1984 Olympics on television and I knew I wanted to be a part of it.”

Curt Clausen: “It was a rough day for me. I wanted to be in the top four. So I’m happy with my place. Everything felt fine, no aches and pains, which is good. When the pace dropped from 4:30 to 4:10 per kilometer, I just didn’t have it. I just wasn’t competitive today.

Teresa Vaill: “I just went out at a comfortable pace and I kept going and going. I was confident and my training was good. I listened to my coach and everything worked out. It’s about time I made the Olympics. It’s all well worth it. I’m very excited.”
Choose A Place and Get In The Race

Aug. 5-8 USATF National Masters 5 and 10 Km, Decatur, Ill.
Sat. Aug. 7 3 Km, Langley, Va. (O)
Men's 10 Km, Women's 5 Km, Toronto, Ontario (L)
Sun. Aug. 8 Ohio 5 Km, Cincinnati (M)
Metropolitan 3 Km, New York City, 9 am (G)
Mon. Aug. 9 5 Km, Long Branch, N.J., 6:50 am (A)
Wed. Aug. 11 Colorado Masters 5 Km, Golden, 6:30 pm (H)
Fri. Aug. 13 5 Km, Loveland, Col. 7 pm (H)
Sat. Aug. 14 2.8 Miles, Seattle, 9 am (C)
5 Km, Otsego, Mich. (D)
Sun. Aug. 15 1 Mile, Fair Oaks, Calif., (R)
Mon. Aug. 16 5 Km, Long Branch, N.J., 6:50 pm (A)
Sat. Aug. 21 3 Km, Langley, Va. (O)
Doc Tripp Memorial 5 and 10 Km, Broomfield, Colo., 8 am (H)
USATF National 10 Km, Wilkes-Barre, Penn. (B)
Sun. Aug. 22 5 Km, Denver, 8 am (H)
Fri. Aug. 27 5 Km, Flint, Mich. (W)
Sun. Aug. 29 5 Km, Denver, 8 am (H)
Sat. Sept. 4 Rocky Mountain Masters 3 Km, Boulder, Col., 8:15 am (H)
West Region 3 Km, West Valley, Utah (S)
Sun. Sept. 5 3 Km, Langley, Va. (O)
Mon. Sept. 6 5 Km, Roswell, N.M. (N)
Mon. Sept. 12 5 Km, Aurora, Col., 9 am (H)
1 Hour, Portland, Oregon (C)
Pacific Assoc. 20 Km, Oakland, Calif. (R)
USATF National 40 Km, Ocean Township, N.J. (A)
5 Km, Cambridge, Mass. 10 am (AA)
5 Km, Denver, 8 am (H)
Sun. Sept. 19 5 Km, Denver, 8 am (H)
5 Km, Long Beach, N.Y. (BB)
Sun. Sept. 26 1 Hour, Kentfield, Cal. (P)

FROM HEEL TO TOE

Clinics. Jonathan Matthews will conduct a two-day clinic sponsored by the Sierra Race Walkers on Sept. 18-19 in the Sacramento area. Jonathan will cover technique, sports psychology, and training, and will provide video analysis. Cost is $135. Contact Trish Caldwell at patriciasandwell@comcast.net or the Sierra Race Walkers at PO Box 5221, Fair Oaks, CA 95628.

On the East Coast, Ray Funkhouser will conduct a clinic in the Norfolk/Virginia Beach area on Sept. 18. Ray will do a beginners class in the morning and an advanced class in the afternoon. Cost is $10. Contact Victoria Nicholls at nichollsvi@cox.net. Talk about competing.
reviewing past ORWs, my eyes were caught by the feats of two US racewalkers 22 years ago—what must be the most ambitious schedule of elite 20 Km racing ever taken on by US athletes. In the summer of 1982, Jim Heiring and Ray Sharp first tangled at the Nationals in Knoxville with Jim first in 1:30:22 and Ray second in 1:32:30. That qualified them for an odyssey of 20s over the next month. On July 3, they were in Indianapolis for the US-USSR dual track meet. Jim finished second to Yevgeniy Yesyukov in 1:27:05, just 23 seconds behind the Soviet ace. Ray had a tough day, losing contact early, and finished fourth of the four in 1:37:02. On July 10, they were in Karl-Marx-Stadt, East Germany for another dual. The East Germans took one-two, but Jim turned in a 1:26:13 in a virtual dead-heat for second and Ray improved tremendously with a 1:29:49. On July 18, it was Bielefeld, West Germany for a five-nation racewalking meet (US, Great Britain, West Germany, Sweden, and Norway). Jim was third in 1:25:32 and Ray fourth in a PR 1:26:48. Then it was back to Indianapolis six days later (July 24) for the National Sports Festival, where they finished together in a 1:28:19. That's five high-class 20s in 36 days in the heat of summer, with several thousand miles of travel thrown in. Let us belatedly tip our hats. Heiring had led off his seven-race season with a 1:25:30 on the track in Bergen, Norway on May 15 and he finished a seven-race season with a win in the Can-Am 20 Km at Niagara Falls on Nov. 6 (1:29:50). Sharp went one better with eight races, having started with a 1:31:16 in Racine, Wis., on April 10, and then doing a 1:29:47 in Lafayette, Ind. on Sept. 18 and a 1:29:11 for fourth in the Alongi Race in Dearborn, Mich. on Oct. 3. In 1986, Tim Lewis and Carl Schuebler didn't have such an intense, condensed schedule, but they came close with nine- and eight-race schedules of elite 20s. Tim's nine races came in just over 8 months. He won in 1:25:43 in Washington, D.C. on March 23; won in Denver in 1:28:40. on May 11; finished fourth in 1:23:58 in the Canadian International in Quebec on May 22; won the National title in 1:25:22 on June 21; finished 16th in the Goodwill Games in Moscow on 1:28:13 on July 7; won the US Sports Festival in Houston in 1:29:15 on August 1; won in a 1:23:25 in Seattle on Sept. 13; finished third in the Pan-Am Cup in Cuba with a 1:28:42 (still the fastest time by a US walker) on Oct. 4; and finished sixth with a 1:29:42 in an international race in Los Angeles on Nov. 1. Not to be overlooked, 50 Km walker Schuebler concentrated on the 20 that year and was in eighth of those races (missing only the Canadian International). He was second in DC with a 1:28:43, second in Denver with 1:32:21; second in the national with 1:25:45; 17th in Moscow with 1:28:52; second in Houston with 1:30:13; second in Seattle with 1:25:38; ninth in the Pan-Am Cup with 1:25:04; and third in LA, where he finally beat Tim, with a 1:27:25. Memorable campaigns for both. Ironman Triathlon— for wimps. No a little bit of the Ironman Triathlon from Hawaii the yesterday. What a wimpy race. I say that after uncovering an item that I had entirely forgotten about in the October 1984 issue of this publication. In the results, I noticed: 2nd Annual Quadrathlon. England, September 1982. Had a mighty fine chest And with victory her quest She won by the size of her C-cup.

Oh, but you can go home again

by Harry Siitonen

(Harry resides in Berkeley, California and has been active in Bay area racewalk activities for many years. He is a long-time ORW subscriber and a frequent contributor of tidbits of information.)

A Finnish-American track and field meet in Fitchburg, Mass, held its 90th annual event on June 27 at Saima Park. This makes the Reipas Athletic Club sponsored Summer Festival Meet the oldest track meet in New England. And they've included a racewalk for at least 41 years.

Six years ago, I walked the 1500 meter race that was on the calendar and finished dead last in a field of seven competitors. This year, visiting back on my boyhood home turf, I thought I'd try it again. What could I lose at age 78? I couldn't do any worse. As the blunt-spoken tennis great Martina Navratilova said when asked why she would still play singles at the French Open at 47 with all the teen and 20-something stars now at the top. "What can I lose? It's not like I was climbing into the ring with Mike Tyson!"

So the call went over the P.A. system at the Saima Park track for all 1500 meter racewalkers to report to the starting line. I got there, and didn't see another soul around. After a while, Raimo Ahli, the Reipas Club timer, showed up and said, "Well, Harry, I guess you're it." A one-man field in an unjudged race. The rest is history, however brief. I came up with my first medal in maybe 20 years and haven't walked in competitive seriousness in almost as many. Modesty precludes me from citing my time, but I do say that at least my pace per lap was consistent. Score one for us slo-mos!

It's too bad this race now hovers at the point of extinction at this venerable meet, which I loved watching while I was growing up in the area. In earlier years, well-known walkers had participated in the meet, when I was no longer living in the East.


It's not the greatest track in the world, the loop measures 350 meters and is composed of cinders, with no inside curb. At least in recent years, the racewalk has been unjudged. But what the hell, how many track events include any kind of racewalk on their agenda? If the sponsors are going to retain it, regional walkers ought to cover it, if only as a fun thing and even as a showcase to stimulate interest in our noble specialty. I know if I get back to Fitchburg at Festival time again, I'll be there to gimp along the best I can to keep it going. For anyone interested, the park website is www.saima-park.org.
Why is Russia Such a strong Racewalking Nation?

(Starting with the 1956 Olympics, Russia (or the Soviet Union) has been the dominant nation in racewalking competition. While Mexico, Germany (primarily East Germany before the breakup), Italy, China, and Spain have mounted strong challenges, Russia has been most consistent in putting walkers at the top in international competitions, particularly when considering both men's and women's races. This article was written by Tim Watt for the IAAF immediately following this year's World Cup competition in Nuremberg—where Russians won three golds, a silver, and a bronze in the five races.)

The dual World Cups wins here in Nuremberg by Vera Sokolova and Yelena Nikolayeva in the senior's and junior walks were not only a great achievement for Russian athletics, but also a little known region in the Eastern part of the country just west of the Urals.

The Chuvash Republic has become a hotbed of racewalking following the successes of Yelena Nikolayeva (she won the 1996 Olympic 10km walk), Olimpiada Ivanova, and Vladimir Andreyev. Crucially for the republic's continued success in the event, racewalking has heavyweight support politically.

In front of a Chuvash TV crew immediately after the medal ceremony for the senior 20km walk in Nuremberg, Yelena had the honor of receiving a call on her mobile phone from the President of the Mordovia Republic Nikolai Fyodorov—himself a famous sportsman in his time.

The capital city of the small republic, Cheboksary, hosted the 2003 European Cup of Racewalking with crowds of 40,000 lining the course. With the massive interest in the city, it's not surprising that it has been chosen as the next but one city for the IAAF World Race Walking Cup. La Coruna, Spain will host the 2006 event; Cheboksary the 2008 Cup.

"We plan to make the World Cup in Cheboksary even better than the European Cup," said Dr. Vyacheslav Kravnov—the Deputy Head of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Chuvash Republic, also the Sports Minister and, incidentally, a star racewalker in his day. He raced in the annual racewalks in Nuremberg back in 1970.

"We have a national slogan in our country of 1.2 million people. 'Learning is the most important thing in life.' We intend to learn from the example of Nuremberg and La Coruna in how to host a World Cup. Lenin in fact had a slogan that went 'Learn, learn, learn' and his father was from the Chuvash Republic—and his mother from Germany!"

"We're also looking forward to hosting the Russian Summer Walking Championships on June 11 and 12, which will decide the final Olympic selections," he said.

The junior winner, Vera Sokolova, still has a year to go at school but is certain about her future role—to follow her idol and training partner, Yelena Nikolayeva. "She's like a mother to me," she said after walking away for an easy win the day before.

It's sometimes wondered how Russia provides such a production line of talent. Indeed, prior to this edition, they have won the last three World Cup team 20 and 50 km men's team titles, the 2002 women's team trophy, the same in 1997 and four times previously as the old Soviet Union.

Indeed, on May Day 2004, the old National Anthem boomed out five times for the parade of various Russian winners. Success, of course, breeds success and Russians appear to want it the most.

Other reasons too, some more prosaic, are evident. According to visiting Russian sports journalist Nikolay Ivanov, "We don't have many walkers in Moscow any more. The center of gravity has shifted to the Eastern Republics. Sport is very popular there—Nikolay Fyodorov is the physical teachers are paid twice the usual wage for coaching racewalkers! They even cancelled the scheme of skiers to support more walkers. So it's no wonder there are so many good walkers coming from there."

So, with that level of interest and backing, Russia looks set to continue its domination of racewalking honors.

Edward Payson Weston, Pedestrian Nonpareil

(We have published various stories of the walking feats (perhaps feet?) of Edward Payson Weston through the years. Steve Vaiteles supplies the following article, prepared by Mara Bossonn, an E-Bay seller of Weston images had found on the web.)

It was box of hothouse flowers, a gift from the wife of the editor of the New York Herald to the wife of the postmaster general that started it all for Edward Payson Weston in February 1859. The flowers had been sent from the editor's residence and were to be picked up at the newspaper's downtown office, then whisked to Washington by train. Weston, a skinny 19-year-old copyboy, forgot that he'd been given the job of unloading the box. The delivery wagon was well back on its way uptown before he realized his oversight. In a panic, he hit out after the runaway buggies, determined to overtake them on foot. Amis wailed from his colleagues, Weston—who had always been sickly—looked off at a tremendous clip. Lucky for him, traffic was heavy and the wagon had been creeping along. Nevertheless, he had to high tail it all the way to 70th and Broadway before he caught up. For saving the day, young Weston's pay was doubled and he was given the chance to write about his heroics in the newspaper. But the adventure gave the aspiring newswoman more than an extra $3 a week. It showed him he could make a name for himself simply by putting one foot in front of the other. That name would be Weston the Pedestrian.

The papers started calling him that after Abraham Lincoln's inauguration in 1861. Weston had made a bet. If Lincoln won, he would walk from Boston to Washington in 10 days, timing it to be there to witness the new President take his oath. Bands and cheering admirers met the young amblere along the road, and he was featured, fed, and kissed by the ladies. He missed the inauguration by half a day, actually, but the stunt was so impressively fanfares that he was brought to meet Lincoln, who offered to pay the young man's way home by means other than foot. Weston declined, saying that since he failed the first time, he would vindicate himself by walking back.

After the war, in 1867, with a 1326-mile jaunt from Portland, Maine, to Chicago, Weston decided to make his living with his feet. At the time, this was not such an outlandish ambition. Long-distance walking was a glamour sport. Arenas would routinely fill to the rafters for walking matches and record attempts. Weston became a great crowd pleaser, with his black velvet knee breeches, blue sash, white silk hat, and kid gloves.

Five years after the Civil War ended, he started to smash records. In 1870, he walked 100 miles in 22 hours and 19 minutes. He failed to reach his next goal—500 miles in six days—until 1874, when he finished with time to spare. Nipping at his heels was one Daniel O'Leary, an Irish farmer who had settled in Chicago and who, in 1874, challenged the champ to a walkoff. Weston refused. The newcomer was too green, he said, let him come back after he broke some records.

O'Leary did just that, shattering Weston's 500-mile mark. Weston could no longer stroll away. He
agreed to meet O'Leary in Chicago for a six-day race in November 1875. And O'Leary burned up the track, leaving Weston 50 miles behind.

First the defeated Weston headed overseas, where he won the Astley Belt, London's six-day walking match, with 550 miles in 142 hours, 100 miles ahead of his nearest rival. Then, just before leaving London, he set a speed record of 127 miles in 24 hours. When he returned to America, he continued to chase new challenges, seemingly growing stronger and faster each year, to the amazement of the doctors who poked, prodded, and monitored the athlete. But, still he hungered to take on O'Leary once more. And in 1886, he challenged his old nemesis to a march from Newark, N.J. to Chicago. This time O'Leary was left panting in the dust.

Weston kept at it for years. At 68, he beat the time he'd made on his Maine-to-Chicago tramp four decades earlier by 29 hours. But it wasn't until he passed threeeore and 10 that he really started cooking. "Weston at 71 starts a 4300-mile walk," reported the New York Times on March 16, 1909, a day after Weston's birthday. The course would go from New York to San Francisco. Weston planned to make it in 100 days. "Walking with a springy step and a general jaunty air, Weston crossed Park Row and started the first course of the trip up Lafayette Street," chronicled the Times. "The short cane which he carried gave him a striking appearance as he clasped it with one hand behind his back and the other over his shoulder," Fans turned out by the thousands to welcome their hero along the route. He was snowed on, rained on, attacked by mosquitoes, menaced by hobos. Crossing the Rockies, winds were so strong that he had to crawl on his hands and knees, four miles in 24 hours. But the old man pushed on, hitting San Francisco in 104 days. The worst failure of his life, he grieved.

The next year he tried again, this time starting from Santa Monica, aiming to reach New York in 90 days. He did it in 76. After his last big walk, from New York to Minneapolis in 1913, Weston the Pedestrian fell on hard times.

Instead, he found a benefactor--Anne Nichols, author of the hit "Abie's Irish Rose"--who established a trust fund for the old champion. Then he was struck by a New York taxi and spent the next two years confined to a wheelchair, unable to take a single step, until he died at 90.

LOOKING BACK

40 Years Ago (From the July 1964 issue of Chris McCarthy's newsletter) -- In the National 2 Mile, Ron Zinn was an easy winner in 1:34:45 with Ron Laird 15 seconds back. A week later in Pittsburgh, Laird had his game face on for the 20 Km Olympic Trials as he walked away to a 1:34:45 victory on a tough out-and-back course in hot, muggy conditions. Zinn came second in 1:36:37, with your editor, the Mortland guy, third in 1:37:05. The finish was just as the sage chronicled the Times. "The short cane which he carried gave him a striking appearance as he clasped it with one hand behind his back and the other over his shoulder," Fans turned out by the thousands to welcome their hero along the route. He was snowed on, rained on, attacked by mosquitoes, menaced by hobos. Crossing the Rockies, winds were so strong that he had to crawl on his hands and knees, four miles in 24 hours. But the old man pushed on, hitting San Francisco in 104 days. The worst failure of his life, he grieved.

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5 Years Ago (From the July 1999 ORW)—The Pan American Games in Winnipeg saw a Mexican sweep on the racewalks. Bernardo Segura won the Men's 20 in 1:20:17, followed by teammate Daniel Garcia and Ecuador's Olympic gold medalist Jefferson Perez. Curt Clausen was sixth in 1:23:39 and Tim Seaman ninth in 1:28:28. The women's 20 went Graciela Mendoza in 1:34:46, 27 seconds ahead of teammate Rosario Sanchez. Michelle Rohr was third in 1:35:22 and Joanne Dow fifth in 1:36:33. World University Games titles went to Romania's Claudia Iovan in 44:22 for 10 km and Mexico's Alejandro Lopez with 1:25:12 for 20. Kevin Eastler was 11th in 1:32:20. The other three U.S. competitors—Al Heppner, Margaret Ditchburn, and Jill Zenner—were all DQd.

Mr. Cummings, world champion walker. Steve Vaitones provided this picture, which was offered on E-Bay with the caption used here. Apparently this is George Cummings, author of "Walking for Road and Track." I have run some rather interesting excerpts from that book at different times through the years. Cummings was apparently a professional walker in the early part of the last century and claimed "world" records at 1 Mile (6:22), London-Edinburgh, 420 miles (82:05), London-York, 200 miles (37 hours), 1 hour (8 miles 345 yards) at age 51, London-Bath, 135 miles (23:50), London-Leeds (262 3/4 miles (39:30), and 2 hours (14 1/2 miles) at age 56. He gives no dates for these performances except for the London-Edinburgh, which he says in his chapter on "Road Adventures" was in 1921. On the title page of his book, he bills himself as the "The World's greatest and fastest walker, holder of world records from 1 to 420 miles." However, I don't find his name anywhere in the results of early British races, so, if he ever competed as an amateur, it was not with any notable success. His book was apparently published in 1934.