Borchin, Kaniskina, Schwazer Mine Olympic Gold

Beijing, China—Following 20 Km victories by Valeriy Borchin and Olga Kaniskina, Italy’s Alex Schwazer prevented a Russian sweep of Olympic racewalking gold by Russia. Schwazer blistered the final 10 Km to leave Australia’s Jared Tallent and Russia’s Denis Nizhnyegodov more than two and three minutes back as he won the 50 in 3:37:09 after a race long battle with the other two. Russia, who had won nine of fifteen medals at the World Cup races in May with four gold, three silver, and two bronze had to settle for the two gold and one bronze here. The big surprise was Tallent, who had earlier raced to a bronze medal in the 20. The Aussie filled in admirably for injured countryman Nathan Deakes. Only tenth in the World Cup 20 in May, albeit in 1:19:48, and with a pre-2008 50 Km best of 2:55:08, he was not looked on as a medal contender in either race. Apparently, he knew better.

The men’s 20 was the first race on the docket. Borchin proved too strong for 1996 gold medalist Jefferson Perez over the final 4 Km as he won in 1:19:01. The 34-year-old Perez, who has won the last three World Championship as well as three World Cup 20s, had his best Olympic finish since that 1996 gold, finishing in 1:19:15, well clear of Tallent, who crossed the line in 1:19:42.

Borchin was walking under a shadow of suspicion. His teammate, Vladimir Kanaykin, who broke the world 20 Km last year and finished second to Sergey Morozov in another world record race in June, was dropped from the Russian team (he was slated for the 50 Km race) because of a positive test for EPO. Alex Voyevodin was also reported as testing positive in the April out-of-competition tests. Morozov was also dropped from the Olympic team for undisclosed reason. It had originally been reported that Borchin was also dropped. Russia’s coach acknowledged that Kanaykin had tested positive but insisted that Borchin had not. Whatever, he was more than Perez could handle on the day.

With a starting temperature of 84, sunny skies, and relative humidity at 45%, everyone was cautious in the early going, knowing that the temperature would be rising as the morning progressed. Thus, when Italy’s defending champion, Ivano Burgnetti, went through the first 10 Km in 40:42 in the lead, there was still a group of 20 walkers within 2 seconds of him. As Brugnetti began to apply pressure, dropping from 8:04 on the fifth of the 2 Km laps to 7:54 on the sixth and 7:52 on the seventh, the pursuing pack dropped to 13 members at 12 Km and then just nine at 14 Km. Besides the leader, Borchin, Perez, and Tallent, that group included China’s Hao Wang, Australia’s Luke Adams, Spain’s Francisco Fernandez, the pre-race favorite of many, Ireland’s Robert Heffernan, and Columbia’s Luis Lopez.

Then Borchin took charge, dropping the to a 7:36 matched only by Perez. Tallent and Brugnetti were trying to hang on, just 2 and 4 seconds back. The other five were quickly dropping away. When Borchin stepped it up even further with a 7:17 on the ninth lap, Perez, too, began to drop away, trailing by 3 seconds as they started the final 2 Km. Tallent was now 16 seconds back, but nine seconds of a fading Brugnetti.
Turava couldn’t continue her assault, however, and two laps later, Kaniskina’s lead had grown to 59 seconds. Platzer was third, along with Vasco, now 10 seconds behind Turava. Another 11 seconds back, Liu was just ahead of Rigaudo And six seconds behind them, Portugal’s Ana Cabecinha was leading Ireland’s Olive Loughnane. Kalmykova and Yang had both gotten third red cards before they reached 14 Km.

Turava’s race was essentially over at that point. With a 9.23 on the ninth lap she faded to seventh with 2 Km to go and lost another eight places on the final lap, which she covered in just 9.33. Kaniskina was also slowing rather drastically, going from 8.32 on her seventh lap and 8.40 on the eighth to 8.53 on the ninth. But, as they started the final lap, she still had a 61 second lead on Platzer. Vasco was just a second behind Platzer in third and with a 10 second lead on Rigaudo and 21 seconds on Liu appeared to be on her way to the bronze, if not silver, medal.

That final lap took Kaniskina a labored 9.07, but her lead was insurmountable and she reached the finish in an Olympic Record 1:26.31, still 36 seconds ahead of Platzer, who set a Norwegian National Record and won a well-deserved silver. But not by much. Rigaudo and Liu both blistered their final lap to move past Pascual. Rigaudo came within five seconds of Platzer at the finish and was only five seconds of Liu, who covered the final 2 Km in 8.30. Actually, everyone in the top 10 was faster than Kaniskina over the last 2, but she earned her gold with her solo effort over the first 16 Km.

For the U.S., Jeannie Dow paced herself well and was rewarded with a seasonal best and the fastest time by a U.S. woman in the Olympic arena. Her 1:34.15 was 11 seconds faster than Michelle Rohl walked in 2000, the first time the 20 Km was contested. The women’s event was first introduced in 1992 and was contested at 10 Km in both 1992 and 1996.

The heavy rain continued throughout the race, but Kaniskina dismissed the weather conditions as an irrelevance. “It had no influence on me”, she said. “It was better than a sunny or a hot day.”

But, although she bettered the Olympic record by more than two-and-a-half minutes, she was disappointed with the time. “The problem is that I could not go as fast as I wanted, but it was enough under the circumstances”, she said. “The one thing winning the World Championships gave me was confidence. However, winning a global title is easier than holding it, but it acts as a springboard for working harder. It makes you more determined to hand on to what you’ve got.”

Following her World Championship win last year, Kaniskina was rewarded by the government of her home state of Mordovia with the keys to a two-room apartment in her home city of Saransk, the Mordovian capital. When asked if she might get a car to go with her apartment now that she has added an Olympic gold, she replied: “No, I don’t need a car. I prefer to walk.”

The 23-year old’s other interest, mathematics, is on hold. She is on sabbatical from the state university where she is in her fourth year. “My professors know that I take a serious approach to my studies, but at the moment I only work when I have time. But in the future, I shall devote my life to mathematics. There is no doubt about that”, she said.

Dow, the 44-year-old mother of two from Manchester, N.H. was not as welcoming of the rain. “I did really well. It’s the third-fastest time I’ve ever walked. I actually felt really great. It was wet. I felt pretty strong. I wonder how I would have done if it wasn’t raining”, she said. “But what a dream to step on that line this morning. I felt really ready. From the beginning, I felt strong. I kept picking people off. My family is having a blast. They’ve waited just as long as I have for this. For them to be at an age when they can understand what this means is pretty special.” Dow’s oldest daughter will be starting her first
year at the U. of Pennsylvania this fall.

For the 50 Km race, heat was again a factor, but didn’t seem to phase Italy’s Alex Schwazer as he destroyed a strong field over the final 10 Km. The race started with the temperature at a comfortable 66F, but 87% relative humidity. By the finish, the temperature had risen to 82, and while the humidity dropped, it was still at 57%, not a comfortable condition.

The race began at a relatively conservative pace with Schwazer passing 5 Km in 22:40. Still, only France’s Yohan Diniz, the 2006 European champion and silver medalist in the 2007 World Championship, was with him. A small group was 10 seconds back. That group closed to 10 Km reached in 4h44:40, as the pace quickened... Along with Schwazer were Diniz, Jared Tallent, Denis Nizhgegordov, Yuki Yamazaki of Japan, and Jianbo Li of China. The rest of the field was already spreading out.

Enough fooling around. A 41:59 for the next 10 brought Schwazer, Tallent, Nizhgegordov, and Li through 20 Km in 1:27:39. Diniz had dropped seven seconds behind and Poland’s Grzegorz Sudol in sixth was 1:34:20 back, but pulling away from the rest. Reaching half-way in 1:49:00, the leading foursome continued to widen the gap behind them, having just covered 5 Km in 21:21. Diniz was trying to hang on at 1:49:17. But 30 Km he had fallen nearly 2 minutes behind the 2:10:38 pace forged by the leaders. Sudol and Yamazaki were now three minutes back. At this point, Diniz dropped out with a hamstring injury and stomach pains. “I just cracked mentally and physically. The conditions were very hard”, he said.

Apparently not for the leading foursome, although they slowed to a 22:00 for the next 5, going through 35 in 2:32:39. But Li cracked on the next 5, dropping a minute behind as the trio of medal aspirants recorded 2:54:36 at 40. He struggled from there and eventually finished 50, one at 20.

Robert Korzeniowski was curious to know about a silver wrist band worn by Spain’s eventual silver medalist, Jesus Angel Garcia, the World Champion way back in 1993 and among both struggled on the final. As, of course, was Schwazer, who had a 1:49:30 followed by 1:48:09.

Philip Dunn, probably closing out his international career in his third Olympics finished 39th in 4:08:32, moving up from 51st at 25 Km in 2:04:08.

Schwazer finally opened the door he has been knocking on. He was third in the last two World Championships and in this year’s World Cup.

During the post-race press conference, four-time Olympic gold medalist (three of them) Alex Schwazer is coached by Sandro Damilano who had guided athletes to 44 medals at major championships, including his younger brother Maurizio who won the 1980 Olympic 20 Km. In the build-up to the Olympics spent six to seven months in Saluzzo north of Torino (known as the “University of Walking” in Italy). “Alex has been doing up to 280 Km of training in peak weeks. We also went to high altitude, where he trained at 1870 meters to prepare of Beijing”, says Damilano. “For me it was no surprise that Alex took the gold.”

Living near the Austrian border, Schwazer played ice hockey, but his first serious sport was cycling. The problem was that as in racewalking, he always wanted to take the lead. That did not work in cycling and Schwazer was removed from the team. He then turned to athletics and the individual sport has suited him better.

Tallent was pleased with his second medal. “This is what you do it for. Just warming up this morning and thinking of all the years of hard work that come down to this. I can’t believe it—two medals at the Olympics”, he said. As for Nizhgegordov, he said: “I feel very disappointed. I don’t think I had any technical problems or mistakes. I got silver four years ago, but now it’s only a bronze. It’s such a pity.”

The results:


Women's 20km, August 21, 9 am-

Men's 50Km, August 22, 7:30 am-

Stroupe, Casey Win National Titles


USA-Canada Junior Match, Victoria, B.C., Aug. 17: Women's 5K-

Men's 10K-
Fernandez was not looking for a record. "Exactly like last year (when he recorded 38:07.65) my only target was just to test myself to assess my form. My coach Robert Korzeniowski has advised me to perform in the 38:30 to 38:40 range, but everything was right. I felt extremely strong and I managed a clocking that gives me a lot of confidence thinking of the Olympics", said Fernandez. Fernandez was at 3:48.13 for the first Km and 2:23.11 at 3 Km. He hit 5 Km in 18:57.31 and then covered the second half in 18:55.78. He was coming off a 27-day training stint at an altitude of 1800 meters.

Looking forward to Beijing, he noted, "Of course, I'll be chasing gold but once more Ecuador's Jefferson Perez must be regarded as the hot favorite. I can't get obsessed with the gold medal. It's an Olympics and any podium place would be welcome. One thing is for sure: should I win, then I'll go up to the 50 Km event next year. Otherwise, Jet's see. I'm guessing I'll go for gold medal. It's Ecuador's Jefferson Perez must be regarded as the hot favorite. I...

Grab thos walkin' shoes and proceed to...

Sat. Sept. 13  
1 Hour, Albuquerque, N.M. (T)  
1 Hour, Minneapolis (V)

Sun. Sept. 14  
USAFT National 40 Km, Ocean Township, N.J. (A)  
5 Km, Denver (H)

Sat. Sept. 20  
5 Km, Denver (H)

Sun. Sept. 21  
Metropolitan 25 Km, New York City, 8 am ((G)

Sun. Sept. 28  
5 Km, Kentfield, Cal., 8 am (P)

Doc Tripp 5 and 10 Km, Broomfield, Colo., 8 am (H)

Sat. Oct. 4  
National USAFT 5 Km, Kingsport, Tenn. (D or K)  
3000 meters, Santa Barbara, Cal., 9 am (E)

Sat. Oct. 11  
2.8 Miles, Seattle, 9 am (C)

National USAFT 1 Hour, Waltham, Mass. (D or K)  
5, 10, 30, 40, 50 Km, Minneapolis (V)

Sat. Oct. 26  
1 Mile, Kentfield, Cal. (P)

National USAFT 30 Km and Jr. 20 Km, Haupauge, N.Y.

Sat. Nov. 1  
New Mexico 5 and 10 Km Championship, Albuquerque (T)

Sat. Nov. 1 or 8  
2.8 Miles, Seattle, 9 am (C)

Sun. Nov. 9  
RRCA National and Florida State 20 Km, Coconut Creek, Fl. (B)

Sun. Nov. 2  
1 Hour, Kentfield, Cal., 9 am (P)

Sat. Nov. 8  
5 Km, Minneapolis (V)

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Eastler Announces Retirement

Beijing, Aug. 16 - A journey that began 21 years ago when he took up racewalking to follow in his older sister's footsteps came to an end Saturday morning at the finish line in National Stadium. Kevin Eastler announced his retirement from the sport after finishing 43rd in the 20 Km race in a time of 1:28:48.

"I wish I could have ended on a better note, but I had so many injury issues coming into the Olympics that I didn't have any great expectations", said Eastler, a captain in the U.S. Air Force. "I just wanted to do my best and that's what I did--and I'm happy with that."

The Farmington, Maine native and Aurora, Col. Resident underwent surgery for a sports hernia in December 2007, and it took several months to recover. And after he did, he was forced to deal with injuries to his right hamstring and right knee.

"It's been a difficult season", the 30-year-old said. "I trained through it the best I could and raced through it as well as I can." Eastler, who finished 21st in the 20 Km at the 2004 Athens Olympics, will retire from the Air Force in October after nine years of service.

"I wouldn't have accomplished what I have without the Air Force", said Eastler, who was the Air Force's Male Athlete of the Year in 2003. "Iowe then so much."

A graduate of the Air Force Academy, he will go to work for GE in New York, where he hopes to work on renewable energy projects. "I can't wait to start that next phase of my life", he said. Eastler said he will continue to walk to stay in shape, but he won't be logging 100 miles a week like he did training for the Olympics. "I'm going to walk for fun, rather than for competition", he said.

Besides his two Olympics competed in two World Championships and four World Cups. In the World Championships, he finished 18th in 2003 with a 1:22:25 and 28th last year in 1:28:59. His best World Cup performance came in 2006 when he finished 21st in 1:22:47. Last year, he tackled 50 Km for the first time and won the National title in 4:05:44.

From Heel To Toe

Whatley training center. With another Olympics now history, and with our three Olympic walkers promising, or at least hinting at, retirement (not to mention the age of two of them along with our only other "B" qualifier), what about the future? In an internet message,
transplanted Brit Ian Whatley, who was on our 1993 U.S. World Cup team at 20 Km, asks what we can do to get our current young national class walkers up to Olympic A standard in 4 years? (Or, I might suggest, even “B standard, while adding that John Nunn, who had an A standard in 2004 has indicated that he might still be around in 4 years.) Ian goes on, “I think we need a custom designed racewalking training center since we don’t have access to coaching and resident at the OTC anymore. Therefore, I have built a 24-acre, custom-designed racewalking training center in South Carolina. If anyone wants to come and see it with a view to taking a few months sabbatical to train here, we are only 3 hours from Kipsburg, Tenn. Anyone would be welcome in the days before or after the national 5 Km in Kingsport.”

If you are interested in a visit or in discussing plans with Ian contact him at whatleyian@yahoo.com, 690 E. Suber Road, Greer, SC 29650, Phone 864-879-6682.

Nammy Awards: This has nothing to do with racewalking, but all but my most recent subscribers are familiar with my son Derek, who in 1997 at age 28 had a serious motorcycle racing accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down. His recovery and determination to get on with life were inspiring, and his interest in music was further heightened. As announced in these pages he released a solo CD of original 12-string guitar music, has appeared in International Music Festivals in Washington, D.C. and Brisbane, Australia, and just recently, with his friend Michael Joseph, a native-American flute player, released another CD. They call themselves SOTIW (Sounds of the Inner World—pronounced sotoo). SOTIW has now been nominated for two Nammy Awards, the Native American version of the Grammys. They are nominated in two categories—World, and Songwriter of the Year. If you care to support them with a vote you can visit the website of the awards at www.votenative.com. You can also find out more about Derek and SOTIW by visiting www.derekmortland.com.

A Spectator’s Guide To Racewalking Judging
by Ron Daniel, IAAF Racewalk Judge

As in most sports events, the officials play an important role in maintaining a balanced for all contestants. The following guidelines should help the spectator who is unfamiliar with the Athletics event of Racewalking become familiar with the superb athleticism of the walkers and the action of the judges.

How fast are the going: With racewalking world records at 1:16:43 for the men’s 20 Km, 1:25:41 for the women’s 20 Km, and 3:34:14 for the 50 Km, the regular weekend runner should be impressed with a sub 40 minute 10 Km and sub 3 hour marathon while on the way to the longer distance. Perhaps even more amazing is the turnover rate of 3.5 steps per second for the men in a 20 Km event and over 3.0 steps per second for the 20 Km women and 50 Km men. By comparison, a 100 meter runner turns over approximately 45 steps per second for 10 seconds, not for more than one hour. These men and women racetrackers are quick and strong!

Definition (IAAF Rule 230): Racewalking is a progression of steps so taken that the walker makes contact with the ground, so that no visible (to the human eye) loss of contact occurs. The advancing leg shall be straightened (i.e., not bent at the knee) from the moment of first contact with the ground until the vertical upright position.” Simply stated, without any visual aids assistance, the judges watch the walkers for both feet off the ground or the failure to straighten the support leg at the knee from the moment of contact with the ground until it passes under the torso.

Judge’s Actions: While observing the walkers, the judges take care to watch a progression of steps before deciding if a walker is not complying with the definition. Also, it is important that the judges work independently. The eight judges on the course have yellow paddles with the symbols < and >. A judge will show a walker a yellow paddle when the athlete is ‘in danger’ of failing to comply with the definition. The < represents lack of contact and > represents a bent knee.

If a judge observes a walker failing to comply with the definition, the judge writes a Red Card (a proposal for disqualification). With the help of an assistant, that proposal is electronically transmitted to a Recorder (stationed near the stadium) where the information is displayed on a large Red Card Posting Board. When it is verified that at least three separate judges (three different countries in an international race) have written a Red Card against a walker, that walker is notified of his or her disqualification by being shown a Red Paddle by the Chief Judge or one of his Assistant Chief Judges (this accelerates the notification process). It is only the Chief Judge or Assistants that have the authority to notify a walker of their disqualification. It is important to understand that multiple yellow paddles do NOT add up to Red Cards.

In the stadium, during the last 100 meters, the Chief Judge has the authority to disqualify a walker who is obviously not complying with the definition regardless of any prior Red Cards, IAAF Rule 230.3a.

Look Back

40 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, 1:34:32 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 established in Long Branch, N.J., went to Dave Romansky in 3:30.34, with Goetz Klopfer less than 3 minutes back. The New York AC won the team title with Ron Daniel, Ron Kulik, and John Knifton finishing 2, 4, 6.

35 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 for Moscow in 1980 (minus any U.S. athletes, thanks to Jimmy Carter’s ill-advised 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 in 1976. Randy Mimms and Mitch Patton were walkers on the first U.S. Junior T&F team to tour in 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 Mimms. In Long Branch, John Knifton overcame Ron Laird to win the National 40 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 Maccabiah Games in 1:35:54 and 4:30:3.

30 Years Ago (From the August 1978 ORW)—Still in Long Branch for the 40 Km National, Dan O’Connor prevailed in 3:31:25. Carl Schueler was 8 ½ 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 Sawall 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 12th, ahead of John Knifton. Otto Bartsch and Anatoly 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 4:10:45, with a U.S. contingent of Dan O'Connor, Augie Hirt, Bob Kitchen, and Knifton finishing 12th, 13th, 16th, and 24th. The British team was much stronger than it is today.

25 Years Ago (From the August 1983 ORW)-In the first ever World Championship Track and Field Meet in Helsinki, Mexico's Ernesto Canto won the 20 Km walk in 1:20:49. He got away from Czechoslovakia's Josef Pribilin in the last 2 Kilometers to win by 10 seconds. The Soviet Union's Yevgeniy Yevsyukov beat Spain's Jose Marin for third. Canadian Guillaume Leblanc was eighth. Tim Heiring was the first U.S. walker with 1:25:49 in 19th. Five days later, East Germany's Ronald Weigel won the 50 in 3:43:08, as Marin came back to capture the silver (3:46:42). Sergey Junk of the Soviet Union was the third medalist in 3:49:30. Marco Enoniuk, who also walked the 20 (dropped out in 13th place when he was told he had another loop to complete near the end when 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 25:10:7. Susan Liers-Westover won the 10 Km in 52:09. Finally, we repeat the many attempts at clever racewalking limericks we composed 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.

20 Years Ago (From the August 1988 ORW)-In a 20 Km race in Vilniu, USSR, 13 Soviet walkers walked 1:23:47 or better in a race won by Aleksie Perschin in 1:20:39. Mexico's Ernesto Canto, the 1983 World Champion and 1984 Olympic Champion was ninth in the race. In two other races earlier that month, five other Soviet walkers had bettered 1:24. And in Leningrad, Franz Kostyukevich did 1:19:39, with five others under 1:21 and five more under 1:23. These were all late arriving results from June. The competition was rather stiff in the Soviet Union at that time. Australia's Simon Baker walked 2:12:50 for 30 Km in Sweden....The Italian 50 Km Championship went to Raffaello Duceceschi in 3:44:27 with two others under 3:50. Latter, Duceceschi finished third in a 35 KM race in La Coruna, Spain in 2:34:26, behind Bernd Guimmet and Ronald Weigel, who both had 2:33:06, stellar at the time, but almost 30 seconds behind the leading trio during the 50 in Beijing. Weigel won the East German 20 Km in 1:20:57, easily beating Guimmet. The Soviet 50 went to Vyacheslav Ivanenko in 3:44:01, 70 seconds ahead of Aleksandr Potashov, with four others under 3:50.

15 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 ahead of Spain's Daniel Plaza. Jaime Barrosse completed a near sweep for the Spanish in fourth. Allen James, the only U.S. entrant,