IAAF Challenge Moves To Italy; Platzer, Fernandez Prevail

Seato San Giovanni, Italy, May 1–Spain’s Francisco Fernandez and Norway’s Kjersti Platzer scored decisive victories in 20 Km races at the 52nd edition of the Coppa Cittadi Sesto San Giovanni, the fourth race of the 2009 IAAF World Racewalking Challenge. Fernandez simply overwhelmed the rest of the field over the second half of the race to win by nearly 2 minutes in 1:19:57. Platzer had a tougher time but finally cruised home in 1:28:50 with a 13-second advantage over Germany’s Sabine Krantz (nee Zimmer). The Norwegian ace scored her third Challenge win of the year to increase her lead in the Challenge standings.

In the men’s race, Italy’s Ivano Brugnetti went to the front early and at 5 Km he, Fernandez, and Norway’s Erik Tysse (Kjersti Platzer’s brother) were together in 20:13, 42 seconds ahead of Mexico’s Jesus Sanchez and Italy’s Giorgio Rubino. When Brugnetti dropped out at 6 Km with stomach problems, it became a two-man race. But not for long. Fernandez made a move at about 9 Km and by 10, which he hit in 40:16, he had a 10 second lead. That was it. He continued to step up his pace doing 19:51 and 19:50 for the final two 5 km splits and Tysse had no answer.

“The conditions were perfect. It was not too warm,” said Fernandez. “I walked very easily in the first half before increasing the pace in the second half. It was my first competition after three weeks of training in South Africa. I have not decided yet whether to compete in the 20 or in the 50 in Berlin (World Championships in August). I have two more competitions in Madrid and Krakow before a second period at altitude.”

Tysse commented: “I tried to push Fernandez in the first half but I had a minor problem. My coach told me to relax and secure the second place. I have now two more competitions in Krakow and La Coruna before a training period in St. Moritz.”

It was the 30th Edition of a women’s race at Coppa Citta di Sesto San Giovanni and Platzer won for the third time, her earlier wins coming in 2002 and 2008. Platzer and Krantz led from the beginning and went through the first 5 in 22:33, with Italy’s Elisa Rigaudo a second back. The pair was still together at 10 Km in 44:27 as they stepped up the pace, building a 17 second lead over Rigaudo. That lead increased to 21 seconds by 15 Km, which they passed in 1:06:53. Platzer made her move with 2 Km to go and easily pulled clear to her decisive win.

“I was tired, but I tried to remain focused on my technique; said Platzer, who plans to retire at the end of the year. “Sesto is a special race for me. It celebrates its 30th anniversary of women’s walking here and this is my 30th anniversary as a racewalker. I started walking at the age of 8 in 1980. My international career started with the European Junior Championships in Cottbus Germany. My first European Championships as a senior were in Stuttgart in 1986 and I made my debut at the World Championships in 1993 in Stuttgart. I will end my career in Germany at the World Championships in Berlin. It’s time to end my career. I have a job at Adecco and I have two children.”
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Kazanin, who eventually gave up the effort. Seemingly unaffected by the heat, the Russian's face looked no different from the 20 Km mark right to the end when he crossed the line totally in charge without even a commiserating glance to the left as he teammate Sergey Bakulin started his last lap. Bakulin finished fourth.

Toughness paid off for the silver medal, as well. Spain's great veteran, 40-year-old Jesus Angel Garcia, the 1997 World Cup winner and fourth in Beijing last year, moved past the sufferers over the second half to finish in 3:46:27, two minutes slower but two places better than in Beijing. Russia's Yuriy Andronov was third in 3:49:09, well ahead of Bakulin, and two more Spaniards, Mikel Ondrizola and Jose Cambi all filled out the top six.

In the 20, Rubino was willing to play a waiting game as France's Yohann Diniz seemingly unaware of the heat set off at a sub 1:18 pace. Diniz was caught by Ireland's Robert Heffernan, Italy's Ivano Brugnetti, and Russia's Pyotr Trofimov at about 6 ½ km. That trio hit 6 km in 32:18, with Diniz laboring but still leading Rubino. Rubino caught Diniz at 11 km and then sped past the leading trio at 13 km. While Rubino opened up a gap with ease, the following trio tracked each other all the way to 16 km;

Trofimov, keeping an eye on the DQ board and seeing the other two each had only one card left, made a break. It was quickly checked by Brugnetti and then Heffernan who moved into third... And then along came the third Italian, Jean-Jaques Nkoulouki, of Congolese and Italian heritage, who sped past Heffernan in the final 2 km to snatch away the bronze medal.

Rubino said: "I have a completely new team of physio, psychologist, osteopath—and of course a new coach, the legendary Sandro Damilano." (And who among our walkers can field such a team?)

In the women's 20, Maria Vasco finally made it to a gold medal in her 18th year of walking. She has three major bronze medals, including the 2000 Olympics. Today, she was canny enough to wait until others had wilted and DQ's mounted. Those factors also allowed Russia's Anisa Kirdyapkina and Lithuania's Kristina Saltanovic to move into medal spots, Saltanovic winning Lithuania's first walking medal of any sort in modern times.

A group of 19 headed by Portugal's Susana Feliz cruised through 2 Km in just over 5 minutes. But only a lap later the pack was split in two with one of the favorites, Germany's Sabine Krantz, dropping away. A circuit later, Feliz was already going through a terrible time and starting to lag behind both groups.

Vasco dug in to head the field through the 10 Km in 45:15, 7 seconds ahead of a line of six, now strung out... From there, Vasco used all her 33-year-old know-how to hold steady. Although she slowed again, a string of sub-1:30 walkers behind were getting even slower. Portugal was on its way to team gold when disaster struck at 16 Km. The Chief Judge showed the red disc to Vera Santos and Inez Henriques, lying second and third. It seemingly gave Russia's Ana Maria Groza the silver, but a DQ board as slow as some of the walkers removed her from the podium as well—and this after she had joyously crossed the line. Vasco said, "The heat was terrible, but in that position you just have to keep going."

In the Junior Men's 10 Km, the Russians won the day, but not, as expected, in the person of Denis Strelkov. Stanislav Yemelyanov was clearly feeling good, because by 6 Km he took an incredible 25 seconds out of teammate Valeriy Filipchuk, who wasn't hanging around by Strelkov either.

Yemelyanov went through 8 Km in 32:18, with two red cards showing on the board, he reined it in from there, with the victory already won. Filipchuk took the silver ahead of surprise bronze medalist, Veli-Matti Partanen of Finland. The last time a Finnish walker placed as well was in 1994 when Sari Essayah won the women's European 10 Km Championship.
In the Junior Women’s 10 Km, the gap at the end between first and second was the biggest in the history of the European Racewalking Cup. World Cup winner Tatjana Kalmykova, the favorite for the race, was trying to close the gap on leader Tatjana Mineeva, but came to a skidding halt when presented with the red disc. Almost immediately, the third Russian Zhenya Trifonova suffered the same fate and the Russian quest for team gold, which seemed certain, was finished.

Romania’s Adriana Turnea could hardly believe her luck when supporters and officials told her she was now second. The Russian’s demise presented Italy with the team gold.


NAIA National T&F Championships, St. Louis, May 22: Women's 3000 meters—\(^1\)

Other Results
Maine High School Results: Girl's 1600 meters, April 16–1. Nicole Court-Menedez 4:42.46 (8 finishers) Boy's 1600, April 16–1. Tyler Campbell 4:31.34 (5 finishers, 1 DQ)
First A Heel, Then A Toe, And A' Racing You Will Go

Sat. June 6 1500 meters, Castro Valley, Cal. (J)
1 Mile, Holmdel, N.J. (A)
10 Km, Longmont, Col., 8 am (H)
Half-Marathon, 5 Km, Fontana, Cal. (Y)

Sun. June 7 Florida Masters 5 Km, (P)
2.8 Miles, Seattle, 9 am (H)

Sat. June 13 2.8 Miles, Seattle, 9 am (H)

Sun. June 14 1500 meters and 3 Km, Arlington, VA. (N)
Ohio 10 Km (track), Yellow Springs, 8:30 am (M)
3000 Meters, Terre Haute, Indiana (K)
Rocky Mountain Senior Games 5 Km, Greeley, Col. (H)

Wed. June 17 Summer Solstice 5 Km, Denver, 6:30 pm (H)

Sun. June 21 New Jersey 5 Km, Pomona, N.J. (A)
Western Regional Masters 5 Km, Los Angeles (Y)
5 Km, Denver, 8 am (H)
need to move to Europe or Australia to get the necessary training partners to reach that level of competency. This, to my mind, is one huge commitment to ask any young man to make. Particularly since there is no certainty of success, injuries are prevalent when you put your body at that level of stress for extended periods, and (unlike our top marathon runners) there are few financial rewards, just the distinctive honor or representing the U.S. in international competition. No doubt those of us who have had the opportunity to compete for the U.S. would not have given it up for the world, but I wonder just how many of those same names from the ‘60s and ‘70s would have been there if they had had to meet today’s criteria. I for one would probably be missing from the list.” On the same topic, Augie Hirt comments: “I agree with you it is sad to see the current American racewalking status compared to the world. But when I am out racewalking with my dog and I’m pushing the pace, it still feels the same as it did in the ‘70s as long as I don’t look at my watch.”

Augie also wonders if his American records set on the track in 1978 are still recognized. These were 75 Km in 7:05:46 and 50 miles in 7:39:39 in Bricktown, N.J and 100 Km in 10:19:00 in Longmont, Col. I don’t believe that these times have ever been bettered, but I don’t believe records are any longer recognized at these distances. Correct?... Salvage-Seaman team. Jeff Salvage and Tim Seaman have created a new website www.racewalkclinic.com. It contains the information for their Clinics of Excellence as well as a free primer on racewalking technique. The primer is being printed with the help of the North American Racewalk Institute and will be available free to help promote the sport. In addition, Tim and Jeff announce the publication of a new book, Race Walk Clinic—In a Book. The book illustrates textbook techniques and catalogs typical mistakes racewalkers make that can rob them of a legal race and speed. It explains why these problems exist and prescribes critical solutions to correct them. They attempt to start where other training materials leave off by grounding their discussion with a review of correct technique rather than focusing on the many aspects of technique that you can do incorrectly. They divide racewalking technique problems into broad categories, starting with issue of legality and then separating technique issues into categories such as hip, leg, arm, and posture problems. The offer remediation in the form of exercises, drills, and stretches to improve style and mental cues to guide one’s focus while racewalking. The text intersperses unique stories in which great racewalkers from the U.S. and around the world retell some of their most memorable experiences. The book is available at www.racewalkclinic.com and www.racewalk.com. You can also learn details on a recently added clinic in Orlando, Florida in late July.... Boost for British walking. While we have been bemoaning the lack of depth in the elite racewalking in the U.S., the British, once the seat of racewalking power have perhaps sunk even further than us. They are seeking an answer as seen in the following press release: UK Athletics today announced that it had set up a new National Racewalk Center under the leadership of Andi Drake. Drake has been appointed as the Carnegie Director of racewalking at Leeds Metropolitan University. Drake—who officially took the post this month—is a UK Athletics Level 4 performance coach in racewalking and a UK Athletics Level 3 performance coach in marathon and distance running. He has a wealth of academic and practical experience of the discipline, including holding a related PhD on elite performance racewalking, acting as personal coach to athletes who have competed at Olympic, world, and Commonwealth level and 18 years of competing for Britain, including at the European Championships and Commonwealth Games. He will encompass a number of objectives, including providing support of racewalkers on the UK Athletics world-class performance program, providing coach mentoring to designated coaches in agreement with England Athletics and UK Athletics, and managing and organizing a future training program for racewalking athletes. Drake said, “I am delighted to be taking this position and appreciate the foresight of Leeds Metropolitan University and UK Athletics in giving racewalking a
permanent center in the UK. We have some exciting talent coming through in racewalking in the UK, both in terms of athletes and coaches.

Last month, after reporting the death of Chris McCarthy, we repeated a part of an article about Chris by Ron Laird that we ran over a three-month period in 1991 and promised more of that article this month. In lieu of that—and we will continue that article next month—we offer the obituary on Chris that appeared in the Chicago Tribune. A wonderful portrait of our dear friend.

Chris McCarthy took up racewalking to conquer the sloth brought on by graduate school and pursued the sport with a dedication that took him to Tokyo for the 1964 Summer Olympics. He brought similar focus to an eclectic array of pursuits in a life unburdened by any interest in money or career.

Mr. McCarthy, 77, died of complications from a brain tumor Wednesday, April 22, in hospice care at Mercy Hospital in Chicago, said his brother-in-law, R. Conrad Stein. He was a resident of Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood.

A Massachusetts native, Mr. McCarthy became a long-distance runner as a teenager and competed in the Boston Marathon while in high school, Stein said. After an Army hitch, he enrolled in the University of Chicago on a scholarship and, over a decade or so, took an unhurried meander to a bachelor’s degree in philosophy and a masters in political science. “The degree was never a target, the learning was a target,” said Bob Thompson, a friend of more than 50 years. “Feeding his mind, he neglected his body and came to yearn for the fitness of his younger days. “He had allowed himself to go seed as a graduate student,” said his wife, Betty, whom he met and married in college.

Inspired by the 1959 Pan American Games in Chicago, Mr. McCarthy took up racewalking and joined the U. Of Chicago Track Club under the legendary Ted Haydon. Striding briskly along Chicago’s lakefront for hours a day over several years, Mr. McCarthy became one of the sport’s top U.S. competitors.

He won National AAU championships in 1963 and 1964. In summer 1964, Haydon collected enough money to send him to Olympic Trials in Seattle. He won, and it was off to Tokyo. Competing in the 50 KM event, he finished 21st in 4:35:41.6. “It was an achievement, it was something he had decided he was going to go for, and he made it,” his wife said.

Mr. McCarthy remained in Hyde Park until rents got too high, then bought a house in Pilsen that sold cheaply for good reason. Among other shortcomings, the home’s plumbing was shot, and for the first year the McCarthy’s had to shower at the homes of friends.

“A neighbor was nice enough to hose out her window so we could fill a bucket,” his wife said with a laugh. The couple fixed the place up and became urban pioneers in the largely Hispanic neighborhood, still many years for hipness.

“His sense of humor and wit were a delight to all that knew him,” said Bob Thompson, a friend of more than 50 years. “He wasn’t lazy, he just had no attraction to money,” said Stein.

Intellectually curious, he read widely on everything from mathematics to Mozart and in the early 1980s became consumed by computers. He attended social events only reluctantly, but one there, he was sparkling conversationalist. “He was a talker and an original thinker,” Thompson said.

He took up bicycling and racked up as many as 10,000 miles a year, often taking long rides along the Illinois & Michigan Canal Trail with his cycling club. Last year, he completed two 100-mile rides.

According to Stein, his final illness required a brain biopsy, after which a doctor asked him his name in the recovery room. “Call me Ishmael!” he replied, wit intact.

LOOKING BACK

45 Years Ago (From the Late Spring 1964 issue of the MidWest Race Walker, published by Chris McCarthy)—Ron Laird was an easy winner in the National 30 Km in Los Angeles. His 2:26:27 left Bob Bowman nearly 10 minutes back (2:36:16) in second. Rudy Haluza was third in 2:38:03.

Two weeks later, Laird went on a record rampage. On May 15, he broke the American record for 1500 meters at the L.A. Coliseum Relays with a 3:57:0. Don DeNoon was second in 3:52:2.

The next day in Walnut, Calif., Laird easily broke the American record he had set a few weeks earlier in Chicago for 1 Hour, covering 8 miles 420 yards. On the way, he took the 10 Km record with a 44:58 and continued to records at 15 Km (1:08:17) and 10 Miles (1:13:18). Dean Rasmussen was dominant on the other side of the country, winning the Penn AC 12 Mile in Philadelphia with 1:37:06, 2 seconds ahead of Bob Minnich. Two weeks later, he took a 15 mile on Staten Island in 2:00:35. Ron Daniel was 30 seconds back in that one. In a close race north of the border, Alex Oakley won the Ontario 10 Mile title in 1:17:08, ahead of Felix Cappella (1:17:15), and Nick Marrone (1:17:45).

40 years Ago (from the May 1969 ORW)—This issue featured the first photos ever published in the ORW, and guess what? They showed athletes in full flight phase as we launched the first of many series of commentaries on judging issues. And here was Laird again winning the National 10 Km in Chicago in a championship record of 45:14.2. Ron Daniel and Steve Hayden followed. One day later, Tom Dooley had no need to hang down his head as he set an American record for the same distance in California, recording 44:26.9.

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35 Years Ago—(From the May 1974 ORW)—John Knifton overcame a challenge from Floyd Godwin in the National 25 Km in Des Moines, Iowa, to win with a 1:56:03 effort. Floyd Godwin was just over 2 minutes back at the finish, followed by Jerry Brown and Bob Henderson. Larry Walker won the National 15 Km in California in 1:10:08, 5 seconds ahead of Carl Swift, who wasn’t swift enough on this day. Ed Bouldin (1:11:43), Bill Ranney, Rudy Haluza, and Steve DiBernardo filled out the first six. Godwin also took the 10 in 45:42 with Henderson a distant second and aging Jack Mortland (39) a rather ashamed third (51:02) as few athletes showed up.

30 Years Ago (From the May 1979 ORW)—It was open season on the World’s 20 Km record, which had been held by Mexico’s Daniel Batuista at 1:23:22. On April 22, Anatoly Solomin, USSR, did 1:23:20. One week later, Frenchman Gerard LeLievre took the record down to 1:22:20 in Epinay. Then on May 19, Bautista said “Enough!” Walking on the track in Valencia, Spain he recaptured his record with a 1:22:15 effort. Jim Heiring’s American record of 1:30:04 set on April 22 didn’t last long either. Todd Scully turned in a 1:28:33 in Seattle on May 17.
Hansen won the U.S. 15 Km title in Kenosha, Wis., tying Canadian Marcel Jobin in the process, as both returned 1:06:58. Heirinig was nearly a minute-and-a-half back with John VanDenBrandt following him... Scully whipped Hansen in the National 10 Km in Chicago in 43:14. Heirinig beat Hansen this time, 43:55 to 44:16. VanDenBrandt was fourth. Scully discouraged the field with a 6:26 opening mile. The next day, Canada’s Marcel Jobin beat Scully in the Zinn Memorial 10 Km, blasting 41:32. Todd had 42:15. The Women’s National 15 Km went to Paula Kash-Mori in 1:21:21, with Jeanne Bocci second... Alan Price was an easy winner in the National 100 Km in 10:36:35, with Tom Hamilton 47 minutes back in second. Jack Blackburn finished third, catching Sal Corrallo in the final 20 miles to take the master’s title.

25 Years Ago (From the May 1984 ORW)—Ever had a weekend festival of National walks. On Saturday, Tim Lewis (20:53) and Teresa Vaill (25:27) won titles at 5 Km. Mel McGovern (21:27) and Vincent O’Sullivan followed Lewis and Mexico’s Maria Colín was second in the women’s race. On Sunday, O’Sullivan came back to win the National 30 Km in 2:22:48. Carl Schueller, better than 4½ minutes back, edged Tom Edwards for second. Fabian Kniazczyk was fourth. Jim Heppner was an easy winner in the National 15 Km, held in New York City. Jim’s impressive 1:03:07 left Tim Lewis 52 seconds back. Ray Sharp was just 5 seconds behind Tim, and well clear of Marco Evoniuk. Ten athletes bettered 1:10. Teresa Vaill won the woman’s title in 1:17:27, 4 minutes ahead of Carol Brown... Marcel Jobin pulled away from Heppner after 5 Kms to win his own Invitational 20 Km in Quebec with a 1:24:59. Heirinig had 1:26:16 with Guillaume Leblanc third... In Norway, Mexico’s Ernesto Canto shattered the world record at 20 Km with a 1:18:39. Daniel Bautista held the old record at 1:20:30. Marco Evoniuk was 10th in the race in 1:26:20, and also turned in times of 1:25:13 and 41:13 (10 Km) in Copenhagen the next week.

20 years ago (From the May 1999 ORW)—National 15 Km titles went to Rene Haarpaintner (1:06:06) and Victoria Herazo (1:16:30 in races held in Long Beach. Steve Pecinovsky trailed Haarpaintner by just over a minute, with Richard Quan third and Allen James fourth. Kim Wilkinson was just 5 seconds back in second place, with her teammate and second place winner in the 5 Km, Tim Lewis in 1:03:25. Steve Pecinovsky disbanded in the women’s race with Sara Standley third. Tim Lewis won the National Invitational 20 Km in Washington, D.C. in 1:26:52. Leblanc on 2:14 back. Mark Manning, Gary Morgan, Steve Pecinovsky, and Curtis Fisher were all under 1:30 in the next four spots... Lewis also won the Penn Relays 15 Km in 1:24:22, followed by Fournier (43:32) and Hamilton (43:00). The women’s 5 Km went to Teresa Vaill in 22:38 with Lynn Weik in 23:03.

15 Years Ago (From the May 1994 ORW)—Daniel Garcia beat Ecuador’s young Jefferson Perez by 3 seconds in 1:23:24 to win the Mexican Walk Week 20 Km. Bernardo Segura (1:23:30) and Hector Moreno, Columbia (1:24:03) were next. Al Heppner led a U.S. contingent with 1:32:49 in 39th... In Durham, N.C., Dave McGovern beat Curt Clausen in a 20 Km, 1:32:06 to 1:33:21. Jan Whatley was just 3 seconds behind Clausen. In fourth was Mark Kautz, reportedly a 29-minute 10 Km runner just getting into racewalking who did 1:33:51—the best heard of again by this reporter.

10 years Ago (From the May 1999 ORW)—In the World Cup, Curt Clausen made a tremendous breakthrough, taking 6½ minutes off his personal best (also the National best), as he finished 11th in the 50 Km in 3:48:04. Clausen moved up to at least 10 places over the final 10 Km. The race went to Kazakhstan’s Sergey Korepanov in 3:39:22 with Tomasz Lipiec, Poland, and Nikolay Matyukhin, Russia, following. Russia beat Spain and Germany for the team title with the U.S. in 10th, just 1 point behind Slovakia... Philip Dunn also had a breakthrough, becoming the ninth U.S. walker to go under 4 hours with 3:59:53 in 45th. Andrew Hermann (4:08:47) in 60th.