Shorey Takes 50 Km Title

Tustin, Cal., Jan. 23—Ben Shorey celebrated your editor’s birthday with a decisive win in the National 50 Km. Ben’s 4:16:00 left Tim Seaman, walking his first 50 since the 2004 Olympic Trials, better than 9 minutes behind. Patrick Stroupe, in his first 50, was the third American just 2 minutes in back of Tim. Sweden’s Christopher Svensson finished third in the race. On the women’s side, it was another repeat of last year’s race with Erin Taylor-Talcott scoring a decisive win over Kathryn Grimes, covering the 50 Km in 5:11:04. That was about 14 minutes slower than last year. Grimes, however, improved by about 17 minutes.

Shorey, who had been third in this race in both 2003 and 2008 improved on his previous best of 4:18:46 set at the 2008 World Cup. For Seaman, it was his second silver medal at 50 to go along with four third place finishes. Following Stroupe, who made an impressive debut at the distance, 54-year-old Jonathan Matthews didn’t quite find the magic of last year, when he was second in 4:23:15, but still had a commendable performance. Mark Green, 55, was another 20 minutes back in sixth place. No further details on the race at press time. The results:


DQ—Patrick Bivona, Ray Sharp, David Guevara, and Tom Belford

Other Results


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**Just Do It! And Here Are Some Opportunities.**

Sun. Feb. 5 2.8 Miles, SeaTac (C)
Sun. Feb. 6 1500 meters and 3 Km, Palm Desert, CA (U)
Sun. Feb. 6 1 Mile and 3000 meters, Brentwood, N.Y. (T)
Fri. Feb. 11 Indoor 3000 meters, Geneva, Ohio (M)
Sat. Feb. 12 Indoor 3000 meters, Cederville, Ohio (M)
Sun. Feb. 13 High School Indoor 1 Mile, Cederville, Ohio (M)
Sun. Feb. 13 USAATF Pan-Am Trials 20 Km and Junior 20 Km, Men and Women, Coconut Creek, FL (B)
Sun. Feb. 26/27 National USAATF Indoor 3000 meters, Albuquerque, NM (D)
Sat. March 5 5 Km, Sarasota, FL (B)
Sun. March 6 5 Km, Denver, 10 am (H)
Sun. March 12 5 Km, Denver, 10 am (H)
Sat. March 19 5 Km, Denver, 10 am (H)
Sat. March 26 3 Km, Seattle (C)
Sun. March 27 Ron Zien Memorial 10 Km, Wall Township, N.J. (A)
Sat. April 9 2.8 Km, Seattle (C)
From Heel To Toe

I goofed. (So, what else is new?) There was a major omission in my world 50 km rankings published last month I omitted my intended seventh place athlete, Russia's Sergey Bakulin. In my preparations, I had marked Bakulin seventh, but then also marked Jesus Angel Garcia seventh. When it came time to enter the rankings into the newsletter, I saw the 2 by Garcia's name and ignored that by Bakulin's name. So Bakulin, who was second in the Russian Championships on June 13 in 3:58:07 and third in the European Championships on July 30 in 3:58:26 is now officially seventh in the rankings. Spain's Garcia drops to eighth, Yuki Yamazaki, of Japan, to ninth, and Ireland's Robert Heffernan to tenth. Mexico's Cristian Berdeja falls out of the top ten. Apologies to my readers and to all the athletes concerned—-who probably aren't even aware that there is such a thing as Ohio Racewalker World Rankings. Another much more minor error, perhaps among many, was leaving the first "Z" out of Grzegorz Sudol's name both in the rankings and in the list of top performers at 50. Sorry Greg, if that is a proper nickname in Polish. In the U.S. lists, I must plead negligence in omitting Darlene Backlund from the women's 50 km list. Darlene walked an American Record for the 65-59 age group with her 6:26.44 in September. A gracious person, Darlene, together with John, renewed their subscription for another year, despite my oversight.

Lafayette's Tyler Sorensen on fast track to success as racewalker

by Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Tyler Sorensen says he likes to listen to rock music to inspire him through longer workouts around his hometown of Lafayette. He didn't say whether he has a prominent spot on his iPod for the Ventures' "Walk, Don't Run." It would fit to be sure. Sorensen at 16 has already established himself as one of American track and field's top prodigies in racewalking, quite a feat considering it's not even offered as an event at California high school meets and barely registers on the popularity meter in this country.

Sorensen, a junior at Acalanes High, is a member of the U.S. Junior National team and perhaps on the verge of helping to revolutionize and popularize racewalking in the country. On January 8, he set a national prep record at 3000 meters in Santa Cruz, obliterating an 11-year-old mark by more than 16 seconds. The remarkable feat earned him USA Track and Field's Athlete of the Week honors, rare enough for a racewalker but particularly stunning for a performer so young. But, it's likely just the beginning for Sorensen, because racewalkers often have productive careers into their 40s.

"No doubt, there are many opportunities out there for me in the future," he said. "It's all thanks to the USATF Junior Olympic Program. When I was 8 or 9, I would run the 1500 and 3000 on my track club team and my sister (Nicolette, now a national girls' champion) would, too. My sister decided to try the racewalk event, and she did well at it and then I decided to try it. I happened to be good at it, too.

Sorensen has become so proficient in a few short years that he is now coached by the country's foremost racewalker, Tim Seaman, who is also guiding another top racewalking hope, 18-year-old Trevor Barn of Bethel Park, Pa. Seaman, a 12-time national indoor champion who finished 20th in the 2004 Olympic 20 Km with the best-ever clocking for an American, will never forget the first time he encountered Sorensen during a training seminar in San Diego.

"I think he was 14, and my immediate impression was that there's no way this kid is 14," Seaman said. "It was only a snapshot, but from that snapshot, I could sort of extrapolate the big picture, and I said, 'Holy cow, this kid is incredible.'"

Seaman sees great things for Sorensen. First, he is permanently relocating to San Diego this month (he will attend Torrey Pines High, where he will be closer to his coach). Second he is already so far advanced for his age. Finally, he has a peer his relative age in Barron and the two young men figure to push each other for many years against tough international competition.

"He's already broken 44 minutes for 10 Km," said Seaman. "I didn't break 44 minutes until I was 19, and I did it just once. I have the American record at 10 different distances, so I can foresee in the future if Tyler continues at his pace, my records will fall.

Sorensen has an even busier 2011 agenda that he did last year, when he made international ventures with Team USA to Singapore, Mexico, and Canada. He'll compete in the America's Cup in Columbia in March, the World Age Group Championships in France in July, and the Pan Am Juniors in Florida, also in July. Along the way he has some specific goals. This Sunday, he will compete in this first 20 Km racewalk and hopes to become the America's Cup champion who finished 20th in the 2004 Olympic 20 Km with the best-ever clocking for an American, will never forget the first time he encountered Sorensen during a training seminar in San Diego.

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"It's an unknown because I haven't done any 20s yet, but I've done 15 Km (he set a national age group record), and I think by 10 Km times translate to at least a 1:36," he said.
Of course women can do exactly as men do. They cover the 100m and the marathon distances using the same physiological tools. But, when other technical requirements are introduced, measuring "equality" by the male standard changes that physiological nature.

Women athletes could put a 16lb shot too, or hurdle 42 inches. But, while the present gender-specific specification are not "equal" in those events, they provide remarkable physiological "equivalency". Top class sprint hurdlers, male or female, cover the distance within a fraction of a metre per second of the same velocity. Women throw their discuss or shot much the same distance as men throw theirs.

So do we have to accept a philosophical position on an "equal" 20km / 50km program when the athletes themselves seem to have little appetite for it?

If waiting for "significant 50km competition to emerge" means continuing the present inequality of opportunity, isn't it time for another option? I say that race walking would be much better served if the sport moved quickly to offer an equivalent, gender-specific program, with both 20km and 10km races for women.

A Challenge

Recently on his website, racewalk.com, Jeff Salvage wrote:

In recent weeks a number of events have transpired that have led me to write up this review. First, I went to European Racewalking Coach’s Conference in Leeds, England. While I knew before going that America was behind, it is only afterwards that I realized how far behind we are. I planned to write a public review, but a few other events occurred that I feel merit attention.

The recent breakthrough by Trevor Barron, although not unexpected, shows that we can compete on the world stage. Trevor has a wonderful support system and his future is bright. (Ed. And let's throw Tyler Sorensen into that mix, too) It's one of the first times in years that I feel we are moving in the right direction, even if on an individual level. Tim Seaman's efforts with Champions International is paying dividends.

Our Racewalking Clinic of Excellence in Springfield, Ill., was of note as well. While the clinic was fine, it was two aspects that give me hope for racewalking. The first was that there was a clinic in Springfield, Illinois. It was spearheaded by Brent Dohlen, author of "Boomerwalk", who was one of the first racewalkers in Springfield just a few years ago. Learning at a Dave McGovern clinic, he became an enthusiast wanting to spread the word. He wrote Boomerwalk and started evangelizing racewalking to the masses. In addition to the people he had led nationally, this led to a sold-out clinic where no active racewalking activities existed a few years earlier. In addition, it led to an opportunity for 12 NAIA athletes to attend the clinic for free. We typically discount college athletes to a $50 entry fee, but Ginger Mulanax raised the money for their fee so that got coaching at no cost right at the beginning of the season. Why do I bring this all up? We don't need to wait for USATF, a larger group, or big funds to have an impact. Brent's actions have led to a thriving walking community where there was none before. Communities like this support the up-and-coming elite and future elite walkers. Currently, we have a number of young racewalkers with incredibly bright futures, but we need to be able to support them financially, emotionally, and with infrastructure. That means going out and building your local walking program.

The second event was the 100th Coney Island racewalk. A historical walk by definition, it is the oldest continual racewalking event in the country. This year's effort saw a nice turnout to the boardwalk, but nothing like the old days. My fear next year and future years is that this event will suffer. We need a grass-roots movement to build the base back
up. When I was just starting, I walked in New York City for the first time. It was a local race and I finished sixth with a time of 48 something for 10 Km. Think about the depth we had just 20 years ago. We need to have that again.

In addition, I gave a lecture at Texas A&M and in the process found out they teach 1000 students a year in a walking gym class, where they teach racewalking. I am working with them to see what we can do to build on their efforts. Clearly, there are sources of walkers out there, we just have to do a better job of recruiting them.

Your editor’s comment: To quantify what Jeff hinted at regarding depth in the U.S. racewalking program, let me rehash some numbers I have presented before, in whole or in part, way back in 1996. I published a table in the December 1996 issue of the Ohio Racewalker that charted the definition of athletes at 20 and 50 km in the U.S. for each year from 1972 through 1996. For 20 km, the table showed the number of athletes that had broken 1:27, 1:30, 1:33, 1:36, and 1:40 each year. At 50 km, it showed those under 4:00, 4:10, 4:20, 4:40, and 5:00. Just looking at those under 1:40 and 5 hours, arbitrarily times that require some fairly serious training to attain. At 20, it showed 20 under 1:40 in 1972 and 23 in 1996, a scant improvement. But look at some of the years in between—37 in 1978, 38 in 1986, and 40 and 43 in 1987 and 1988. The last year there were as many as 20 was 1998, and since 2004, when there were 18, the numbers are 9, 13, 13, 14, 11, and 10. At 50, there were 20 under 5 hours in 1972 but only 12 in 1996. The peak years were 32 in 1979 and 25 in 1983, with more than 20 in six other years leading up to 1996. Since then, there have been more than 10 in only 4 years, and just 6, 1, and 6 in the last three years. So, where have all the walkers gone?

A reply to that final query comes from National Chair Vince Peters. His reply issues a challenge to the racewalking community. It follows:

I am afraid the #1 answer is—the lack of coaches.

And what should be a prime source of coaches in our event? Of course, it should be our greatest asset—our current and retired athletes!

However, way to many of our former elite walkers have failed to impart a love of the event into a new generation of athletes as they slip from the starting line into other roles.

Just imagine the huge improvements that could be obtained if every individual who receives this e-mail would find a way to bring two new people into the sport during 2011.

First suggestion is, of course, to get involved with a local youth club. The vast majority of these clubs do not have a clue about racewalking. But not only that—most also need distance running coaches. So offer to become a distance coach. Compared to coaching racewalkers, coaching distance runners should be a piece of cake. Don't simply expect to have a flock of kids want to walk. Be patient. Be positive.

Second, take the same approach at the middle school and high school levels. Ask if you can be a volunteer coach for your local school's track and field program. As you coach the distance runners, introduce racewalking as a technical event for endurance athletes. We have within our racewalk community lots of free coaching materials to help you with this.

Initially use racewalking as an off-season cross training/strengthening program for your distance athletes. And, as you identify athletes with true potential to be walkers, encourage them to become competitive. Put a carrot out there, i.e., tell the athletes that if they hit such and such a time at the mile walk you will help them get to the IL.S. indoor (or outdoor) racewalking championships. It is only a mile and almost any high school athlete can become competent enough to qualify. Make a commitment. Make it fun. Make the challenge attainable.

I hope some will take these suggestions seriously. It is so much more important to do something (at this point anything) than simply sitting back and lamenting the current lack of numbers and talent in our event.

A final footnote to this discussion is added in an e-mail from Brian Savilonis:

Another interesting piece of the puzzle is the resurgence of U.S. distance running. Some of the prior interest in walking was from ex- or injured runners who found racewalking fit their needs. It may be that there will be a lag in getting the surge in running to translate into new distance walkers.

However, I think there are fewer strong locales around the country and far more running races to grab all sorts of talent. I will admit that a period of injuries—and the acceptance that 2:40 marathon ability was not going to make me “competitive” drew me into at least trying racewalking.

Now there are so many race of all caliber that I am not sure I would have taken that first step, especially since the local calendar is all 3 and 5 Km races—not appealing to marathoners).

Diniz After Record

(From the European Athletics website)—Frances’s Yohann Diniz, the European Athletics Championships 50 Km racewalk gold medalist, plans to attack the world record for the distance in March. Diniz has chosen his local track the Georges-Hobert Stadium in Reims, to be the venue for his attempt on the record of his compatriot Thierry Toutain, who clocked 40:59.7 in September 1996.

"It’s 125 laps, but I think I can go under 3:40. It will be good preparation for the 2011 World Championships and also the Olympics in 2012 as well as being able to perform in front of the people who support me," said the 32-year-old Frenchman.

Diniz, who was also the gold medalist in the longest event in the European Championships at the 2006 European Championships, produced what many pundits have called the most uncompromising performance of the week in Barcelona in last summer’s European meet. He led from the gun and, maintaining a phenomenally fast pace that left his opponents all trailing in his wake, he was 53 seconds clear after just 5 Km and kept on extending his lead throughout the race.

Despite tripping over a curb just before the 45 Km mark, and falling heavily, he finished in a 2010 world-leading time of 3:40:37 and crossed the line almost two minutes ahead of Poland’s silver medalist Grzegorz Sudol.

The preparation of Ivano Brugnetti

(Taken from Jeff Salvage’s report on the European Racewalking Coaches Conference in Lees, England)

Antonio La Torre, coach of Ivano Brugnetti, talked about preparing Brugnetti for his 2004 Olympic gold medal performance at 20 Km. While he gave specific examples of workouts, what was more important to learn were the ideas behind it. They are summarized as follows:

1. Brugnetti trained at a very high level. Much higher than most, including his teammates. This ability allowed Brugnetti to push harder in training than many. In my opinion, that makes the examples of workouts that Brugnetti did less applicable to the masseses. Importantly, to La Torre’s credit, unlike some other coaches I have seen, he acknowledged this and did not prescribe the same level of workouts for Brugnetti’s teammates. This is very wise and shows great insightfulness.

2. Brugnetti was able immediately to walk at altitude at the same level of intensity as at sea level. This is not normal, especially for athletes who are new to altitude training. Brent Vallence (Australia) said for the typical athlete it can take 6 to 8 years to achieve this.
3. La Torre feels that you build a strong base by training for the 50 Km and then can step down to the 20. At least, that’s what he got worked well for Brugnetti. (Some of what was said was difficult to understand due to the language barrier).  
4. Strength training can be achieved with hill work on mixed courses of up and down. There was high intensity on both the up and down. This was surprising to me. I don’t think we prescribe hard on the down. However, the concept of using hills for strength training is not surprising. This is part of Stephen Plater’s philosophy and therefore part of Tim Seaman’s, as well.

5. They target preserving stride (both amplitude and frequency) in training.
6. They used a “sleep high, train low” philosophy—hiked up to the hut. La Torre pointed out sleep initially was an issue and the mental fatigue of living at altitude was also an issue.

7. It seemed that La Torre was stating that Brugnetti’s inconsistency in performance was mental not physical. (Ed. Certainly typical of many athletes I have known and known of. With proper preparation, the actual competition may be as much as 90 percent mental. The body will respond if the mind allows it to.)

Two Hundred Years of Competitive Racewalking
A History of Racewalking

by Glenn Authur Sweazey, December 1981

(Glenn Sweazey is a Canadian and a prominent racewalking competitor at the time he wrote this. This is the second installment of his paper following the first installment in the November 2010 issue)

Edward Payson Weston and the Six Day Races

By the 1850s, walking competitions were being replaced by the faster running competitions. Most of the local fairs that had been the sites for walking competitions were being dominated by running events and for a short while competitive walking took a "backseat" role as a sports activity. However, it was to be primarily because of the popularity of an individual walker that the sport of walking would regain the public's interest. Pedestrianism was about to take upon itself a tremendous role as a sporting phenomenon during the 1870s and 1880s.

This scene was far different than it had been earlier in the week. At that time there seemed to be little interest in the event taking place. Perhaps it was the Newark Daily Advertiser's comment on Wednesday that "from the evening on until the end of the walk the pedestrian may be seen at his best"...that finally had the people pouring off Broad Street horse cars and walking the short but chilly distance to Washington Street. The 6,000 spectators, composed all classes of society. A group of state dignitaries gathered at the judges’ stand and the enclosed space in front of it that was reserved for the walker's attendant. (Quote from Tom Osler’s World Publications book, “Ultra-marathoning, The Next Challenge.

The year was 1974 and Edward Payson Weston was attempting to accomplish something that no man had ever done before. Weston had failed on three previous tries that same year to walk 500 miles in six consecutive days, but he succeeded on his fourth attempt, which was held in the Washington Square Park, New York City. This accomplishment caught the public interest, and competitive walking was to benefit greatly from this and many subsequent six-day races.

Weston had been a professional pedestrian since 1867, when from October 29 to November 28 he walked from Portland, Maine to Chicago Illinois, a distance of 1326 miles, winning a $10,000 wager for his effort. His subsequent accomplishments earned him a great deal of public, but it was with his six-day effort in Newark that his career first received the special recognition that would follow him until he died.

This achievement by Weston garnered public appreciation because of the enormous endurance that it had required. It is important to note that this interest was the result of a long-distance event of considerable magnitude and that it was comparable in its nature to the events that Powell and Barclay had participated in (see first installment in Nov. issue).

Although their accomplishments were not of the same caliber as Weston’s, it was the character of these events that had stirred the public’s imagination and interest. The endurable qualities of these walkers were fascinating to witness.

After his successful walk in 1974, Weston created a great deal of interest whenever he gave exhibition walks and lectured upon the virtues of abstention. However, in 1975, he was challenged to compete in another six-day race against Daniel O’Leary, who had become the second pedestrian to cover 500 miles in six days. The competition took place in Chicago and started on November 15. In this competition, Weston was beaten easily by O’Leary and the result served to stimulate even greater interest in pedestrian racing. The sport had become truly competitive again and this would stimulate more popularity than walking had ever known.

In January of 1865, Weston traveled to England so that he could compete against that country’s best walkers. After he had defeated two of England’s best (first against William Perkins in a 24-hour race and then against Charles Rowell in a 75-hour contest), Weston covered 450 miles in a six-day race in London’s Agricultural Hall. Weston continued his tour of England and then accomplished what all Great Britain had been waiting for. From September 25-20 at the Toxteth Park in Liverpool, he covered 501 miles within 144 hours. During the time that Weston was in England, he won $30,000 and a whole host of rich, influential friends. One of these was Sir John Dugdale Astley, a member of Parliament, who was known as the “Sporting Baron.” This friendship with Astley proved to be an important one because of his special interest in the six-day walking races. This English gentleman soon became the sponsor for the most famous six-day race of them all. These were to be known as the “Astley Belt Races”.

Right up to the time of the first Astley Belt competition, the six-day races were entirely walking affairs. The athletes were judged by their style so that it was certain they were walking fairly. Some evidence of this is given in an account of the Weston and O’Leary race that was contested in April 1877. The race took place at the Agricultural Hall in London. Although both O’Leary and Weston went on to establish new records of the event (O’Leary finished with 519 miles and Weston with 510), Weston’s walking style came under criticism. (Also from the Osler book.)

Astley was so taken with this long-distance business...that he decided to inaugurate a series of six-day races for the “Long-Distance Challenge Championship of the World”. These would not be merely walking races but “go-as-you-please”. The pedestrian could walk and/or run in any fashion he chose. There are two conflicting reasons given for the advent of the go-as-you-please concept. Astley says he proposed this because of the peculiar “wobbling gait” of Weston that was open to objection as not being fair heel-and-toe Walk. O’Leary gave a different reason. He claimed that since the American pedestrian were so much inferior to the English that “it was deemed necessary to invent a style of progression that would place the legitimate champions at a decided disadvantage.”

Competitive walking, in its professional form, had become one of the most popular spectator sports during the 1870s. However the professional atmosphere of these six-day shows provoked racing styles that could no longer be judged as “fair walking”, and as a result
the rules were relaxed to allow both running and walking. Indeed, it is true that walking continued to play a significant role in these unique endurance contests; but, these six-day competitions changed dramatically with the advent of the “go-as-you-please races.” The common goal for the six-day “walks” had been 500 miles, but with the added help of running many of the better endurance efforts pushed the records much higher. With this advantage, the sport of “pedestrianism” reached an amazing record of 623 3/4 miles walked by an Englishman, George Littlefield, in the 1880s. Pedestrianism took on a new sport form that was no longer racing by “mere walking”, but rather the combination of two different sports. Therefore, when pedestrianism is used in reference to the six-day races that took place after the beginning of the Astley Belt, it is not correct to label these as walking races. Walking played a limited role in these events, but the new rules were such that running a “trotting gait” were most often used. The “Golden Age” of pedestrianism referred to by Lucas in his article called “Pedestrianism and the Struggle for the Sir John Astley Belt, 1978-1979” (The Research Quarterly, October, 1968, which gives a fine and detailed account of these competitions, describes professional running as much as it does walking. Nonetheless, the six-day races had become popular as long-distance walking events and this is the important point to note when considering the history of competitive walking. During the 1870s, professional walking had reached the mania stage and the publicity given the sport during this time proved to be very important in promoting the growth of amateur walking.

The performances of Weston, Rowell, O’Leary, and other famous six-day competitors in the Astley Belt races continued to intrigue the public for only a few years more. Lucas gives this interesting account concerning the decline of “pedestrianism” during the 1880s:

The inherent ills of professional sport are greed, callousness, and an insatiable tendency toward blatant and often brutalized gladiatorial display. Without a regulator, professional sport contains the seeds of its own destruction. Professional pedestrianism in the United States was guilty of these abuses and slowly began to ebb in popularity after the intriguing series of five matches sponsored by Sir John Astley. (From the Lucas Research Quarterly article referenced above.)

By the middle of the 1880s “professional pedestrianism” was gone; however, competitive walking began to flourish in a new form. Walking races became gradually integrated into amateur track and field competition. No longer burdened with the “greed and callousness” of professionalism, walking competitions began to take on the regulated style of the contemporary sport known as racewalking. Competitions became more concerned with an athletic display of speed and endurance rather than the “tendency toward brutalized gladiatorial display.” It is this transition that marks the development of the “modern” sport of racewalking. (Look for that in the next installment of Glenn’s paper.)

A Personal Memoir of Your Editor

I don’t recall exactly when I had any serious thought of qualifying for an Olympic team. I do remember that in early 1956, while a student athlete at Bowling Green State University, I adopted a slogan “It’s only a hop, step, and a jump to Melbourne” where the 1956 Olympics were to be held. That event, now the triple jump, seemed to be one of the weaker events in the U.S. at that time, but not one I really had any particular talent for. I had long jumped (then still the broad jump until political correctness of not insulting “broads” led to change) just 20 1/2” in a rare attempt at that event, but was primarily a quarter- and half-miler and cross country runner. So, I never had any serious thoughts of Olympic glory.

When I took up racewalking in 1958 while completing grad school at Ohio State, I soon found that I could compete at a fairly high level in that event and saw it as an attractive way to continue in the sport I loved. But, even when I finished third in the 1960 U.S. Indoor 1 Mile Championship (and second American as the event was won by Ferenc Szekely, a Hungarian refugee), I did not set the 1960 Olympics as any goal. There were many who told me after the race that I was now a solid candidate to qualify in the 20 K race walk, but I knew full well the difference between 1 mile and 20 K miles and knew there was no way I would be prepared for type of effort it would take to make the team. However, finishing ninth in the Trial race was satisfying in itself and perhaps the thought of qualifying four years hence began to creep in.

I’m not sure just when that became a real goal, but finishing second in the 1961 National 20 and qualifying for the National T&F team for a meet in Moscow with the Soviet Union and others in Europe certainly brought it forth as a realistic goal. Even though I dropped a spot in the National 20 each of the next two years, the 1963 race gave me full confidence that I would make the 1964 Olympic team. Although, I finished fifth (fourth American), I finished the race strongly in a personal best time, knowing that my training, while quite intense, had not included any attempt to walk more than 8 miles in nearly a year. My thoughts at that time were more set on a June wedding when Marty became my life companion. I knew when I added walks of 20 to 24 miles to my schedule, as I did going into 1964, the added strength would make me very difficult to beat for a spot on the team.

I gained further confidence in the National 1 Hour, held in March 1964. I finished fourth, behind Ron Zinn, Ron Laird, and Art Mark. Zinn and Laird were strong favorites to make the Olympic team. I got a little bogged down in the middle stages with a left leg feeling numb (I had some problems with sciatica), but got back on pace and then accelerated to a 7:20 over the final mile. Feeling very strong I knew that I could have held that pace at least to 10 miles, while Mark, just 9 yards ahead of me at the finish, was obviously struggling. Thus, a fourth place finish gave me renewed confidence in my ability to win an Olympic berth.

The 20 K Olympic Trial was held in Pittsburgh on Sunday, July 5. It was a very hot day—I don’t know if I ever heard any exact reading on the temperature. However, I had walked 10 miles a week earlier in Columbus on an even hotter day and had quite easily walked 8 minutes miles with no opposition. Hot, humid weather always seemed to work to my advantage in a race. Knowing that if I walked what I was capable of I would be on the team I went to the starting line fully confident.

At that time, I usually walked without socks, I’m not sure why. But, it never caused any problems. Well, Akos Szekely, who had been one of the three ahead of me at the 1963 National 20, glanced down and then proclaimed, “Look, Mortodont isn’t wearing socks. He’s in for stitchers.” Or something to that effect. A moment of doubt crept in—“maybe he’s right.” But that passed as the gun sounded and the large field moved out on what was essentially an out-and-back course, which was often the case in those days. The course consisted of an ‘L’ shape that led onto a large rectangle consisting of right turns and then a left turn back onto the original 1, which took us back to the start-finish line.

It was around 3 miles when all the pretenders had been dropped leaving a leading group of about 10 ying for Olympic berths. Suddenly, a moment of panic crept into my previously confident thoughts. I looked around. There was Ron Laird, who devoted his whole being to racewalk training and competition. And then there were Ron Zinn, Art Mark, Akos Szekely, Rudy Haluzza, Don DeNoon—all in some branch of the armed services and in the thoughts that invaded my confidence, given the opportunity to train full-time for this race. What chance did I, who trained in the evening after an 8-hour workday, have in this field.

I don’t think those thoughts lasted long and by about halfway into the race, Laird, Zinn, and I had separated from the pack and were spread by 50 to 80 meters from one to the next. As we rounded the final right turn onto the long last leg of the rectangle—at about 7 miles—someone handed me a cup of 7-up and shouted, “You’ve got it made. Rudy’s about 100 yards back of you.” That wasn’t particularly reassuring—really a slim margin with nearly 5 ½ miles to go and Rudy was a 1960 Olympian. But, still I felt strong and tried to press my
advantage.

That 7-Up was the only thing I got during the race. Watering stations were not usually a part of a race in those days, but even on hot such days such as this, I rarely needed anything. Perhaps my DNA would show some camels in my ancestry. Nonetheless, I was rather frustrated with what was happening over the next few miles. Ron Zinn was perhaps 60 or 70 meters ahead of me. His coaches from Chicago, Mike Ribon and Bill Ross, were in a car and stopping every half-mile so to douse him and give him drinks of water. I would get within 10 or 20 yards of them, thinking they might offer something to me—I thought we were on good terms—but they would hustle back into their car and pull away as I started to hold my hand out. While I felt no real need for water, I still felt slighted. But, of course, the Olympics were at stake and why help the opposition.

I really had no clue what might be behind me and never liked to encourage a pursuer by looking back. But when I went through an underpass, perhaps 2 miles from the finish, figuring I was in the shadows, I risked a glance back and could see a single pursuer at least 100 meters back. Still moving strongly, I was more confident than ever of a successful finish.

There was still one more moment of doubt. With perhaps a half mile to go, my stomach suddenly felt very unsettled, something that never bothered me during races. After a couple of dry heaves, I thought, “Oh no! I’m going to be barfing at the side of the road, while Rudy strolls by for the final spot on the team.” That didn’t happen, my stomach settled and I crossed the one a full minute ahead of Don DeNunno, not Rudy, and was on the Olympic team.

Since it was something I fully expected going into the race, I don’t remember any great euphoria—perhaps a little disappointment at not catching Zinn, who was struggling more than I. I thought I would be on the team and now I wasn’t. I felt I had more excitement three years earlier when I first qualified for a national team because then I really never believed such a thing would happen. Besides all of that, big emotional displays have never been part of my makeup, so there was no dancing or shouting—a hug from my wife I’m sure. But, I really remember nothing of post-race events.

Back home, I celebrated the next evening by going to a campus record store and treating myself to three new LPs in my favorite jazz idiom. Then, back to training for the Olympics in October.

**LOOKING BACK**

**45 Years Ago (From the Jan. 1966 ORW)**—The 1 Mile Walk in the Los Angeles Invitational (won by Ron Laird in 6:38) made it onto the telecast of the meet—unfortunately. All we could do was chaste CBS for playing it as some sort of comic relief. But, that’s an old refrain.

The National Junior (more precisely “novice” at that time, it had nothing to do with age) 50 Km went to Martin Kraft in 5:22:34, ahead of Roger Duran. Ron Daniel won a 1 Mile race in New York in 6:34. On the local scene, Jack Blackburn (14:38) whipped your editor (14:43) in a 2 Mile (outdoor) on a cold January day...

**40 Years Ago (From the Jan. 1971 ORW)**—In L.A., Ron Laird set an American indoor record for 4 miles (records were recognized at an amazing number of strange distances in those long ago days) with a 28:41.2. Larry Walkers finished 22 seconds back...