

BUDDY WHO?

By **DON SIKORSKI**
Special to the Bulletin

New Zealand's Rod Dixon had just won a major road race in Tulsa, Oklahoma when a Race Official offering congratulations approached him. "My name is Buddy Edelen", he said, to which Dixon's reply was "Buddy Who?" Dixon meant no disrespect. It was just that Edelen, despite previously holding eight American track records and a marathon world best, wasn't exactly a household name, even amongst the running community.

Leonard "Buddy" Edelen was born on September 22nd, 1937 in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. He moved to South Dakota, where he excelled as a high school distance runner, running 4:28 for the mile and going undefeated during his senior year in 1955. He went on to run at the University of Minnesota on a partial scholarship and raced with some decent success, but it wasn't until Edelen's post-collegiate years, living in Chelmsford, England and being coached but former two-time Olympian Fred Wilt, that he saw the results of his continuous hard work. Buddy Edelen's training regime was intense, with twice a day running, a ton of fast interval work, and long, steady weekend runs, all of which would commonly add up to about 135 miles per week. As a school teacher, Buddy would rise early to run 4.5 miles to school, then run home after school and add on grueling track workouts (20 x ¼ mile repeats at 70-71 seconds each with 45 second jog recoveries was a standard workout) or additional mileage often run at 5:00 per mile pace or better. Buddy enjoyed racing cross-country as part of England's club system, and owned personal bests of 28:00.8 for 6 miles and 48:28.0 for 10 miles on the track. He also became the first American to break 30:00 for the 10,000 meter run. But despite his heavy interval regime, Buddy soon discovered that his best event would be the marathon. At the 1962 Fukuoka Marathon, Buddy would finish a strong 4th in a time of 2:18:56.8. Nine years after Jim Peters of Great Britain broke the 2:20 mark for the 26.2-mile distance, Buddy Edelen became the first American to do so.

Buddy's training and lifestyle contradicted what many envision that of the typical distance runner. Edelen would drink coffee before and after his morning run, then follow most of his evening interval workouts with a few pints of Guinness stout at the local tavern. Edelen's stomach couldn't handle solid foods immediately following a hard workout, so his dinner followed the stout (plus, Edelen swore by Guinness' blend of vitamins and iron recommended even for nursing mothers. It also helped him sleep). On Friday, June 14th, 1963, Buddy Edelen followed his lunch (a cheese sandwich, ice cream, and a chocolate bar) with a steak dinner washed down with three pints of stout. He awoke the next morning after 8 ½ hours of sleep to a breakfast of 4 soft-boiled eggs, 4 pieces of toast, a large cup of coffee with milk, and two more chocolate bars. In weather conditions of 73 degrees, sunny and still, Buddy Edelen ran and won the 50th annual Polytechnic Marathon in Chiswick, England in a time of 2:14:28, good enough for a new British all-comers, American, course, and world record. He had become the first American since Al Raines in 1909 to hold the world record for the marathon distance. It wouldn't be until Alberto Salazar's 2:08:13 in the 1981 New York City Marathon that another American would achieve that same honor.

Edelen would go on to win the 1964 Yonkers Marathon in brutally warm conditions, 91 degrees and high humidity for the noontime start. The winner would be awarded a spot on the 1964 Olympic Marathon team. Buddy won the trials race in 2:24:25, a time not especially impressive until you consider that the 2nd place finisher was almost 3 ½ miles behind Buddy, finishing in a time of 2:44:11. Two local residents were also strong contenders in the Yonkers race; Johnny Kelley, the 1957 Boston Marathon winner who was considered the king at Yonkers by virtue of his eight Yonkers Marathon wins, and Norm Higgins, who Edelen had considered a potential threat to win it all. Kelley managed a 3rd place finish in 2:46:46, while Higgins, who at 15 miles trailed Buddy by a mere 100 yards, fell back by 4 minutes at 20 miles and subsequently blacked out and did not finish. Of the 128 starters, only 37 runners finished within the established 4-hour time limit.

But soon the years of pounding out hard intervals and high mileage with little or no rest (despite repeated warnings from Coach Wilt) took a toll on Edelen's body. His admitted insecurities made him uncomfortable cutting back on training volume to peak for specific races. The motivations that made Buddy Edelen a world class distance runner were now beginning to break him down. He would go on to finish 6th in the 1964 Olympic Marathon in 2:18:12 despite being slowed by a painful sciatica throughout the race and during his last years of competition. Considering his physical injuries leading up to the Games, Edelen's Olympic performance was a true testament to his mental strength as an athlete. Buddy's running career finally came to a close in 1967. By the time his career was finished, Buddy Edelen had won 7 of the 13 marathon races he competed in, most against strong international competition. In an era when most Europeans laughed at the performances of American distance runners, Buddy Edelen used the laughter as his motivator to train harder than anyone, and his performances showed the merits of his hard work.

Upon his "retirement" from competitive racing, Edelen earned his master's degree and obtained a teaching position at Adams State University in Alamos, Colorado. In 1971, Buddy Edelen was in an automobile accident in Montana, suffering a broken shoulder, a broken pelvis, and a damaged diaphragm. Although not expected to survive, Edelen made a miraculous recovery and was told that he would have to be on crutches through Christmas of that year. Edelen discarded the crutches in September and was back running in October. He taught for 15 years before moving to Tulsa, where he worked for the state. Buddy Edelen died of cancer in February 1997 at the early age of 59. His athletic biography is illustrated in Frank Murphy's "A Cold Clear Day". He was one of the true heroes in American distance running.

Racing Roundup

- Killingly's Megan Owen will compete in the girls' high school mile at the Millrose Games at Madison Square Garden on Friday, February 7th for the 2nd consecutive year.....The Mohegan Striders Association will host their 10th Annual Banquet on Saturday evening, February 22nd. The Event takes place at New London's Port-N-Starboard Club at Ocean Beach Park beginning at 7:00pm. Tickets are \$20 for members and \$25 for non-members in advance and \$25 and \$30 at the door. Contact Tim Kane @ (860) 823-1422 or Lynne Hansen @ (401) 539-4672 for more information.

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