

THE LYDIARD INFLUENCE LIVES ON

By DON SIKORSKI
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Arthur Lydiard's training philosophies have influenced competitive distance runners in the same manner that Beethoven's compositions have influenced the classical musician. His principals of training are utilized by today's top coaches nearly 50 years after they were first introduced. Sadly, Arthur Lydiard died of an apparent heart attack on Monday, December 13th at the age of 87. He had just begun a tour of the United States serving as a motivational speaker.

Born in Auckland, New Zealand on July 6, 1917, Arthur Lydiard's distinguished career as a distance runner included two national titles in the New Zealand Marathon (1953, 1955) and a marathon personal best of 2:39:05. His coaching resume is even more impressive; he served as the New Zealand Olympic Coach in 1964 and coached such great athletes as Peter Snell, Lasse Viren, Dick Taylor, Murray Halberg, and John Davies. He was inducted into the New Zealand Sports Hall of Fame in 1990, and that same year, was awarded membership of the Order of New Zealand in 1990, the countries' highest royal honor. It was his innovations in coaching philosophies that Lydiard is best known for. In a time where the training of national class distance runners consisted of three sessions per week sprint intervals, Arthur Lydiard introduced a seven day per week marathon-type training regime for middle and long distance runners. He also utilized himself as a test model, logging longer and longer distances in an attempt to measure what type of training volume the human body could handle. 100 mile weeks became the norm, and long-term success was realized as a result of the adaptation to these volumes. But it was the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome that put Lydiard in the world's spotlight. New Zealand athletes earned two gold medals when an unheralded Peter Snell surprised everyone to win the 800 meter title and a mere hour later, Sir Murray Halberg's "run away from the field early" tactics resulted in another gold at 5,000 meters. Despite Lydiard's success as a coach, his methods were often unwelcome in his homeland, and demand for his guidance soon grew in other countries. His greatest contribution to the sport was his system of training that was based on long, steady running for long distances as opposed to the standard practice of interval training that had been utilized by American and European coaches at the time.

Arthur Lydiard was also a great philosopher who sprinkled doses of humor over his often critical and direct responses. When asked about the factors that contribute to a runner's morning heart rate, Lydiard responded, "well, it depends who you're sleeping with." When asked his opinion on the benefits of stretching, his answer? "Well, I suppose some moderate stretches might help, but I never saw a race horse stretching!" Many of his statements would also serve well on motivational memorabilia: "Champions are everywhere, all you have to do is train them properly", "There are champions everywhere, Snell and Halberg lived in my neighborhood. With the right training, anyone can be a champion", and "if your coach can't tell you why you are doing a particular workout, get yourself another coach." He could also deliver his message with a quick and simple response. At a training seminar, when asked if he could give only one piece of advice, what it would be, he simply responded "run every day". All classic Lydiardisms.

The basic Lydiard training philosophy was the simple principle that "miles make the champions" and that the initial grind of running a great volume of mileage would eventually serve as the basework for any future training at faster speeds. Lydiard was also blunt about the fact that hard work was the only path to success in distance running. "It's old-fashioned to say, but the fundamental physiological mechanics of running have not changed. We used to run 22 miles through the mountains and you don't see people doing it that much anymore. People have gotten soft and flabby. It's a question of application, not talking. Why did Peter (Snell) do the mileage and the 22-miler? Because he knew it made him a better runner." He often criticized the American scholastic athletic system and its focus on fast paced intervals and frequent competitions. "If you want to be a successful runner, you have to consider everything. It's no good just thinking about endurance and not to develop fine speed. Likewise, it's no good training for speed, or anaerobic capacity with lots of interval type of training when you haven't developed your aerobic capacity to maximum. You have to take a long view and train on all aspects of development through a systematic program. It's a lot of hard work for five, six, or seven years. There's no secret formula. There's no shortcut to the top." Finally, when asked about recovery from long runs, Lydiard responded matter-of-factly "We never had any of those sports drinks or go. After a long run, we had a beer." Lydiard also believed in being ready to race when it was time to race. "You should race when you're ready. Don't go out there and make a fool out of yourself." Personally, that message was stamped in my brain whenever I pinned a race number on my chest.

Arthur Lydiard was considered by many to be the greatest distance running coach who ever lived. His training philosophies have influenced almost anyone that has ever laced up a pair of running shoes, as he is considered to have been one of the founders of the jogging movement. His contributions to the sport of long distance running will be missed.

Racing Roundup

Last year's two best high school distance runners in Connecticut concluded their debut collegiate cross-country seasons with strong performances. Griswold's Gavin Coombs, competing for North Carolina State, helped his team to a successful defense of their ACC title and finished 79th overall in the NCAA Championship race, running 2nd man for the Wolfpack in that race. His high school rival, Ahmed Haji of Conard (West Hartford), finished 163rd overall running 4th man for Providence College. Both runners have already made an immediate impact on two of the countries top distance running programs.....Former national high school champion and Colorado standout Dathan Ritzenhein, who left the Buffalos this spring to turn professional, is reported healthy and back training at 100% effort. The 2003 NCAA XC champion is bow coached by Brad Hudson, a former elite distance runner. Hudson, considered one of the top new coaches on the national class circuit, also coaches Scott Larson, who recently finished 3rd in the Twin Cities Marathon in a personal best 2:14:11.

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