

THE FATHER OF AMERICAN DISTANCE RUNNING

By DON SIKORSKI
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The day I turned 30 years of age, I began to feel plenty of aches and pains following a difficult workout. 10 years later, it hurts just to get out of bed in the morning. So I envy a runner of Ted Corbitt's stature. Corbitt ran long distances, raced at an elite level, remained relatively injury free, and maintained an active and healthy runner's lifestyle well into his 80's. He led by example and served as an inspiration to many.

Corbitt, referred to by New York City Marathon founder Fred Lebow as "The Father of American Distance Running", passed away last month as a result of respiratory complications. He was 88 years old. An inspirational and motivated athlete and individual, Theodore Corbitt began his days of running as a young child growing up on his father's cotton farm in Dunbarton, South Carolina. After relocating to Ohio, Corbitt ran competitively during high school and college, competing at the University of Cincinnati. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in Education, Corbitt served in the United States Army during World War II and later moved to New York City, earning a Master's Degree in Physical Therapy from New York University. He would develop into an outstanding distance runner, running his first marathon in Boston in 1951 (finishing in a very respectable time of 2:58:42) and competing at an elite level for over two decades until bronchial asthma slowed him down in his mid 50's. Inspired by two-time Boston Marathon winner Ellison "Tarzan" Brown, Corbitt saw the marathon distance as a challenge that he could excel at, with his dedication to long distance training paying true dividends. And Corbitt would continue to compete at the ultra marathon distance with phenomenal results. At the age of 81, Corbitt walked a total of 240 miles during a six-day race. He would log 303 miles in that same race a year later. Corbitt also posted a time of 5 hours, 35 minutes, and 3 seconds for 50 miles in 1970, which currently remains as the U.S. record for ages 50 and over.

Ted Corbitt competed in nearly 200 marathons and ultra marathons (distances of 50 to 100 miles or 24 hour relay events) during his running career. Corbitt is said to have consistently logged near 200 miles weekly in training, and at times, as much as 300 miles. The training paid off. He won a total of 30 of those ultra marathon races. Corbitt also represented the United States as a member of the 1952 Olympic Marathon team in Helsinki. His personal best marathon time of 2 hours, 26 minutes, and 44 seconds holds up even against today's top age group runners. With much of his mileage was logged in New York's Van Cortlandt Park, Corbitt was able to avoid running injuries and develop the strength required for long distance racing success. Rumored to have run the full marathon distance every day for a month, Corbitt often ran to work every day, making a 20+ mile trek through the city to his Manhattan office, where he worked as a physiotherapist. He also incorporated weight training into his fitness routine. Corbitt was clearly willing to serve as the experimental test model for long distance running.

Ted Corbitt also made contributions to the sport administratively. He founded the Road Runners Club of America and served as the club's president, assisting in establishing criteria for course measurement and certification nationally. He was also one of the original inductees into the National Distance Running Hall of Fame in Utica, New York.

With little scientific training knowledge available to runners during his time, Corbitt tested training method himself, serving as a test model and sharing the results with his contemporaries. He pushed the envelope in terms of human performance, believing that the proper amount of rest could revive the body for the following training session. As a young black athlete, he also encountered racial barriers. Yet he remained optimistic that his presence in the sport could make a difference. Corbitt was the key creator of the Masters division in road racing for runners ages 40 and over which exists today. Ted Corbitt ultimately helped to break the color barrier in the sport of distance running. He also serves as a model for scientific support in determining how far the human body can be pushed to run and endure. Leading by example, Ted Corbitt paved the way for the runners and served as a role model in determination and longevity. His presence will certainly be missed.

Racing Roundup

Former Yale University standout Kate O'Neill recently won the Chevron Houston Half Marathon in a time of 1:11:57. O'Neill, 27, plans to compete in the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials race in Boston on April 20th. James Carney of Lafayette, CO claimed the men's title in 1:02:21. The race served as the USA Championship for the distance.....The Flora London Marathon continues to attract the world's best marathoners. World Record Holder Paula Radcliffe of Great Britain and Ethiopia's Gete Wami will renew their recent battle from the New York City Marathon this past fall at the April 13th race. U.S. Olympic Trials Marathon winner Ryan Hall will be part of the elite men's field according to Race Director Dave Bedford, himself a former Olympic distance runner for Great Britain.....The 13th Annual Reebok Boston Indoor Games take place on Saturday, January 26th and will again feature many of the world's best athletes.

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