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SPORTS

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Between The Sport Lines



Really, You Never Heard Of Corbitt?

By Marco Smolich

TED CORBITT, AS YOU well know, is one of the most remarkable athletes of our time. Corbitt? You mean you never heard of Ted Corbitt? Really?

Well, neither did I until Paul Reese, Sacramento's numero uno distance-running buff let it be known that the 50-year-old New York physiotherapist is scheduled to compete tomorrow in



Ted Corbitt

the fourth annual National AAU 50-Mile Championship Race at Rocklin's Whitney Ranch subdivision.

This bunion-belter will start at 8 a.m. sharp at Midas and Rawhide Court and cover a 5-mile loop with aid stations at each 2½-mile section of the loop.

IF ANYBODY IS standing at the end of 50 miles, the race figures to be over by 2 p.m. Spectators are welcome and should bring their own lunch — and refreshments.

Skip Houk, former University of Nevada runner who is in the insurance business in Fresno, set the course and United States record of five hours, 38 minutes, 15.6 seconds in 1968. Houk is listed as a doubtful starter this trip.

IT SHOULD BE MENTIONED that Skip's record was considered broken last fall when Bob Deines, a Berkeley teacher, clocked a blistering 5:22.55 for the Rocklin 50.

While Bob, whose previous longest run measured only 35 miles at a "leisurely training pace" of 8-minute miles, accepted congratulations for his amazing achievement, AAU officials — all sticklers for whatever is right — measured the course.

They came up with the startling news that Deines had negotiated 2,740 feet short of 50 miles. Thus Houk retained his crown.

AND WHAT ABOUT CORBITT?

Well, this brings us to the point that Ted, a 5-9, 134-pounder, last year placed second with a 5:38.11 clocking in his fifth shot at England's London-to-Brighton Classic. This, obviously, is about four seconds faster than Houk's 50-mile US mark.

Ted's performance, however, was over 52½ miles. That, friends, is 2½ miles longer — or approximately 16 minutes at his 6:20 mile pace. Remarkably Corbitt after it was over: "I'm surprised. I pulled it out of nowhere."

Small wonder that Ted has become somewhat of a folk hero to the marathon fraternity.

PERHAPS THE SUPER-marathon fraternity would be more correct. Ordinary marathoning, up to 26 miles, has lost its allure. Why, they say your grandfather or grandson can do that.

When it comes to 50 miles and better, Corbitt — who gets much of his mileage dodging traffic on New York streets, in street shoes, to and from work — has been at it longer and with more success than anybody else in the US. Nobody knows better than he what this demanding activity entails.

Ted had gone 50 miles a dozen

times before deciding in 1969 to try the London-to-Brighton arch-snapper and remain in England for a 100-mile grind, 400 times around a quarter-mile track, four weeks later at Walton-on-Thames.

THE AMAZING CORBITT covered the 100 miles in 13 hours, 33 minutes and six seconds, placing third for what is believed to be an American record. Or do you know of any other US runner who negotiated 100 miles any faster?

It meant nothing for Ted to run 1,000 miles per month in training. Once he ran 83.3 miles in one day and on another occasion logged 300 in seven days.

Back to that 100-miler, and Corbitt believes the trouble he had untying his shorts for two restroom stops cost him three minutes, at least.

THIS HE TOLD TO Joe Henderson of Distance-Running News, along with the following:

"The race started at midnight and they used portable lights during the night. . . . The Road Runners Club of England sponsored the race (that club helped him get there, as did his own group, the New York Pioneers, and the Road Runners Club Travel Fund). . . . They had a tent on the infield which was lit very well. Outside the tent there were blackboards listing 5-mile times and places and other information. . . .

"THIS WAS GOING to be a conservative race, not as bold at the start as London-Brighton. I went through the first 50 miles in 6:13 (per mile average) and felt all right. I was hopeful I could run almost as fast for the second half, but of course I didn't.

"Somewhere along the way I was aware that I was slowing up. I had no state of breathlessness at any point. I did almost step on the curb maybe a couple of dozen times, but this was because of a loss of attention. There was no problem with dizziness or discomfort.

"AFTER A WHILE I sort of lost interest in looking at the blackboard. It was too much trouble trying to focus on the figures. Sometime when I did want to check the board, to see if others were catching up, it would take two or three laps for the figures to register. The mental part came in somewhere after 11 hours when I realized that every one left in the race could finish if they could control their minds. . . .

"I would slow up and start drinking. The dispensers were urging me not to stop completely, figuring I might cramp up. This was a possibility, I guess.

"WHEN I WENT to the dressing room (after the race) John Jewell of the British RRC asked if I had trouble with my feet. I said no. Within a minute I realized I did have some pain in one toe. This got more and more painful and I eventually lost the toenail. In fact, I lost two. I hadn't felt this at all during the race.

"I had six days of pain (with the toe). Before the race was over my right wrist became very sore. . . . In the process of trying to keep going the best I could, I flexed this wrist. Doing this for a long period set off the pain. The next day both wrists were sore."

IT IS ONLY RIGHT to tell you who won that 100-miler. John Tarrant, a Britisher living in South Africa, set a world record of 12:31:10, clipping 15 minutes off the old mark.

Between him and the lone US entry was another Britisher, Dave Box.

Anyway, for a man like Corbitt to file an entry for tomorrow's Rocklin 50-miler gives that event a pronounced touch of class.

Or do you doubt that this New Yorker — he will be 51 in January — rates among the most remarkable athletes of our time?