

The Father of American Distance Running

There are people who climb Everest because it is there. Then there are the likes of George Willig, who won his celebrated bout with the World Trade Center Towers.

And then there are the likes Ted Corbitt, who in quiet anonymity, set standards that most people only dream about approaching.

Ted who? Ted Corbitt, of course. And if the name is not exactly a household word, it's because Ted Corbitt truly was a man ahead of his time. And Ted Corbitt, almost a painfully shy man, prefers to avoid the spotlight. He has let his actions speak for themselves.

But among people who know, people who care about what's called pure running, Ted Corbitt is reverently referred to as "The Father of American Distance Running." He's the main man, and, today, all those countless people running around all those countless courses, owe Ted Corbitt at least a vote of thanks, if not a huge debt.

Ted Corbitt today received some of the recognition he deserves when the New York Road Runners Club honored him with an award for his contributions to road racing in New York which included becoming the first president of the Road Runners, in 1958.

Corbitt, in accepting the award, also announced that he would compete on Sept. 17 in the New Harlem 10 Kilometer Foot Race through the streets of Harlem. The race is sponsored by Manufacturers Hanover as a community activity which will serve as a preparatory test for the New York City Marathon on October 22.

Ted Corbitt ran long distances seriously long before it was fashionable. In fact, if it had been chic, he probably wouldn't have been interested. In the late '40's and early '50's, Ted Corbitt, who had impressive credentials as a collegiate runner, was a recently discharged Army veteran trying to get his act totally together.

By 1950, married and with his wife Ruth expecting their first child, Ted Corbitt, who had been working days as a physical therapist and attending New York University nights, had earned his Master's Degree.

All the while since his discharge in 1946, Ted Corbitt had dabbled at running. He would run a few miles once a week, but armed with his new degree and with his nights free, Ted Corbitt decided to resume serious training. Virtually nobody was into serious, long distance running then. It was a time for Korea, automobiles with fins, Mr. B. shirt collars and D.A. haircuts.

But, then, Ted Corbitt never was interested in what was fashionable. He went his own way, steadily increasing his training distance until, in January of 1951 he went 30 miles in a workout. He did 30 miles two more times that month and, literally, was off to the races - marathon style.

He made his marathon debut in Boston that year and finished 15th in a field of 150, with a time of 2:48:42. He was 13th a month later at Yonkers in 2:48:48. And, still a month later, was 10th with a time of 2:47:28 in the Junior National Marathon Championship.

That began an odyssey that still hasn't ended. By his own count, Ted Corbitt has competed in approximately 200 marathons at such meccas as Boston and Yonkers with a trip tossed in to the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, and journeys to England for a 52.5 mile London-to-Brighton road race and a 100-miler at Walton-on-Thames.

TO BE CONTINUED



Ted Corbitt at a recent press conference for "New Harlem 10 Kilometer Foot Race."