

Ultra Running

Inspirational Runner Ted Corbitt

I'm writing this column on Jan. 31, the birthdate of Ted Corbitt. I have been teaching about Corbitt to my classes, as I do each year on his birthdate. I start Black History Month one day early by informing my students about the life and accomplishments of Corbitt.

First, let me give a quick review for the few readers who are not aware of Corbitt and his accomplishments. He was an Olympic marathoner in the

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1952 games at Helsinki. He brought the United States into compliance, and

worked with others internationally to unify the world in terms of course certification. He co-founded the Road Runners Club of America and the New York Road Runners Club. He worked for 40 years as a physiotherapist, including working a couple of days a week well into his 70s. He also ran and won a lot of races from the marathon to six-day runs, including a 302-mile six-day performance at age 82. Yes, 82. He was not pleased with his performance

from the previous year when he only covered 240 miles in six days. There is a great deal more information available on the Internet. I recommend everyone spend some time checking out more of this great man's accomplishments.

Corbitt was both indirectly, and directly, a mentor of mine. When I read of his 200-mile training weeks I sought to emulate him. When I read of his back-to-back long runs I did the same. When I read about his 312-mile training week, I said "that's okay," and I did the same concerning his 70-mile training runs. After all, there were some things a mere mortal like me was not ready for. When I talked with him, he was informative and encouraging.

I had advantages though. When Corbitt was young, there were fewer than a dozen marathons in the entire country for an entire year. One year there were only three. There were few, if any ultras. Corbitt's 70-mile training runs were of necessity. I had the luxury of finding 50 to 100 mile races to run. I did not need to run 70 miles in training. I did not need to run 300 miles in training since I could run six-day races, or 24-hours, even 48-hours. After a 200-mile 48-hour performance it does not take many miles the rest of the week to approach 300 miles. Those miles were not all training miles. Corbitt ran 312 miles in a week, without a race mile recorded. (Do not try this at home.)

Corbitt was big on nutrition. Aspects of fueling the body from choice of food to the way it was eaten were important to him and his performances. He often advised putting the fork down after every bite and chewing food to paste before swallowing. He knew this was the best way to gain maximum food value for calories consumed and to make digestion as easy on the body as possible.

He ran in shoes that would torture feet in the modern era, but was not a complainer. He fixed what needed fixing, and went on to his next run. Running gear was decidedly non-technical and he made do with what he had. Made do is an understatement, he super achieved with what was available at the time.

Corbitt was, and remains, a hero and inspiration to me and countless other runners, marathoners and ultrarunners. Another year without him is the sport's loss but his achievements continue to set standards worth striving for.

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