

Hard Work Brings Brilliant Results | by trishul cherns

My first meeting with Ted Corbitt was in the middle of a hot August in 1978, a week before my very first ultra, a 47-miler. He spoke to me of believing that you could get to the finish by having determination and focus, with that alone your dreams could be reached. I was totally green, eager and open to hearing advice from an experienced runner who had done twice the distance I was about to undertake, in his training runs.

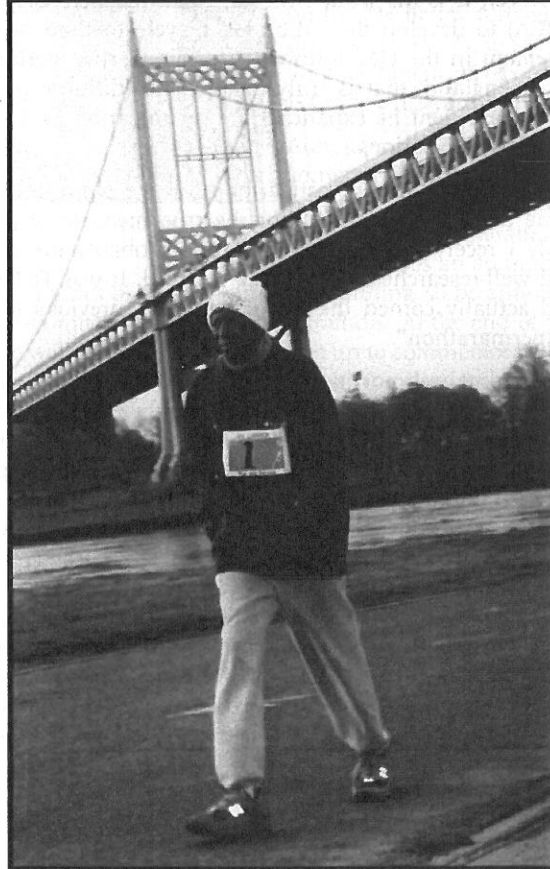
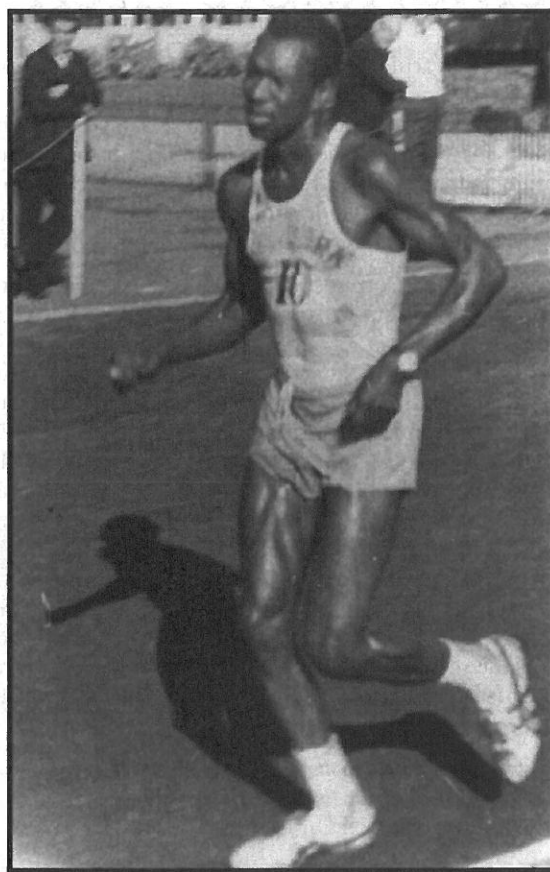
Ted Corbitt was a stellar example of how hard work brings brilliant results. He would accumulate 200 to 250 miles per week training for three months in preparation for a sub 5:45 50-mile race. He once told me in the early 1980s that, "only if you train hard, can you race hard." He certainly did just that with 120 marathons under three hours in the years from 1951 to 1974, with a personal best and victory in January 1958, of 2:26:44, at the Shanahan Marathon in Philadelphia. All of these marathons were run in the pre-"technical shoe" era, which shows you that talent and determination trumps crappy shoes.

When Ted primed himself for the six-day races in 2000 and 2001, he would walk ten to 20 miles a day for many months before the event as preparation. Ted did his homework and passed the test by walking 303 miles for six days in 2001 at the Self-Transcendence Six-Day race on Ward's Island, New York. This performance, at age 82, broke his previous Age Group World Record for six-days by a staggering 63 miles. Ted was always thinking of how he could enhance his training for the next race. He said that if he were to do the six-day again, he would introduce running back into his training program. He told me that if there had been six-day races around when he was in his prime, his goal would have been to attempt to run 600 miles.

It gave me joy to talk to Ted about the improvement of ultra times throughout ultrarunning history. Here was a guy who loved to see the old records tested and surpassed. He was not only a master of his discipline but a true student of the sport. I distinctly remember a conversation with him concerning the breaking of the 100 mile world record, long held by the great Don Ritchie, by two Russian runners at London's Crystal Palace. He felt that the 5,000 £ prize money for breaking the record sweetened the pot for these runners hungry for compensation for their efforts. He talked admiringly of Ann Trason's talent, and how her breakthrough performance of seven hours for 100 km finally put women's ultrarunning at the level of the elite men in the minds of the naysayers.

Ted Corbitt always liked to give people their due, whether it was sending them typed notes, or attending their event or awards ceremony. He would write congratulatory notes to people who accomplished their running goals, as well as send motivating and encouraging letters to those who asked for his advice. I have a few of those typed notes and letters from Ted that I hold in special esteem. His recognition of your achievements made you feel like "you made it", and his proclamations of what he thought you were capable of running in the next attempt were reason enough for signing up for another one. It was a thrilling honor to see him - quiet and unassuming, standing there in the crowd - knowing he took the long train ride out especially for you.

Ted was a low-key and poised individual, a gentleman athlete, who never boasted of his exceptional career, I am content to do that honor for him. He always wanted to improve himself, broaden his knowledge and enrich his life. All of us who have been his students, friends, or colleagues would say that he is the one who has enriched our lives.



Above: Ted on the roads during a 100-miler.

Below: Corbitt in 2001, enjoying Day 4.