

THE MAN

TED CORBITT

At 53, Veteran Marathoner Hasn't Slackened His Pace. In Fact, He's "Going Like Sixty."



Imagine running 134 miles. The average jogger could run it in a month or so, or a college runner could do it in two weeks of training. But could a man run that far in one day?

Ted Corbitt has. Running in a 24-hour race last year in England, the veteran distance man totaled 134 miles, 200 yards—an American record. This would be an exceptional performance for any runner, but for a 53-year-old athlete it borders on the unbelievable.

Corbitt has been one of America's top marathon and ultramarathon runners for over 20 years. Why does he run? "Mother Nature programmed you to run and walk," he says. "I grew up on a farm, and ran and walked everywhere I went."

His first race was a 60-yard-dash in junior high school, which he won. In high school, and later at the University of Cincinnati, Corbitt ran everything from the 220-yard-dash to two miles. Such versatility, unusual at the high school level, is even rarer in collegiate competition.

"I wasn't really pleased, though," says Corbitt. "I finished so far from my target of 155 miles." Considering the physical and emotional difficulties he experienced during the race, it was remarkable he finished at all.

The first hour Corbitt ran 7¼ miles,

as planned. Then, things got out of hand. "I was overcome by this euphoria, and ran nine miles the second hour, way too much. The euphoria wore off, and I settled down to a reasonable pace, but my thighs started bothering me."

He had scheduled several walks as rest periods, but his ever-tightening thigh muscles forced him to walk more than he wanted. "I was not functioning well," he recalls. "After that third hour it became a 'downhill thing' for me."

In spite of the pain, and his steadily decreasing morale, Corbitt continued.

Drinking a glucose solution for nutrition, he was able to pass the 50-mile mark in 6 hours, 48 minutes—excellent time. After 15 hours and 22 minutes of running, Corbitt reached 100 miles. "The last nine hours were a real struggle as I covered only 34 more miles."

Though shy of his goal, he finished third in the grueling international event. The winner, Ron Bently, ran 161 miles for a new world record.

So how did Ted Corbitt, successful sprinter and middle distance man, become interested in long distance running? "I think it was '35 or '36 when I saw a picture of the Boston marathon winner, 'Tarzan' Brown. He intrigued me because he wasn't white.

At the time I thought he was a Negro, but later I found out he was an Indian."

Over the next 15 years, Corbitt trained and raced over longer and longer distances. Finally, in 1951, he decided to enter the prestigious Boston marathon. This 26 mile, 385 yard race from Hopkinton, Massachusetts, to Boston, attracts the world's best distance runners. "The Boston" is the oldest, biggest, and only international road race in the United States.

In a huge field of hundreds of starters, Corbitt placed a respectable 68th in 2 hours, 48 minutes and 42 seconds. (16th)

Back in '51 few Americans ran the marathon that fast, so he was thrust into the picture for the 1952 U.S. Olympic team. He made the squad, and in only his seventh marathon race ran 2 hours, 51 minutes, for 44th place in the Helsinki Olympic Games—a decent showing for an American marathoner in the early '50's.

Four years later, he was again an Olympic candidate. "I beat myself in that one though," he says of his Olympic trials. "I over-extended myself and finished only fourth. Since the first three qualified, I had to be content being an alternate in '56."

At this point in his running career

Corbitt was bored running marathons. He would finish a 26 miler feeling unchallenged, unfulfilled, and with plenty of energy left.

Consequently, he turned his attention to longer races—the ultramarathons. But there were no ultramarathons in the United States. In fact, in the late '50's there weren't many American marathons. The only logical step was to organize his own races.

So in 1958 Ted Corbitt gave birth to the ultramarathon movement in the United States. With the help of the National Road Runners Club, he organized a 30-mile road race in the Bronx. He ran the course in 3 hours, 4 minutes and 13 seconds, and won.

Craving even longer races, he tried promoting a 50-mile track race in New York. However, the AAU refused to sanction the event. The organization could not comprehend that anyone would be interested in running that far.

Without the AAU sanction, the race had to be canceled, and Corbitt's ultramarathon career was temporarily halted, but his desire was not. His determination to race ultramarathons was so strong that he traveled to England in 1962 for the famous 52 1/4-mile road race from London to Brighton. In his first attempt on the hilly course, he ran well, finishing fourth.

It was the following year that an ultramarathon—the 44-mile National Road Runners Club Championship—was held in the U.S. and Corbitt won it.

Then it was back to England once again in 1964 for the London-Brighton race. He placed second. By 1965 Corbitt was confident of victory in this endurance test. However, his foot gave out on him in the early stages of the race.

"When you've trained so hard and come so far for a race, you want to make a good showing no matter what," he said.

In spite of the painful injury, he limped the last 30 miles, finishing second only a minute behind the winner. It was a typical Corbitt performance—defying a severe injury to not only finish, but also to finish well.

Though he ran a heavy schedule of

distance races at home, Corbitt could not resist the lure of the London-to-Brighton race. In this race in 1966 he placed fifth, and then remained in England a few weeks to participate in a 50-mile race on the track. He completed the 200-lap race in 5 hours, 54 minutes, placing third.

At the age of 46, he had broken the American record for the event by over an hour and a half.

Not until 1969 did Corbitt compete in England again. This time he ran from London to Brighton in 5 hours, 38 minutes and 11 seconds—another American record for 50 miles, even though he actually ran 2 1/4 miles farther. Corbitt averaged 2 hours, 49 minutes for each 26-mile segment of the race, and at age 49 had run this double marathon at a faster pace than at the age of 32. How many athletes are still competitive, much less twice as good, 17 years after appearing in the Olympic Games?

Before returning home, Corbitt competed in a 100-mile track race. Even though he couldn't walk for two or three days after the 52 1/4-mile race, Corbitt recovered in time to record a 13 hour, 33 minute and 6 second clocking in the 100 miler.

What kind of training must a man do to succeed in international competition from 26 to 134 miles? Corbitt's training includes massive dosages of mileage, most of it run at a fairly moderate pace. He regularly runs over 100 miles a week, sometimes covering as much as 200 miles in a seven day period. Usually, he runs to work, choosing one of several routes from his Manhattan apartment to his job. These training runs vary from 11 to 15 miles. On weekends Corbitt runs from 30 to 50 miles through the streets and parks of New York City. He once ran an incredible 83.3 miles in a single training.

Using a weight training program he devised himself, Corbitt occasionally works with weights to build up his strength. His program was highly praised by Percy Cerutti, the famous Australian coach, who is an authority on weight training for runners.

Believing in the "you are what you eat" philosophy, Corbitt experiments with a variety of training diets. "Presently I eat pretty much what I

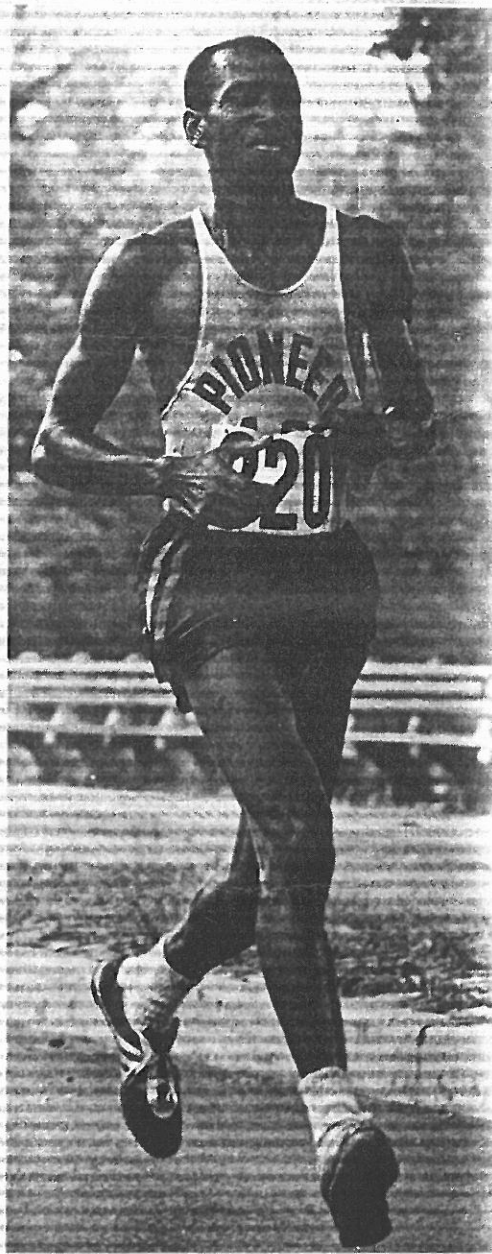
want, but I supplement my diet with kelp, garlic oil, bone meal, alfalfa, and other raw foods and grains, as well as Vitamins B complex, C, and E," he said.

But Ted Corbitt's contributions to long distance running are not limited to his accomplishments on the track or road. He's also a writer, contributing volumes of detailed technical research to running publications.

His most important piece of writing was the pamphlet, "Measuring Road Running Courses." Properly measured courses are a necessity for the

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CORBITT: He just keeps on running.



○ THE MAN (Continued)

development of world-class road runners, and the poorly measured courses in this country have inhibited the growth of U.S. distancemen.

Corbitt's pamphlet influenced the National AAU Long Distance and Road Running Committee to adopt a rule requiring national championship races to be measured by steel tape or calibrated bicycle.

At the age of 54 what lies ahead for Corbitt? Will he continue active competition, or retire? As long as he can stay free from sickness or injury, he says he'll continue to run. "Age does get its licks in, though," he admits. "It's harder to shake those nagging injuries as you get older. Injuries damage the spirit more than the body," Corbitt insists, "but I am motivated to overcome injuries because I still have competitive goals. I'd like to run the Pike's Peak marathon, walk 100 miles in 24 hours, and continue running marathons under 2 hours 50 minutes. I'm especially proud of my record of running sub 2:50 for 22 years in a row, from 1951 to 1972. Though I only ran 2 hours, 55 minutes in 1973, I hope to get back to the 2:40's in '74."

Corbitt is a good bet to break the age-group records for the marathon for ages 54 through 74 (no known records exist past that age). He already owns the American records for age 38 (2:49:43), age 44 (2:35:03), and ages 49 to 52 (2:42:07, 2:44:15, 2:46:16).

"I will also run 200 career marathons," he vows. "I've already completed 172 and have never dropped out of a single one."

Sometimes he fantasizes how his running career will end. "I'll stop in the middle of a race, walk back, and never run another step again." Then, he quickly reconsiders. "No, that probably won't happen. I'll walk, hike, or cycle when I no longer can run."

Knowing Ted Corbitt, it's hard to imagine a time when he won't be running—and running well. ●

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