

Two "Old" Black athletes prove
that Father Time's
Great Blind Stone shatters not the old
nor the young in men—
merely that in him which waits.

CORBITT & BEADS

KEEP ON TRUCKIN'

by RON SOMERS

Most athletes start thinking about retirement by the time they reach their early thirties. The reflexes start to go, the legs aren't what they used to be, and the emotional strain of competition begins to weigh on the athlete's psyche.

Sports are for the young, and the 30 year-old-plus athlete can only stand by hopelessly, while his career fades into the sunset.

There are exceptions. Satchel Paige played baseball into his fifties, but even he eventually had to yield to father time.

Perhaps the most remarkable exceptions are two black distance runners, Jared Beads, 46 years old, and Ted Corbitt, 55 years old; who not only are still active in their sport, but are still setting American and world records.

New Yorker Corbitt set a U.S. record for 50 miles at age 49, and he continues to break his own world record for most career marathons every time he crosses the finish line of one of the 26 mile, 385 yard races. Corbitt has completed some 180 of these grueling endurance tests, and has yet to drop out of one.

Baltimorean Beads is the American record holder for non-stop running. As a 41 year-old he ran 121¼ miles around a high school track—without stopping. At the time it was a world record. Since then, however, an Australian named Tony Rafferty ran 140 miles to break Beads' record. Though still the holder of the American record, Beads is determined to regain his world mark.

At an age when most men would consider it a major accomplishment to jog a mile or two, Corbitt and Beads are running circles around men young enough to be their sons. "The older I get the better I get," Beads boasts. "This year (1974) I ran my fastest marathon,"

he says referring to his 2 hours, 42 minutes clocking at the Boston Marathon.

How do Corbitt and Beads do it?

Both are determined and proud men, who have unshakeable faith in their ability to endure pain over a long period of time.

"You better believe I'm gonna get it back," says Beads of his lost world record. "No doubt about it." Beads is so confident of his ability that he plans to break the record not by a mile or two, but by 60 miles, which would mean a run of 200 miles.

Beads has already tried once at the 200 mile distance. On November 9, 1974 he set out at midnight from the George Washington Bridge in New York City determined to make it to Baltimore City Hall, 200 miles away, by noon of the 11th. His course followed U.S. Route 1 through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland.

After running about 60 miles along the heavily travelled road, Beads developed a sharp pain in his left knee, but ignored it.

The assistants and reporters who accompanied Beads in a car just ahead of him noticed that the knee was beginning to swell. "How're ya doin', Jared," they called back to him. "Fine, just fine," replied Beads confidently, still disregarding the throbbing knee.

He kept running for about 40 more miles, the knee eventually puffing to the size of a grapefruit. Finally, at a darkened gas station in Philadelphia, 103 miles from the start, Beads quit running. He was deeply disappointed, yet he told a reporter, "I'll be back. I'm not a quitter. There's no way I'm going to let the devil win over me."

When Beads got back to his home in

the Westport section of Baltimore, he checked with his doctor to see what had gone wrong. "What happened was I pulled a muscle in the fold of my knee," recounts Beads. "I thought it was arthritis, but my doctor said it was a pull."

"I always overcome injuries by running them out," he claims. So he ran a couple of easy miles a day until the knee felt better. With the memory of his failure still burning in his mind, Beads began plotting another attempt at the 200 mile mark.

"I'm gonna run it on a track this time," says Beads of the attempt, which will come some time in 1975. He admits it gets boring circling a quarter mile track hour after hour, but he knows how to beat the monotony. "You get your mind on something and you keep thinking about it, and you pass the time that way," he explains. "I think about my wife, my children, and even my job." (He works for the Maryland Glass Co.) Sometimes Beads thinks how he's "richer than Rockefeller" because of his running ability. "Everything comes across your mind when you run, good and bad," he says solemnly.

In the city where Beads began his first 200 mile attempt, lives Ted Corbitt. A physical therapist, Corbitt has a long list of accomplishments, in distance running, to his credit. In addition to his American record at 50 miles (since broken by someone else), he also holds American records for the fastest marathon ever run by a 38 year-old, 44 year-old, and 49 through 52 year-old.

Corbitt's most amazing feat is probably his 52½ mile London to Brighton race in England in 1969. Not only did he break the U.S. record for 50 miles

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for the second time (despite the handicap of the additional 2½ miles), but at age 49 he ran at a faster pace for 52½ miles than he did for 26¼ miles at the Helsinki Olympics at age 32.

Instead of slowing down with age, Corbitt was actually improving on his Olympic performance of 17 years earlier.

Like Beads, Corbitt runs with painful injuries. In the '65 London to Brighton race Corbitt was one of the favored runners. However, about 20 miles into the race Corbitt's foot gave out on him.

"When you've trained so hard, and come so far for a race you want to make a good showing, no matter what," Corbitt said. Limping severely the last 30 miles Corbitt ran a gutsy race finishing second only a minute behind the winner.

Corbitt was invited to stay in England a few more weeks to run in a 100 mile track race. Though he could barely walk for several days after the 52½ miler, Corbitt recovered in time to run the 100 miles in 13 hours, 33 minutes.

One of Corbitt's severest tests came in England in 1973 in a 24 hour race. He had hoped to run and walk a total of 155 miles during the 24 hour period, which would have been a world record.

Planning on averaging about seven miles each hour, Corbitt got carried away in the early stages of the contest. "I was overcome by this euphoria, and ran nine miles the second hour, way too much," he recalls. "The euphoria wore off, and I settled down to a reasonable pace, but my thighs started bothering me." To ease the pain Corbitt had to walk more than he planned and he soon fell behind a 155 mile pace.

But he did not give up. Unlike many distance runners who drop out of a race if they become injured or discouraged, Corbitt always sticks with it. After 6 hours, 48 minutes he completed 50 miles, and after 15 hours, 22 minutes he passed the 100 mile point. "The last nine hours were a real struggle," he recalls. "I covered only 34 more miles."

Though disappointed at not setting the world record, Corbitt's total of 134 miles, 1200 yards was an American record, and good enough for third place in the tough international event.

Why do these men run? As amateurs they don't make a dime. They get little publicity, and they don't have hordes of young groupies trailing them from city to city.

Corbitt says, "Mother Nature programmed you to run and walk. I grew up on a farm, and I ran and walked everywhere."

Beads says simply, "I just love to run."

Corbitt started running competitively in junior high school. His first race was a 60 yard dash, which he won. Later in high school and college at the University

of Cincinnati Corbitt displayed great versatility by running everything from 220 yards to 2 miles.

After college he continued to race. Then in 1951 he entered the world famous Boston Marathon, America's most prestigious distance running event. Against an international field of several hundred, Corbitt placed 68th in 2:48:42. In the early 1950's this was considered good time for an American, and by 1952 Corbitt found himself on the U.S. Olympic team as a marathon runner. At the Helsinki Olympics he ran respectably again—2:51 for 44th place.

Beads began running in the late 1940's when as a young prize fighter he put in many miles of road work for conditioning. But Beads' mother worried about him. She didn't want her son to get hurt in the ring, so she convinced him to give up boxing.

While Beads was willing to quit the ring, he wasn't willing to sit back and let himself get out of shape. He decided to continue the road work, which was the most enjoyable part of his training anyway.

In the late 50's and early 60's Beads entered one and two mile races in the Baltimore area. "I'd run them and get nothing out of it," he remembers. "I never got tired, so I decided I was a long distance runner," he says, drawing out the word "long" for emphasis.

Since there were no long distance races in Baltimore, Beads thought he'd go out for some long runs by himself. He ran from the Baltimore city line to the Washington, D.C. city line, and back—a distance of 64 miles, which took him nine hours. Later he ran from Baltimore City Hall to the White House and back—80 miles in 12 hours. Beads figured he had set some kind of record. "I called up the *Baltimore Sun* and asked them if it was a record."

After checking the Guinness Book of Records, the *Sun* discovered the record was 120 miles, 175 yards set in 1882 in New York's Madison Square Garden.

Finally, in 1969 Beads beat the world record by running 481 laps, 121¼ miles, at the Dulaney High School track in Baltimore.

While Beads was finding one and two mile races too short, Corbitt was also experiencing a similar dissatisfaction with his running. By the mid-fifties the 26 mile marathon was no longer a challenge to the rugged New Yorker. Corbitt did the only thing he could do to change the situation—he organized his own ultra long races.

With the help of the National Road Runner's Club he organized a thirty mile race and a 44 mile National Road Runner Championship, both of which he won.

What kind of training must a man do to successfully run these long distances? A lot.

Beads runs "15, 20, 25 miles a day—on the days that I work that is." When he's off on the weekends, he'll usually run 40 to 50 miles a day. He's been known to become bored and restless watching TV in the evening with his wife and six kids, so he'll sometimes take off on an all night run. After trotting along for eight hours around the sleeping city, he'll return home about 6 a.m. After a rub-down, his wife Mary cooks him breakfast, and off he goes to work at the glass company.

Corbitt also racks up many miles in training. He usually runs at least 100 miles per week, and frequently he tops the 200 mile per week mark. He likes to run to and from work, and totals about 11 to 15 miles per day commuting on foot through Manhattan.

He too steps up his training over the weekends covering 30 to 50 miles both on Saturday and Sunday.

Corbitt works with weights and is a health food nut. Though not as strict with his diet now as he was in past years, he still gulps down an assortment of unusual goodies. "I supplement my diet with kelp, garlic oil, bone meal, alfalfa, and other raw foods and grains," he says. He also takes vitamins B complex, C, and E.

Beads, on the other hand, claims to eat "just regular food." However, he does have some unusual dietary habits. "I enjoy eating raw beef. I ate that and raw egg on the New York to Baltimore run."

Despite their ages, Corbitt and Beads have no intention of stopping or slowing down. Beads of course is going for the world non-stop record again, and Corbitt vows to continue running marathons and ultra marathons.

"When I'm 100 years old I'm still gonna be running," Beads states emphatically. "The only way I'll retire is when they put me six feet under—I'm serious."

Corbitt says, "As long as I can stay free from sickness and injury I'll run. It's harder to shake those nagging injuries as you get older," he admits. "But injuries damage the spirit more than the body. I'm 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 2:50." Corbitt had run sub 2:50 for 22 years in a row before the string was broken in 1973, when he ran "only" 2:55. "I'll walk, hike, or cycle when I no longer can run," says Corbitt.

Instead of fearing the aging process, Corbitt and Beads have learned to live with it and have conquered it. Long ago Ponce de Leon searched all over this country for the fountain of youth. He never found it. But Ted Corbitt and Jared Beads have. ●