

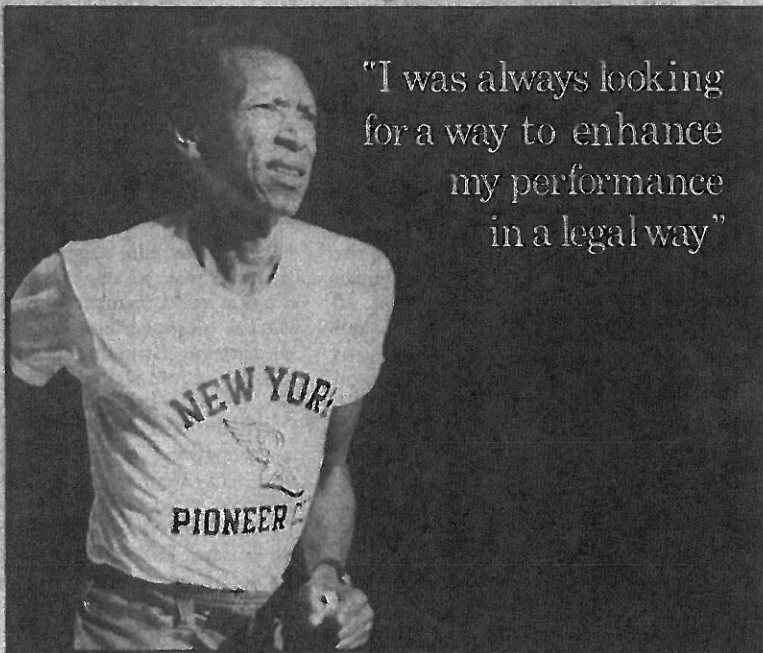
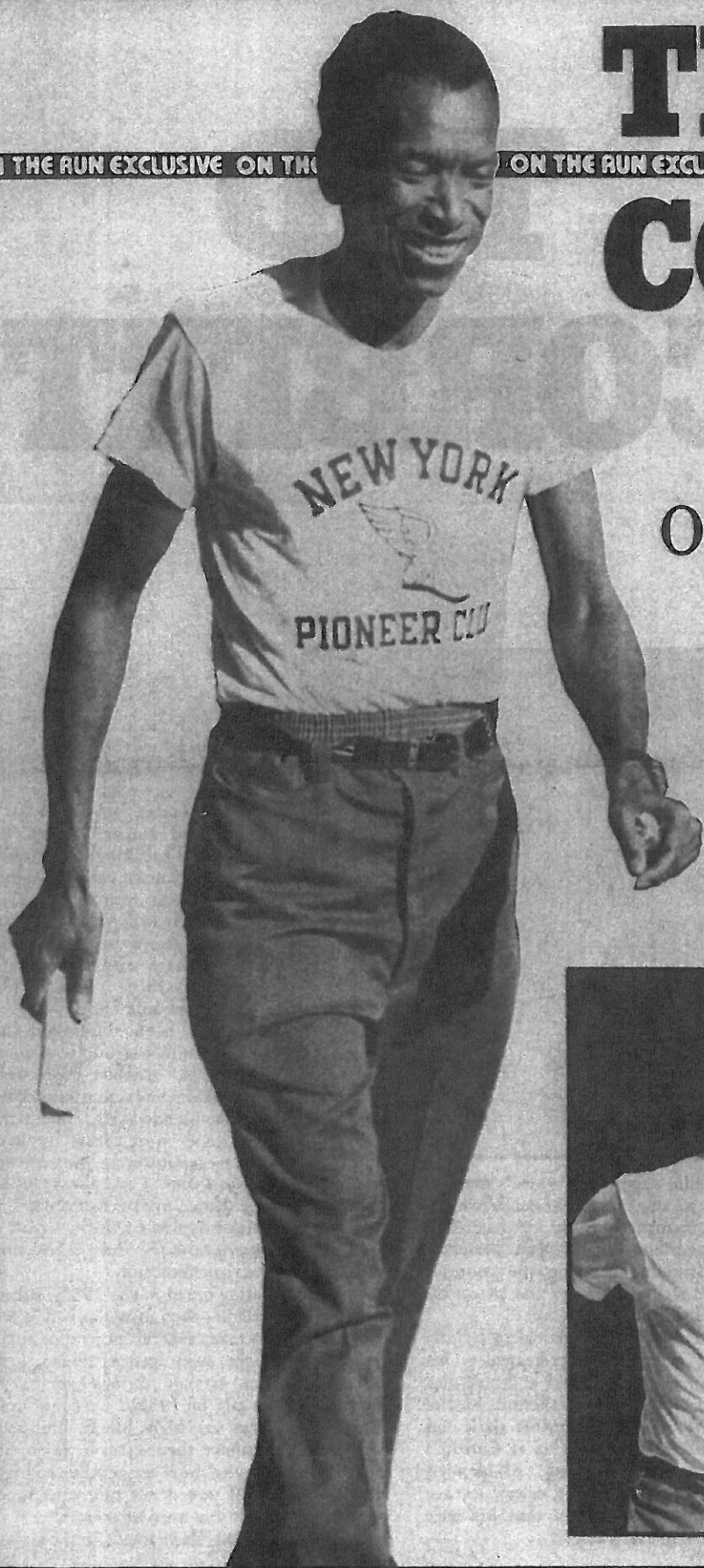
# TED

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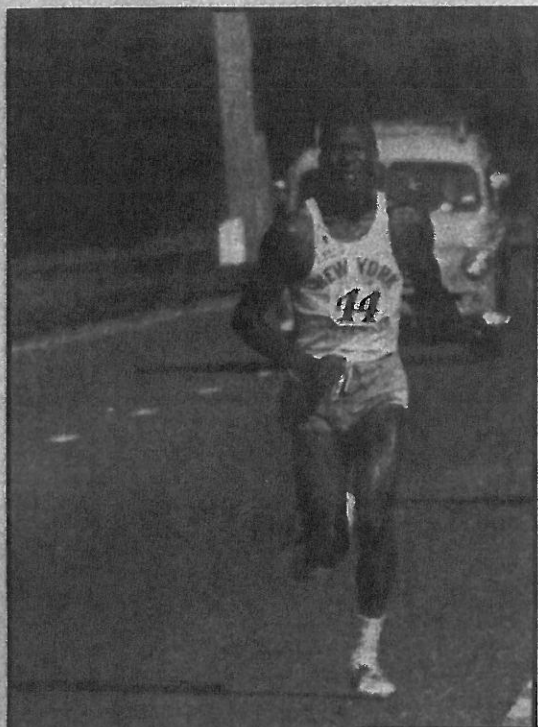
# CORBITT

## Visiting the Sage Of Distance Running

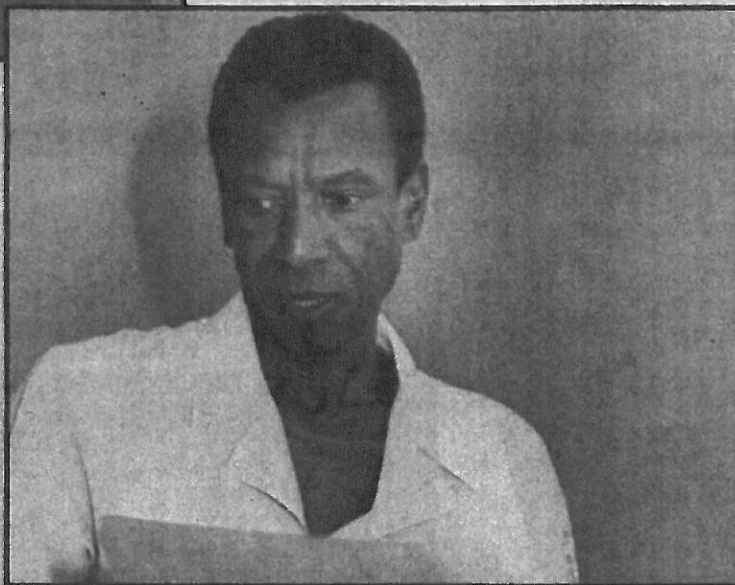
By William Dunnett



"I was always looking for a way to enhance my performance in a legal way"



# TED CORBITT



**T**ed Corbitt is chief physical therapist at the ICD Rehabilitation and Research Center on 24th Street in New York City. His office is tucked away on the fifth floor. It is tiny and incredibly cluttered. Mountains of papers obscure books, waste baskets, filing cabinets, even Corbitt's desk. There are no available chairs to sit on—a heap of papers already lays claim to each. Corbitt himself is seated behind his desk, seemingly lost in a vast morass. He's on the phone. Corbitt smiles shyly and looks away. He's speaking softly, barely audible.

Ted Corbitt, the runner; he has held the American record for 100 miles, the American track records for 25 miles, the marathon, 40 and 50 miles. He's been an American and Canadian marathon champion, a member of the Olympic and Pan American marathon teams, a National 30-km. Champion, a National RRC ultra-marathon champion, and . . . what else? Ted Corbitt has completed more marathons than anyone else in history: 193.

He is called the father of American long-distance running.

Yet Ted Corbitt the runner, dressed in his white therapist's garb, seems to hardly fit the

image of the elite super athlete. He's diminutive and shy; so shy he seems withdrawn, so diminutive he seems to fall into his chair. He's neither slumped nor upright, just perfectly conformed. Someone entering the room, I imagine, could well stride over and sit on his lap, almost oblivious to his presence.

Off the phone now, Corbitt makes a clearing out of the jungle of papers heaped on his desk. He reaches under the desk and pulls out a brown paper bag and a huge thermos bottle. In the thermos he reveals a rather dark and unpleasant looking liquid. This is Corbitt's staple, a raw vegetable "soup" of blended salad. It's a tomato, cucumber, celery, lettuce and green pepper concoction that his wife batches up for him every day.

Out of the brown bag Corbitt produces the rest of his meal: a jar of bean sprouts and two raw egg yolks. "I have the blended salad for breakfast, lunch and dinner," says Corbitt. He's speaking slowly and self-consciously. He mixes some of the bean sprouts into the lumpy brown brew. "For dinner I also have an avocado, raw cabbage and more bean sprouts. Once a week I'll have a raw milk cheese.

"I've been interested in nutrition in a serious way since the '50s," Corbitt continues. He takes a few tentative spoons of the blended salad, then stirs in some more bean sprouts. "Vegetarianism in me evolved over a long period of time. I was always looking for ways to enhance my performance in a legal way. Nutrition is one of them. I read a book called *Prescription for Energy* and this started me in the right direction.

"I stopped eating bread in the 1950s. Bread is a chemist's delight—though not as bad as ice cream." Corbitt takes several more spoons of his meal. With the bean sprouts mixed in, it looks like some strange stringy gravy. "I stopped taking salt in 1958," he continues. "Salt contributes to high blood pressure. Also, blacks victimize themselves by taking in salts because they're more susceptible to high blood pressure. If you don't salt your food you get all the salt you need anyway.

"I gave up eating flesh foods step by step

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between 1967 and 1973. That was because of the things they put in it—DES for instance. I gave up eating sausage and luncheon meats first of all. Then I gave up meat and poultry. I gave up eating fish last of all.

"I've become almost what you call a vegan vegetarian. But I'm not a vegan by principle. They have a belief that you should never kill animals. I still favor using animals for food. I think meat is a good food and their byproducts should be used. I can eat meat again. If I got my own farm and raised my own cattle I'd consider it.

"Living in this city—or any other big city—there's a lot of pollutants, especially in the air. The body tries to get rid of these pollutants as best it can—but at a cost. Some people can tolerate these things but most of us can't. By going vegetarian I am just trying to reduce the number of pollutants entering my body."

I ask Corbitt if being a runner in the city isn't dangerous. After all, runners suck in larger than average amounts of carbon monoxide and other airborne pollutants deep into their lungs on a daily basis.

"I've worried about that," he says. "But I've been told that running is good in spite of the pollution. That's because your lung capacity is increased. A doctor told me that long-distance runners will be the last ones around, probably because they've changed their bodies and have more blood vessels and breathing capacity. They can tolerate pollution better."

Corbitt takes several more bites of his blended salad, mixing in the remainder of the bean sprouts. "I'm anxious to see what I can do with this vegetarian diet. I haven't really tested myself because I've been injured. I can tell you that my energy level is quite high now, as high as it's ever been. Really it's higher."

Ted Corbitt is reluctant to advocate his brand of vegetarianism. He readily admits that people uneducated in nutrition might harm themselves by entering into an unfamiliar diet. But I wonder how runners might be able to use selective parts of vegetarianism to enhance racing performances. Carbohydrate loading?

"I wouldn't advise anyone to carbohydrate load," replies Corbitt. "Some people who are in nutritional trouble already would risk getting into further trouble by eating the wrong things as part of the loading. I used carbohydrate loading when I first heard about it in 1968. I found it helpful. I didn't run any faster but my fatigue perception was changed. Today I might load with fruits that are starchy and sweet, like figs.

"I've advised other runners to eat potatoes, rice and lentils during the three days before a race and then get to simpler foods the nearer you get to the race. On the morning of the race just eat a bunch of grapes to give you liquid and fuel.

"During the race itself I prefer something sweet because I have a sweet tooth. But many times the sponsor just provides water, so I take water.

"In a race you use up your glycogen stores in the muscles. There have been cases where runners have been almost dead in a race and then made comebacks. Many runners quit because they think they're out of gas. Those who manage to persist can pick up and get going again. The only way they could have done that was to tap another tank of energy. The ability to tap energy is there, you just have to train your body to cough it up when you need it.

"I've found that you can come back quicker if you take a refreshment during the run. But the funny thing is you get a new supply of energy long before the refreshment could possibly be digested.

"I wasn't surprised to hear recently that caffeine seems to help runners. We've used colas in races before and that often produced the comeback. I always thought it was the sugar that stimulates the body to pick up again. But here again the pickup comes too soon. It couldn't be the sugar because you can't digest it that fast.

"There's something else about the cola that stimulates the body into giving up this new source of energy. Apparently it's the caffeine and not the sugar.

So if you've run out of one source and have to switch to another tank, this may be the key. I wouldn't advocate this as a way to go, but it seems that it's the caffeine and not the sugar that makes a difference."

I ask Corbitt if he ever drinks beer. After all many runners, even marathoners, swear by the brew. Frank Shorter has called it his "electrolytic replacement." George Sheehan does everything but prescribe it for his patients. Corbitt sighs patiently and looks down at the floor. He folds his hands. "Beer might help a few," he says dubiously. "But it uses up your B vitamins which you need for your nerves and digestion. Beer can contribute to back pains and things like that. There are better ways to get your body fluids back than by drinking beer.

"During the Depression there were a lot of people out of work. But somehow they always found money to buy alcohol and get drunk. I was nine or 10 and I observed these people—very nice people until they got drunk. I vowed then I wasn't going to drink, ever. I tasted beer once and I spit it right out.

"But I'm not an advocate. Not everyone's going to be a winner and if you need alcohol to make your life pleasant it's OK with me."

As a confirmed beer drinker myself I swallow my pride as Ted Corbitt gobbles down the last of his blended salad concoction.

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**T**his month marks 30 years as a physical therapist," says Corbitt, rising to his feet. "I started here at ICD in March of 1949. I was only going to stay a year. This is 29 years later."

Corbitt leads me into the physical therapy room. It resembles a high school gym. Mats cover sections of the floor. Exercise machines and parallel bars are scattered haphazardly about. The corners of the "gym" are stacked with small barbells and weights. Only the wheelchairs and crutches near the entrance betray the room's true purpose.

A stereo on a wheeled cart just outside Corbitt's office is piping out classical music, barely audible under the clicking and pumping of the exercise machines. Two or three other therapists are already

working with their patients, encouraging or instructing them at their various activities.

Ted Corbitt greets his first patient, a middle-aged black man in a wheelchair.

"You're not in speech therapy any more, is that correct?"

"Yes, that's correct," the man mumbles slowly. He's a former bus driver who had suffered a stroke.

Corbitt wheels the man to the parallel bars. The bars are about 20 feet long and three feet high. "Walk down to the end, turn around and come back," says Corbitt. The patient struggles to his feet and pulls himself sluggishly down the parallel bars, gripping the handrails and dragging his feet, one after the other.

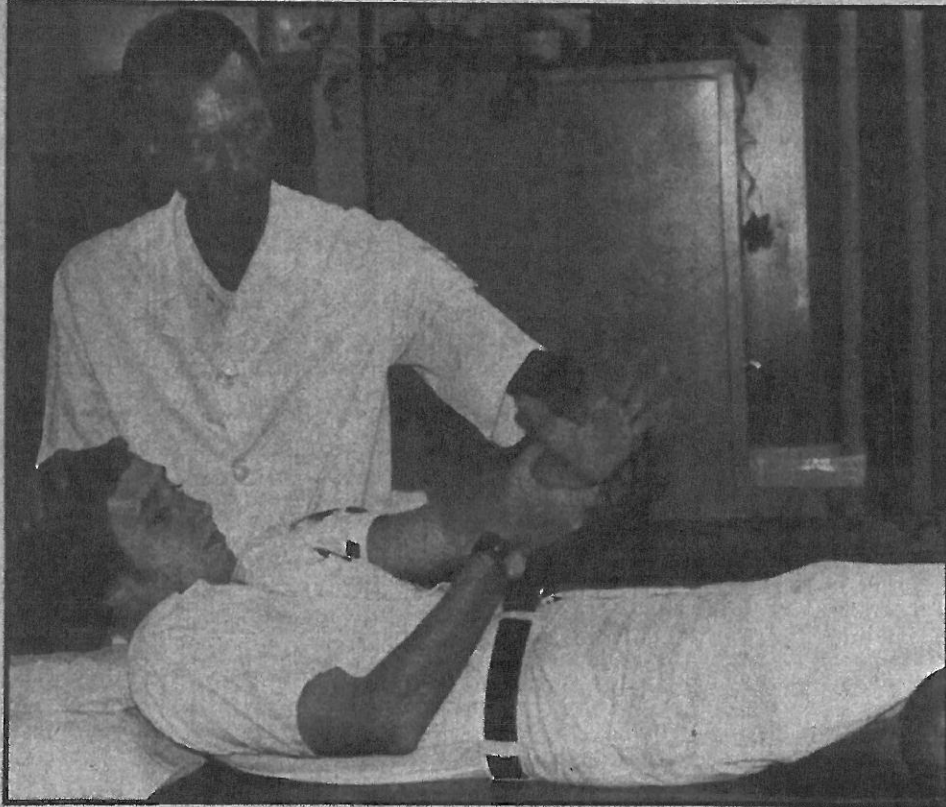
## "I wouldn't advise anyone to carbohydrate load"

"Many of our patients," Corbitt says, watching the bus driver shuffle slowly down the bars, "are stroke and accident victims. Others are here for post-operative care or for the treatment of lower back problems. My next patient has arthritis of the hips.

"That's good, that's good," he says to the bus driver. "Keep it up."

We leave the parallel bars and go to the rear of the therapy room. Back here there are a series of three or four booths partitioned off from the rest of the room by what look like shower curtains suspended from the ceiling. Corbitt leads me into one of the booths. Here we visit a man lying comfortably on an examination table. He's stripped to his shorts. Corbitt methodically lays towels on the patient's stomach and waist. On top of these he places steaming hot heating pads. Corbitt completes this sandwich with another layer of towels. He sets a nearby timer for 20 minutes.

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For 29 years, Corbitt has worked in physical therapy.

**A**ccording to biographer John Chodes, Ted Corbitt first started running as a young boy on his father's South Carolina cotton farm. Every day he ran two miles to school and back. He ran to school and back because in the 1920s school buses in South Carolina were for white children only. "We left the farm in 1927," says Corbitt. "Cincinnati became my adopted home town. Later the government bought all the land around the farm and built a hydrogen bomb plant.

"I was the oldest of five children. One brother died of Bright's disease as a child. My other brother now lives in Los Angeles and works for an aircraft company. A sister, Bernice, is now a power machine operator at a shirt factory in Los Angeles. My other sister, Louise, is a nurse who lives in Cincinnati, as does my mother. My father died on April 19, 1974. That used to be a Boston Marathon date but they changed it.

"I was born Theodore. An aunt named me after Theodore Roosevelt. I was born on January 31, 1919, the same day as Jackie Robinson. There's a mix-up and my recorded birthday is January 31, 1920, so

I use that. It gets to be confusing sometimes; right now I'm 58 going on 60." Corbitt stops and looks momentarily puzzled. "Wait a minute . . . is that right? Let me see. Yeah, I think."

Ted Corbitt may be cloudy about his age but he's as clear as day about his more vital statistics.

"I'm 5-feet-9 and a quarter. For most of my adult life I've weighed 134 pounds. That's what I was when I got sent to Okinawa and Guam during the war. There were some beautiful places to run there but I didn't dare. It was too dangerous! So I gained a lot of weight in the army. On the way back on the ship I had KP and the smell was so bad I lost my appetite. By the time I got back I was 134 pounds again. I stayed 134 for years; it was my best running weight. When I stopped eating fish it went down to 123, where it is today.

"I decided that when I finished my masters work in physical therapy in 1950 that I would run a marathon. I planned to run a year with that in mind, so I started my marathon training after graduation in May of 1950. I ran my first marathon in April of 1951—the Boston Marathon.

"I first heard of the Boston Marathon in 1936. I

saw a picture of Tarzan Brown. I was in high school at the time and I was intrigued by the thought of anyone running over 26 miles. I decided then that I'd like to try it.

"I went to the libraries and read everything I could find. But there wasn't much, not even as late as 1950. I did find something in the *Amateur Athlete*, a monthly periodical put out by the Amateur Athletic Union. They had an article on training for the marathon which recommended a program of only three days a week. They thought that was adequate."

Corbitt laughs at the thought and shakes his head. "Most people at that time followed these light training programs. If you extended it long enough and if you were reasonably fit I suppose you could get through a marathon on that . . . with a little suffering.

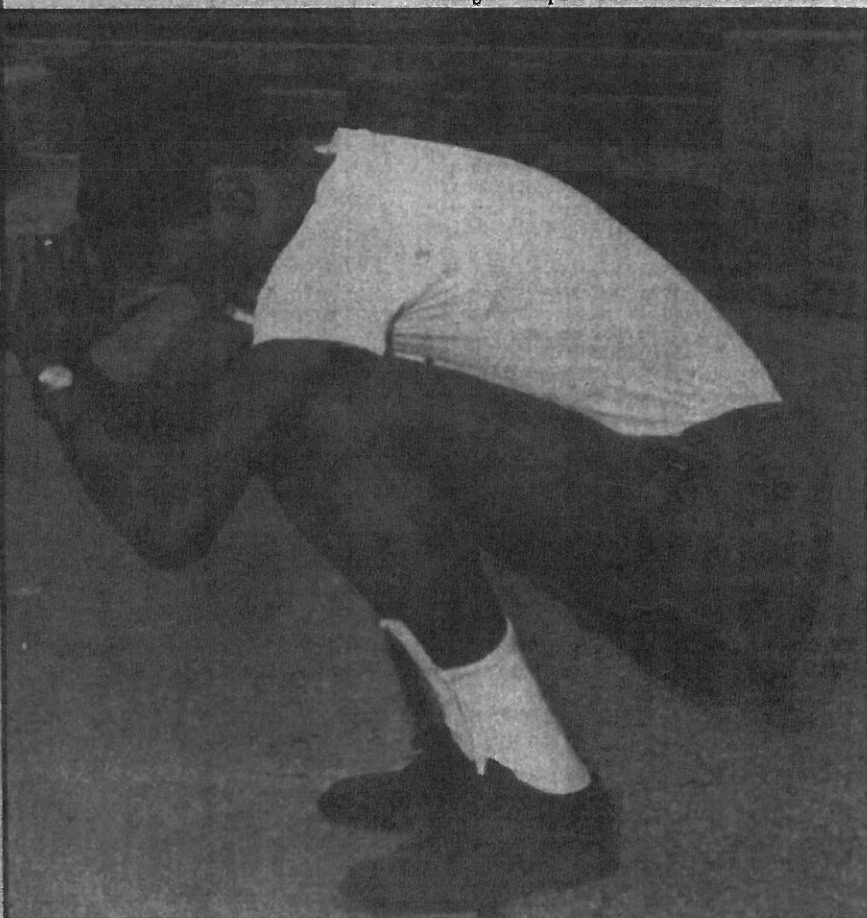
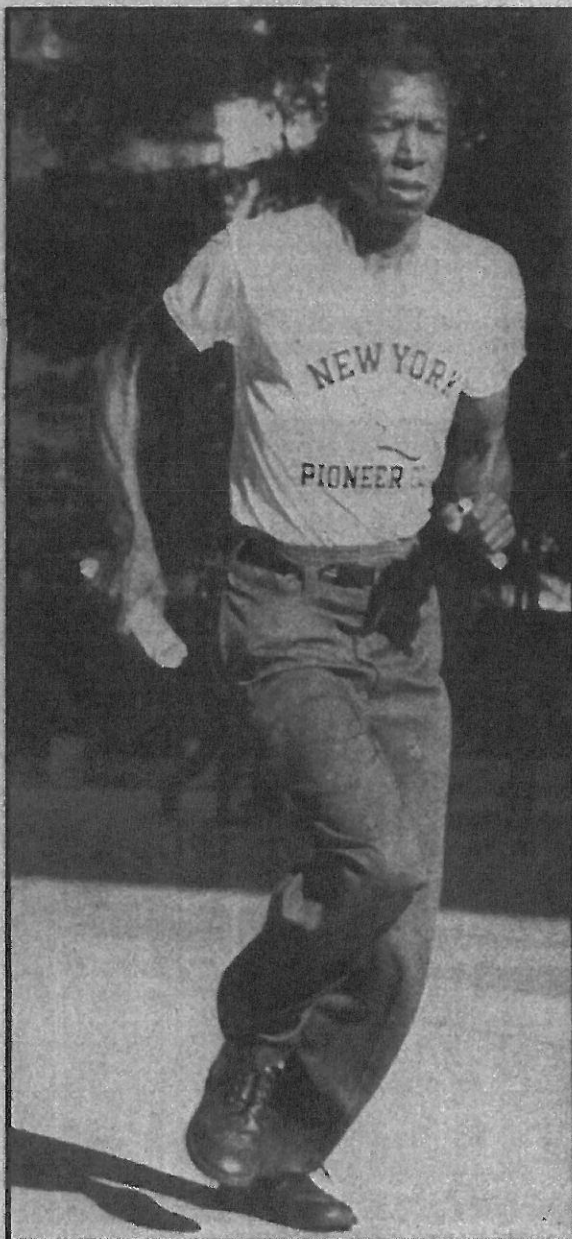
"People in those days didn't prepare themselves properly for a marathon. They depended on the excitement of the situation to carry them through. A lot of people never finished. But I figured if I set a slight overdistance to my training and combined it with time trials I could make it. Time trials and overdistance; the same system still applies today.

"I used what I call the principal of progression. When I got out of school I was doing a certain amount of running. I just progressively increased this. I graduated in May and by December I was making attempts to run 30 miles. I never got past 22 until late January.

"One day I made a discovery that enabled me to finish 30 miles. I was running in a mild snowstorm and I found myself unconsciously sticking out my tongue to catch the snow. Coaches would always say, 'Don't drink water or you'll get sick!' But now I realized that the reason I was having trouble running 30 miles was that I was dehydrating. I ran that 30 miles and after that I rarely failed. I just made sure to run by fountains.

"I lived in Brooklyn then and did most of my training in Prospect Park. I measured off two sections

"I was intrigued by the thought of anyone running over 26 miles. I decided then that I'd like to try it"



of it. One loop was 201 yards around. The other was 53 yards and a fraction. I'd run either one or the other and combine them to make a figure eight.

"Eventually I figured I could save time by running to work. I changed things around so I could do most of my training then.

"I had all sorts of courses. The shortest distance from home to work was 11.6 miles. If I came down the West Side it's 13.4. I had a 15-mile course, a 17- and 20-mile loop. My 20-mile loop started in Manhattan and went up into Yonkers, back down into the Bronx and then down the FDR Drive all the way to 24th Street. It became routine to run this 20-mile loop to work.

"Also I had ways of adding on to a run if I wanted more mileage than the basic route. Across the street here there's a hill I measured off at three quarters of a mile, so going up that and back will add another mile and a half. A housing project on this block is six-tenths of a mile around and I can include that too. Occasionally I'd run 30 miles to work in preparation for the Boston Marathon."

Ted Corbitt placed 15th in the 1951 Boston Marathon with a time of 2:48:42. Not bad for a first marathon effort. The world record at the time was 2:25.

"Each year I ran more miles and harder," Corbitt continues. "This is the principal of progression again. I used to have a stunt that I'd do at least once a year, and that was to run 30 miles a day for seven consecutive days. They were tough weeks but when I came back down to normal training it made things a lot easier.

"For the 100-mile race I had originally planned to run 100 miles in practice. I actually did 82 or something. I ran all day and into the night. If I'd wanted to continue running another 18 miles I felt I could have done it. But I also felt that, knowing this, there was no more need to do it. So I stopped. I realized then that I could run 100 miles.

"The goal in training is just to get out, stay on your feet, keep moving and not to run fast. Sometimes in my training I would hit a high. A euphoric high. If I followed that inclination and ran faster it would have been a good way to get an injury. Nothing's to be gained from running hard in practice. If you practice racing speeds you don't try a long run. Try something shorter.

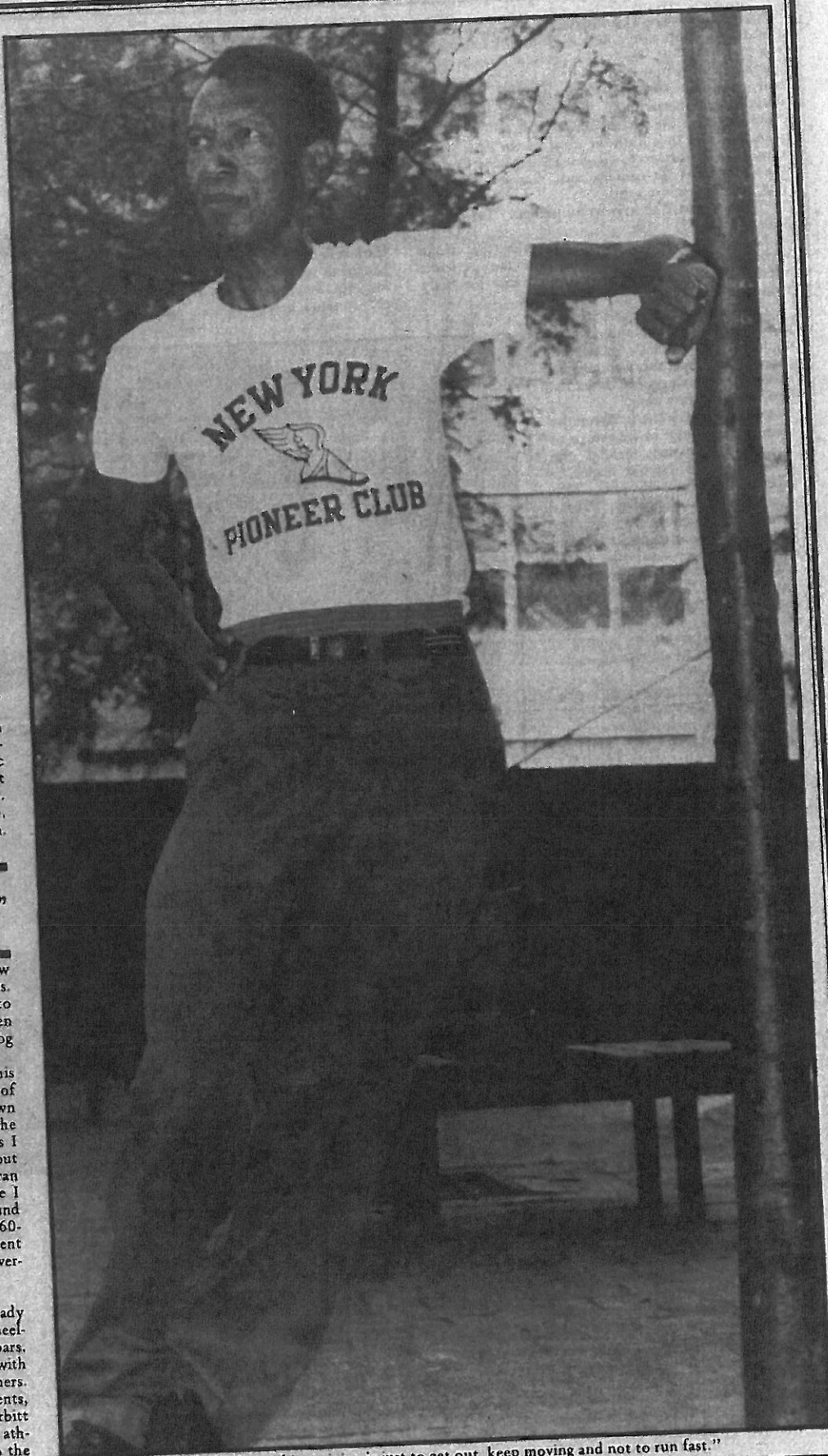
### "I ran all day and into the night"

"I was doing interval running even before I knew there was such a thing. It evolved through the years. There was a park near the university and I used to just run down a hill maybe 50 or 70 yards and then jog back up. Run down, jog back; run down, jog back. I did a lot of that.

"Later I measured off a hill in another park. This hill was a real nice grassy running area. At the top of the hill was a tree. I measured from the tree down 300 yards. I measured another 30 yards beyond the 300-yard mark. Then I ran up the hill as hard as I could. By the time I got to the tree I was just about bowlegged. Then I turned around the tree and ran down the hill to the 300-yard mark. From there I jogged to the 30-yard finish point and turned around for another run. So I had a 600-yard run and a 60-yard recovery. I did this 30 times every time I went up there. That's interval training—or at least one version of it."

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**W**e return now to the bus driver, already waiting for us and seated in his wheelchair at the end of the parallel bars. The therapy room is now filled with the tick tick ticking of various timers. Other therapists are working on their own patients, moving in turn from one to the next, just like Corbitt is doing with his. "It's like circuit training in athletics," he laughs. "You go from one exercise to the next and then back to the first."



"The goal in training is just to get out, keep moving and not to run fast."

Corbitt massages the shoulders of the stroke victim. He starts off softly, merely gliding his hands over the patient's shirt. He applies pressure slowly, pressing more firmly now into the flesh. Corbitt leans hard and braces his feet. His fingers expertly knead the muscles and massage the shoulder and neck joints. Now he grasps the patient's head and, telling him to relax, has him turn his head from side to side. "Head turning is important for walking," explains Corbitt. "It's important for running too. You just don't notice it because it's so subtle."

"That's right," he says to his patient. "Turn, turn, turn and stop."

Corbitt now works on strengthening the stroke victim's trunk. While holding onto the patient's shoulders he instructs the man to twist his body from side to side.

They return once again to the parallel bars. The man pulls himself up to his feet. "That's good," encourages the therapist, watching his patient shuffle sluggishly down the bars. "Concentrate on it."

Meanwhile Corbitt's 20-minute timer has rung and so we return to the arthritis patient behind the shower curtains. Corbitt begins to take off the heating pads from around the man's pelvis. "These pads," Corbitt says, "are heated to 136 degrees. Heat increases the circulation to carry away the waste and bring in oxygen and nutrition. You get your healing from blood. It also relaxes the muscles." After removing the heating pads and towel sandwich, Corbitt applies a padded, hand-held electric massager to the patient's hips.

The buzzing massager relaxes the muscles still further, until Corbitt determines his patient is ready for his therapy. Corbitt tells him to draw his feet up on the examination table. Corbitt grips his knees and, bracing his own legs, tries to pull the patient's legs apart. The patient does his best to keep them together.

They reverse the operation, the patient now pulling his knees apart as Corbitt tries to push them together. The entire procedure is repeated several times. Both the patient and his therapist work in unison, neither saying a word, both knowing the routine intimately. They methodically strive to strengthen muscles and flex the aching arthritis joints.

"Okay," Corbitt finally says, "you can get dressed now."

Corbitt and I leave the curtained booth and wander into the therapy room. We approach a couch with the appearance of some medieval torture device. Straps and pulleys hang down from overhead bars. We'll wait for the arthritis patient to join us here at the "rack."

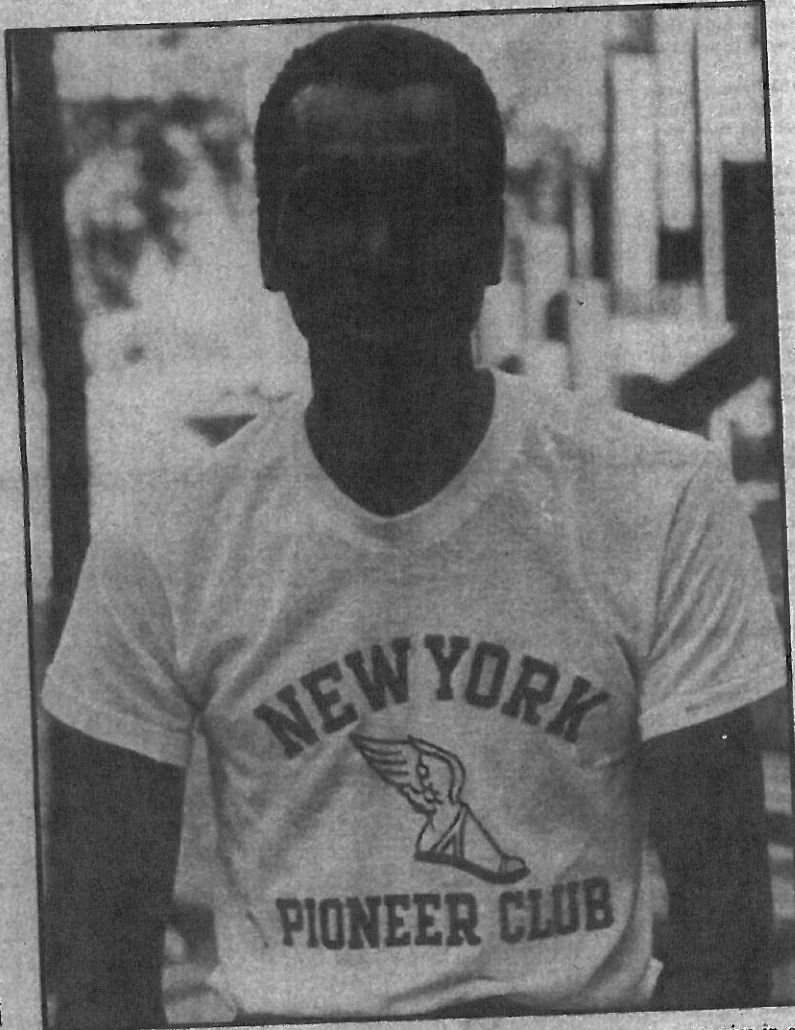
I used to wear my old combat boots to run," Corbitt remembers. "I wore them to build up my strength. There was enough flexibility in them to run. I didn't lace them up all the way and I glued in some rubber padding—not foam rubber but something like that. When I wore them out I bought some others."

"Most of my training now is in street shoes. You can run as fast as you like in them. I've had less problems in them than regular running shoes. I use running shoes only in time trials or if my regular shoes are wet."

"There's a place for someone who will make shoes that conform to the human foot and who will make soles and heels that last. Even my street shoes I had to patch once a week; of course I was running 200 miles a week in them so I can't complain. But many of these running shoes won't last even that. Runners should protest."

"I also train in street clothes. I always run in some sort of long pants to give the dogs something to bite other than my leg. My waist is 28 or so, so I buy pants that are 34. They're baggy and give lots of room so there's no friction."

Ted Corbitt is known for his perseverance and his fearless determination. Once Corbitt decides on a goal he carries it out regardless. Once he enters a race, for instance, he will never drop out. But Corbitt is probably unique among famous athletes in that he has



actually won comparatively few competitions.

"I've entered many races with no thought at all of winning, just to run and run well. I went for 10 years without winning a race. I won the Greater Cincinnati AAU Championship 440-yard dash in 1944 and I didn't win another race until 1954, which happened to be a marathon."

"Occasionally I get in a race where I find myself in the lead in spite of everything. I won a 15-miler in Fishkill, N.Y., for instance. About three or four miles out I found myself out front so I slowed up. Then I found myself out front again so I slowed up again. And I kept slowing up until I realized it was ridiculous to run that slow just to avoid a lead so I went out and took the lead and I ran hard to make sure no one caught me."

"I have no plan when I run. I just run. I watch my opponents and keep moving. If at the start of a race I look at my opponents and figure I should win, then it's a different story. I won't let them get away no matter what they do. But I won't do the planning that, say, Park Barber would."

"My preference was to run hard at the beginning and rely on my extensive training to see me through. My advisor, John Chodes, told me that I should start slower. So I did. I started my marathons at a seven-minute mile for the first two miles and then go up to six minutes or whatever I could manage and try to finish fast."

I ask Corbitt about the sudden explosion of interest in running. Corbitt had been running in the Boston Marathon in the 1950s when the field was less than 200. Now of course fields are counted in the

thousands. Ted Corbitt himself has been partially responsible for the boom by his work in helping to form the Road Runners Club and his promotion of various races. "I thought back in the early '60s that the running boom was a fad," he laughs. "I knew it was! And I fully expected all the women to disappear. But they didn't."

"Before the explosion in running you'd be able to see everyone in a race sometime before the race started. But now you can't even see your opponents. In one of my Boston Marathons there was a team of five Japanese. I think the group took first place and five out of the six places or something like that. But I never saw these five Japanese runners before, during or after the race. I read about them later. That's how I found out they were even there."

"I'm in favor of mass participation races. There shouldn't be any problem in a race up to 1000 runners if the course is properly selected. Of course in a race like the Boston or New York Marathons runners literally get pushed aside, but there are other marathons around to compete in where the fields are smaller and you can go for time."

"The day before the New York Marathon there's a National AAU Championship—the Skylon Marathon—from Buffalo to Niagara Falls. That's a good course that's relatively flat. And there's more races being organized all the time—so if you don't like the crowd there are options."

"An advantage of this explosion is that far more races are being organized. Another advantage is that we've got a vast pool of runners now. The top runners today, like Rodgers and Shorter, are

superior in every respect to the runners of the '50s. They have to be—they're at the top of a much larger pyramid."

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The arthritis patient, now fully dressed, finally joins us at the "rack." He's limping and needs a cane for support. He gets onto the couch and allows Corbitt to tie up his legs to the straps hanging down from the overhead bars. Corbitt suspends the feet about nine inches from the couch.

"Most of our work here is with out-patients," he says, adjusting the straps. "They come in about two or three times a week. It's like training; you have to do it at least twice a week to get any use out of it, more to be more effective."

Once the patient's legs are securely strapped up, begins to swing them back and forth as an exercise for the hips. Again, this patient seems so familiar with the routine he needs no instruction from his therapist.

"People come here from the neighborhood," Corbitt continues, "and all around town. Some even come from out of state or from other countries. It's difficult for many of our patients to get in. One fellow comes in by bus and subway. He's had both legs amputated at the knee. Amazing."

We proceed to the parallel bars, where Corbitt's other patient is still shuffling intently along. He drops back into his wheelchair and Corbitt wheels him over to a wall pulley. Corbitt locks the wheelchair in place and helps the patient grab the exerciser's handle. The patient is told to use the other hand to steady and support the first.

"Believe it or not," says Corbitt, turning to me, "but this exercise will help his belly. When you exercise you work a lot more muscles than just the ones that seem to be in use. The belly muscles in this exercise stabilize his body while he pulls at the wall pulley."

"The arthritis patient continues to swing his legs back and forth on the suspension apparatus. "It's a very light day today," Corbitt observes, unstrapping the man's legs. The therapist then straps up only the man's left leg and allows him to swing that leg back and forth independent of the other.

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**B**ack in the '50s and early '60s there weren't many road races organized for runners. The AAU was almost exclusively responsible for organizing and promoting races but it virtually ignored the out-of-school competitor. The Road Runners Club emerged from this need for better promotion.

"This idea had come up before," says Corbitt. "My teammate John Sterner looked into it and tried to see if the better known track distance runners would get involved. They weren't interested."

"So John Sterner asked me in 1958 if I would run for president of this Road Runners Club. I didn't want to; I'm not a leader. One of my advisors said, 'Don't get involved with administrative work. It takes time away from training.' I agreed with that, but then again, we needed somebody with a reputation and I was the most logical candidate. I was elected president.

## "I'm in favor of mass races"

"I immediately set about implementing the goals of the club. We set up a constitution, charged dues and elected officers. We also gave ourselves a name—the Road Runners Club, New York Association. I started a newsletter and promoted some races.

"In the meantime I was trying to find out from the AAU what we were permitted to do. But some of the officials were jealous of their responsibilities. They considered us a threat. Even though they admitted that they hadn't provided enough races for us themselves they wanted us to drop race promotion. They thought we should be a social club.

"We had no choice but to work through the AAU. So we asked them to certify our races and we invited their officials. We persevered.

"I still work for the Road Runners Club. I do some work for the newsletter and I work on the Standards Committee measuring road courses. Sometimes I spend whole weekends writing letters now. Someday I'll get caught up."

I mention to Corbitt that race promoters and runners alike once considered the marathon to be the ultimate in human endurance. It was virtually inconceivable that anyone could go much further.

"Ultra-marathons are a natural progression from marathons," he replies. "It's something that mara-

thoners do. The same drive and intrigue that makes you try the marathon makes you go on to the ultra-marathon. I'd run a marathon and speculate that I could have completed 30 miles. Usually I could have. Of course," Corbitt adds after a pause, "the weather has to be good. In lousy weather a marathon is quite enough."

According to John Chodes, the newly formed Road Runners Club organized its first race in 1959—the Cherry Tree Marathon. Corbitt won it with a time of 2:38:57, 25 minutes ahead of the runner-up.

The RRC had also set up its first ultra-marathon

and scheduled it two weeks after the Cherry Tree. It was the same Cherry Tree course but with a four-mile addition. "I decided you should run a 30-miler just the same as a marathon," Corbitt says now. "Everyone else was scared of the 30 miles, I guess, and started slow. I ran away from everyone right away and just kept going."

Corbitt passed the marathon point at 2:37:59, breaking his previous course record, and streaked on to win his first ultra-marathon at 3:04:13.

Ted Corbitt's principle or progression carried him further and further. There seemed to be no end. But



"Most of my training now is in street shoes."

eventually it would get him into trouble.

Corbitt entered the First National 50-Mile Championship on Staten Island in July of 1966. He had been training for this race by putting in 200-mile weeks. "Jim McDonagh and I were the favorites to win," says Corbitt. "He had beaten me several times in past races by just running away from me at the end. So I decided that if he's going to beat me this time he's going to be tired before he does. I planned to run really hard, a 2:44 marathon, something like that."

But New York was simmering in one of its worst heat waves. On the night before the race the heat had actually melted the glue from Corbitt's running shoes. The heels fell off. Corbitt, on the morning of the race, was forced to lace on a new pair of unbroken leather shoes.

around. The race really begins at the 30-mile point in a 50-miler. That's where you try to pick up the pace. But here I felt a sort of deep, deep tiredness. It was sort of a fatigue zone. You have to blank it out of your mind. Push it out and erase the feeling. You have to be really fit to do this and I did, but it slowed me up. We both slowed up."

At 40 miles Corbitt and McDonagh were still battling it out. But dehydration was exhausting Corbitt. "I was still in the lead," Corbitt remembers. "But I cramped out. Here I was in the lead of the National 50-Mile Championship race and cramps stopped me in my tracks at 44 miles."

"I got a scissors gate. It's something like a walk that brain damaged people do, one foot crashes into another." Corbitt's dehydrated adductor muscles on the inside of his thighs cramped painfully, pulling his

minutes behind McDonagh at 6:12:31. It was his 102nd marathon.

I ask Corbitt how he plans his ultra-marathon runs. Does he break a 100-mile race, for instance, into roughly four-1-gag at the thought—marathons?

"No," he replies. "I resort to that only in training. I did plan to do something like that in my 24-hour run, however. I visualized 20-mile segments because I'd been running 20 miles routinely to work in the mornings and in the evenings I'd do another 20. But when I got to the race itself I just ran. I was too occupied with suffering. Toward the end I was just taking it lap by lap."

Corbitt is talking casually, almost indifferently, in his own understated style. I am lulled, meanwhile, into a kind of wide-eyed stupor. I listen and nod my head attentively as if I understood what it takes to finish a 24-hour race. But can anyone understand?

Even among the finely-tuned athletes taking part in that 24-hour race on an overcast November day in 1973 at Walton-on-Thames, the brutal trial sometimes had bizarre effects. According to John Chodes, after nine hours of steady eight-minute miles, one contender suddenly burst into effortless six-minute miles only to collapse, wrecked. Like a disease this weird condition, this running sickness, spread from man to man. Just on the brink of total exhaustion a runner would suddenly break into effortless but suicidal speed. Or exhausted minds would produce hallucinations, tormenting the runner with horrible or painful visions.

To many, that 24-hour run was excruciating beyond words. But Ted Corbitt, despite agonizing thigh pains, pressed steadily on, lap after lap. Corbitt came in third with 134.7 miles. It was his 172nd marathon.

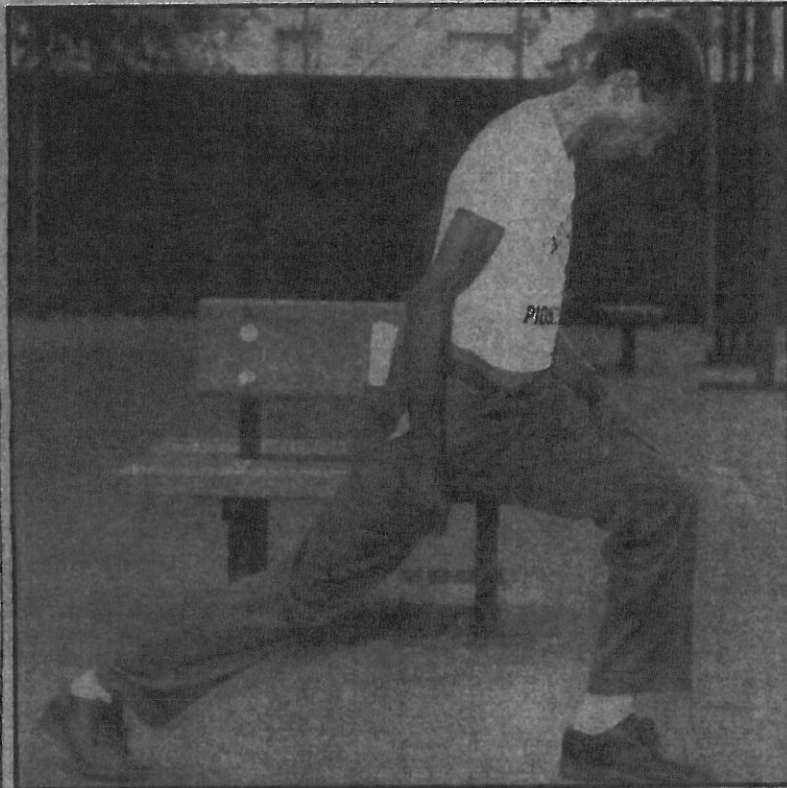
Once again Corbitt and I return to the stroke victim. He's still working away at the wall pulley. Corbitt unlocks the wheelchair and turns him around so he can repeat the same process but with the other arm. Corbitt helps him grasp the handle of the pulley. The patient has trouble coordinating his fingers but with some concentration he's able to wrap them around the handle.

"I do all I can," Corbitt says, adjusting the pulley's tension. "to give my patients as much care and attention as I can for their money. It gets more expensive here all the time. That's why there's a need for a National Health Bill."

Corbitt watches his patient draw at the pulley with one hand while using the other, as before, as a support. This too helps the belly muscles. "It costs them about \$40 an hour now," resumes Corbitt. "I've paid \$50 an hour or more myself, so I know this is really very reasonable."

I mention to Corbitt that Park Barner, another ultra-marathoner, once said that he thought the optimum age for the long-distance runner was 50. After all, Corbitt's amazing 24-hour run was made when he was turning 54. "Fifty is a bit late," he replies. "For a marathoner I would say the optimum age is between 28 and 38. I have a theory of my own, however, that you've got only about 10 or 12 good years of running and it doesn't matter much when you expend them."

"Many of the top sprinters were just as fast or faster than they'd ever been when they quit in their early thirties. I'm not convinced they slowed down because they were getting older. I think they stopped training. For example, Muhammad Ali. I don't think



Corbitt stretches before an evening training run.

The race started early in the morning. It was cool then but shortly after the start the temperature shot up dramatically. The officials were supposed to terminate the race if the temperature rose above 85. They forgot. It pushed past 90.

Meanwhile, Corbitt and McDonagh were running neck and neck for mile after murderous mile. They watched each other, waiting to see who would crack first. Corbitt began to pull ahead. "But before I started really applying the pressure I noticed I was developing either a blister or a friction burn on my heel. I couldn't tell which. So I was forced to slow down a bit and instead of running a 2:44 marathon I ran a 2:49. I think we would both have ended up in the hospital if I had run a 2:44."

"As it was I was still ahead at 30 miles when I began to feel real fatigue. Heat does something to you. It saps your energy and changes your body fluids

legs together. "I was suffering like this when McDonagh roared by."

The race was lost but far from over. "I'd never walked in a race before," says Corbitt, "and I

wasn't going to start in this one either. I made an attempt to run but only made a few steps. The cramps got worse. They went all the way down my legs so that my feet turned in and my toes turned up. I continued walking with my legs wide apart and alternately walked and ran." Corbitt finished second, 20

he's getting the most out of his body. I don't think he ever did."

Ted Corbitt nods to his patient, indicating that the wall pulley exercise is over. He helps the stroke victim unclench his stiff fingers from the device. Then he turns the wheelchair around and passes it

**"The thing that knocks off most athletes is injuries. They get wiped out by injuries"**



command over to the patient's wife. She thanks Corbitt and pushes her husband toward the exit.

"The thing that knocks off most athletes," Corbitt continues, "is injuries. They get wiped out by injuries. Joe Namath for example. He's probably still very skilled at throwing forward passes but he's hampered in setting up because of his injuries. Most athletes get fed up in a short period of time with repeated injuries. They don't like starting all over again."

Corbitt's own injuries are legendary. If he is famous for his marathoning, he is equally famous for comebacks after suffering debilitating injuries that would have sent any sane man to a life of comfy chairs and television.

But Corbitt is unimpressed with his own fortitude. "I have a chronically sprained ankle," he tells me reluctantly. "I got it in 1955 when I was defending national marathon champion. One night I went out to run in an area I had scouted out in the day. But I didn't know that some kids had dug a hole in the course in the meantime. I stepped in the hole. This sprained my ankle bad and it never really got strong again. It still bothers me periodically."

Twenty-eight years of training and marathoning has taken its toll. The years of accumulated injuries finally led to a chain of events that forced Corbitt to stop running just when his life goal—200 completed marathons—seemed within easy reach. First, in 1968, a dog attacked him during a training run. Corbitt managed to avoid the beast's flashing teeth but in the process sustained an injury that no dogbite could inflict—a severe pelvic injury that only a month of intense physical therapy could save from becoming a permanent disability.

Then in 1974 he developed a low-grade pain in his right knee. This didn't stop his training but it turned his effortless running style into a hobble. Breathing difficulties finally forced him to turn from long-distance running to walking in December of 1974. For months he couldn't run.

By the end of 1975 Corbitt was finally back out pounding the streets and sidewalks of New York on his training runs. "I got back into fair shape then," he says. "Not good shape, but fair shape. And I ran a few races again."

Things got along fine for a while—until April this year. "I ran the Yonkers Marathon," Corbitt says softly. There's no trace of bitterness or regret. "The Yonkers was probably my most brutal race—and I've had some tough ones. The rain was bad and the intermittent gusts of wind hit me like an icy whip. I felt like I was naked. I came in at four hours and 11 minutes." That was Ted Corbitt's last marathon to date. Number 193.

"I thought I'd take a little rest after that," he says. "I was told by three doctors in one week that I needed a rest. They didn't have to tell me; I knew."

"I still do a little running now. But I mean a little; maybe as much as a mile, perhaps two or three, a day. I barely leave the house."

Corbitt and I walk back to the arthritis patient, still dutifully swinging his leg back and forth underneath the "rack." Corbitt untraps the leg and helps the man sit up. The patient reaches for his cane and, thanking his therapist, limps off toward the exit.

Corbitt watches him go. "Believe it or not," he says, "I still want to run the New York Marathon on October 22nd. I expect to. After all I've invested seven dollars in the application."

"I have almost a suicide complex. I function best when my back is to the wall. I'm almost refusing to get going with my training to see how little it will take to get me to the finish line."

"My neighbors used to tell me I was going to drop dead running. Might yet, who knows."

Ted Corbitt—the runner—hopes to reach his personal goal of 200 completed marathons sometime next year. He is already planning to step up his training for the final assault. He hopes, too, that his new vegetarian diet will ultimately give him the power and flexibility he needs. "I still think I can run a 2:50 marathon," adds Corbitt, "as soon as I get back into shape." ☺

# Games Runners Play



By Stephen San Filippo  
Running creates an abundance of time for thought. Though at first the novice is engrossed in a purely physical world of heaving lungs and cramping legs, time and training bring a kind of sensual calm. Soon the miles fly by almost unnoticed by the corporal self. And the mind, that integral and often overlooked entity, lies dormant in a sea of dissociation.

Dr. Reid Daitzman, a psychologist and corporate consultant, believes the mind is a terrible thing to waste. A jogger himself, Daitzman has developed a series of intellectual exercises he feels can be of great use during running. He calls them and his book, *Mental Jogging*.

"These exercises," Daitzman explains, "will hopefully stimulate people to think about the world a little differently. In psychology this is called divergent thinking—that is, thinking that is not obvious."

Divergent thinking, which is the basis of Mental Jogging, could be as simple as the answer to the question: What is half of 8?

The normal, accepted answer is four. But, utilizing divergent thinking, the answer could be 0. If an 8 is chopped in half the result is 0 on top and 0 on the bottom. In a different light, if the 8 is chopped the other way the result would be two 3s. This changes the individual's perception of a common image or idea.

Mental Jogging employs this same principle.

One of Daitzman's Mental Jogging exercises is "Eight or more ways to make the telephone stop ringing." The jogger takes a seemingly obvious question and during his run explores the different solutions. One would be to pick up the phone. Another is not to pick it up. Not paying the bill is as effective as pulling out the wires, and probably much more permanent.

"There are 365 Mental Jogging exercises, or one per day,

What I suggest is that runners use the jogging exercises with their workouts."

Dr. Daitzman said the idea first evolved about a year ago. Traveling around the country giving presentations at scientific conventions, he grew tired of waiting at airports.

"I was sitting down in an airport one day and I saw some unusual things—things we always experience but never think about."

"I started jotting them down. At first I came up with 10 or 12. I generated about 200 of these exercises in about three months and added another 200 during the last eight months."

"Some books have exercises in them that solicit nine obvious uses for something. Mine go beyond that."

"The typical exercises before mine came out were like eight different uses for a safety pin, or maybe a brick. It's called functional autonomy. Most people look at objects in terms of their function—this is called functional fixedness. And if you can transcend that then you can be a little more creative. And that's why I invented them."

To test Mental Jogging Daitzman entered an ad in the Mensa news bulletin. (Mensa

is an organization where membership is limited to those with IQs of 150 or over. Members come from all walks of life, not solely the professions.) The response was overwhelming. Answers and requests for further exercises came in from all over the world and Daitzman intends to include them in his book as a means of comparison. They will also establish a criterion for scoring.

"Generally we all know the answer to a problem, that is, the socially-accepted answer. But there are many, many solutions to every problem."

"In Mental Jogging one problem will tend to generalize to other problems that are perhaps more relevant to the real world. It could also be used by families on trips to pass some time while in the car, or on vacation, or with friends."

Daitzman is quick to point out that Mental Jogging is not limited by intelligence, only creativity, and he for one does not believe the two to be synonymous.

"I have found that from a psychological standpoint intelligence is not highly correlated with creativity. Intelligence involves coping and adapting and functioning in the real world. Creativity involves transcending the daily coping process and coming up with new solutions for old problems."

"Many creative people don't get along that well in organizations. But, in fact, if the organization gave them the chance they would do very well. But people are threatened by creativity because it means change. Most of us like security and would like to be able to predict change."

Unfortunately, as Daitzman sees it, creativity is not subject to prediction, is not governed by predetermined parameters and therefore is not encouraged.

"People are taught not to think and not to be creative."

Daitzman hopes Mental Jogging will encourage creativity and help fill a void so often created by physical jogging. ☺