

the marathon

T H E M A R A T H O N

MIAN

BY KEITH LORJA



Ted Corbitt, third from the right, at the 1952 Olympic Marathon in Helsinki.

**Former Olympic marathoner Ted Corbitt
continues to race in his 80s.**

At 81, Ted Corbitt has created an amazing legacy in the running community. He's won marathons, represented the United States in the Olympics, and he continues to add to his impressive credentials. In May, Corbitt set a new world age-group record in the Sri Chinmoy Six-Day Race by covering 240 miles in the event, an average of 40 miles per day. He was the first person over 80 to ever attempt such a race.

"The race was six days, and you were supposed to cover as much ground as you can, and I had never done one of these things," Corbitt says. "I had a goal of 300 miles, which would have been 50 miles a day, but I ran into some health difficulties due to lack of adequate training."

The impressive 240 miles meant Corbitt averaged 40 miles a day, and he was very pleased to reach that mark. Before this, the closest Corbitt had ever come to attempting a race of this magnitude was a 24-hour run in England more than three decades ago.

Since he was suffering from some breathing problems and hadn't trained that long for the event, Corbitt decided to walk the race. He hopes to return next year and add some running. "My goal is to try once more and run and walk and see how many miles I can accumulate," he says. "I don't know how much better I can do, or even if I can, but I want to try it."

Running has always been a top priority for Corbitt. Born on a farm in South Carolina, he was one of five children who ran to school every day. When he was a young boy, his family moved to Cincinnati, and he started playing running games with other kids in the neighborhood. "I didn't know there was such a thing as a foot race until then," Corbitt says. "In 1932, just after the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, there was a mini track-and-field event in Cincinnati with some of the Olympians. This was the first race I had ever seen."

The following spring, Corbitt ran his first race. "I was in junior high, and I was racing for the championships," he says. "I won the 60-yard race in my weight division because that's how they separated us back then. I ran one race a year until high school and then ran a variety of distances there."

Next came college, and Corbitt continued to run as a student at the University of Cincinnati. "I majored in physical health education and ran on the cross-country team," he says. "I ran regularly and really started to appreciate how special running was."

Corbitt joined the Army after college, and when he returned in 1946, he moved to New York City to study physical therapy at NYU. "I haven't left since," he says.

In 1947 he ran his first East Coast race. "It was a junior national 25K championship, and after the race I was invited to join the New York Pioneer Club, which I did," he recalls. "I started running road races and track races and on and on. My first marathon was in Boston in 1951."

He ran that marathon in 2:48 and a month later ran the national championships in Yonkers, N.Y., which also was the first of three Olympic Trials for the marathon. He was the 10th American to finish. He was the third American during the second trials in Boston and then third in trial number three as well. "The committee elected me as the third member to go over to Helsinki and represent America," Corbitt says. "The Olympic marathon was my seventh marathon in 13 months. I had a horrible race, but I finished, and it was an incredible experience."

In 1958, Corbitt was one of the founding members of the New York Road Runners Club and also served as the club's first president for two terms. "We had a tough time surviving back then," he says. "There was negative support from the amateur board, but we held on. I started a newsletter, promoted races and did a lot of things to make the thing work."

Although his son has raced a little in his life, Corbitt never tried to force his family into following in his impressive footsteps. "My father is an amazing man," son Gary Corbitt says. "He is still very active, and I am proud of all that he has accomplished."

Those accomplishments will continue if Corbitt has his way. "I've run 199 marathons and ultramarathons, and if I can make myself run, I'd like to get up to 201 or more," Corbitt says. "I haven't really trained in almost a quarter of a century for marathons, so I'm not certain I can do it, but I want to give it a try. That may not seem impressive today, but there weren't that many races when I was younger, so that mark comes from over 25 years of running." ■