

Ultramarathon World



The perfect holiday gift
A Step Beyond
The Definitive
Guide to UltraRunning
Order this book now!



[Home](#)

[Search](#)

November 15,
2003

[Ads by Google](#)

David Blaikie
 News 2003
 News 2002
 Ultra races
 Training
 Calendars
 General
 Links
 Archives
 Major reports
 Submissions
 What are ultras?
 UW forum

[Ultramarathon World](#)

24 hours with the great Ted Corbitt

An American legend walks 69.93 miles at age 84

[UW](#)

[Comment?](#)

By Arpan DeAngelo
 Ultramarathon World



New York (UW) - Considered by many as the father of long distance running and racing in the U.S. and still a humble figure in the ultra-running community in the New York City area where he lives, Ted Corbitt at age 84, never ceases to amaze the running and non-running community alike.

In an official 24 Hour race held in Queens, New York City, on the weekend of Nov. 8-9, to honor one of his great achievements, Ted walked, with no significant rest breaks, a distance of 68.93 miles. The temperature dipped to 30F, or just below freezing, and colder than that with a stiff wind chill in our faces coming out of the north. Luckily the sun helped warm us up a bit as we started out at 10 o'clock Saturday morning at Astoria Park, under the Triboro Bridge and next to the East River.

I forgot just how challenging and difficult a 24 hour race is, not having done one in many years. But having done many other ultramarathons, including multi-day races, I felt that I could handle this race even though I was not properly trained for it specifically.

Always a challenge

To stay on the course, which in this case was a quarter mile rubberized track, for the whole 24 hours when your body would naturally want to sleep at night and you've run or walked usually much more than a mere 26 mile marathon already, is a challenge not many runners dare to face.

To be in such a race to honor Ted and to be running and walking with him personally in the race was an opportunity and an honor too great for me to pass up. I ran in this particular race which was administered by the Broadway Ultra Society, or BUS, ten years ago to honor the 20th anniversary of Ted's 24-Hour American Record, set at the age of 54. This time, ten years later, the race celebrated the 30th anniversary of that same achievement. But now ten years older, Ted still walked the whole time. Out of 35 participants, Ted placed 17th and was by far the oldest participant at age 84.

When I am with Ted for such an extended period of time I really see and feel the profound qualities of humility and dedication. Ted's contributions to the sport of long distance running are too extensive to list here.

[San Francisco Runners](#)

Get off the Road and on the trails For a fun time a great location.
www.RedwoodTrails.com

[Running](#)

Sport Specific Training, Improv Fitness, Strength & Conditioning
www.SportsWorkou.com

[Running Track Resurfacing](#)

Colorized Cushioned Resurfacing Coatings with S by-Step Inst!
www.tennisuniversa.com

[Train smarter](#)

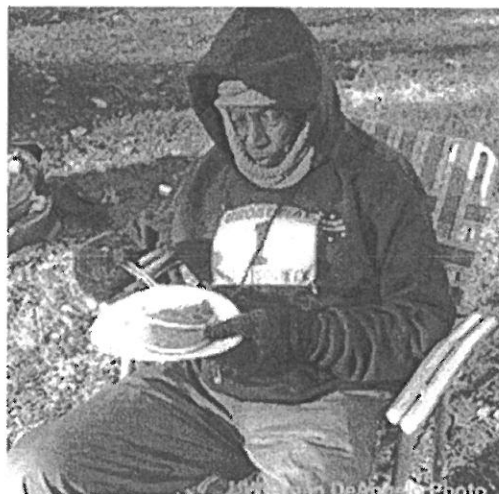
Organize, plan, analyze your workouts, racing daily activities
www.racingbuddy.com

[E-mail David Blaikie](#)

Briefly, Ted is one of the founders and first president of the NYRRRC as well as founder of its newsletter, and first president of the RRCA, as well as a key figure in establishing the NYC Marathon.

Pioneered certification

According to Ted and many others his most important contribution to long distance running was developing and establishing the standardization methods for certification of running courses around the world. Without those methods of certification, we would never know if any 10K races, marathons, etc. were exactly the same.



Consequently, world and course records would be meaningless.

Ted has also run over 200 marathons and ultra-marathons including several American records at various distances. He was a member of the 1952 U.S. Olympic Team, running with other immortals such as Emil Zatopek. But as all the runners of his day have virtually quit running or just naturally passed away, Ted still remains strongly involved in the running community even as a competitor setting numerous age records and defying his age and our own limited understanding of self-transcendence.

Quiet greatness

Ted is a quiet and humble individual, saving his energy for meaningful pursuits rather than for his own self-glorification. Walking with him in the race or passing him on the track as he continues to walk relentlessly to his goals, one always gets the sense that the greatness of this human being comes not through his achievements but from his goodness.

Although Ted has much to be proud about in terms of personal achievements, anyone who gets to know him even briefly can see that his immortality is being formed not only by his unwavering self-transcendence, but more importantly by his soft, unassuming humility and respect for all human beings.

If this is what we can learn from Ted and derive from long distance running and racing, then I would say that I am glad and proud to be in the same sport as Ted and learn the same lessons that this truly immortal man has learned and has conveyed to others by his exemplary life.

On the more mundane level of physical effort and discipline, I was inspired by Ted to persevere in this seemingly endless race until the last tick of the clock. To be running and walking in circles minute after minute and hour after hour with only an occasional restroom break can seem to some individuals like a futile pursuit.

Temperature drop

Whether it is a 400 metre loop, or a mile loop or an out and back or continuous course, I felt that once I focused my mind and energy in the

right place, it is just a matter of relaxing into a steady pace and keeping my energy level up through hydration and food.

This particular race had a few extra challenges besides the time factor. It started out a 42 degrees F. and got colder from there on.



Arpan DeAngelo, Ted Corbitt, Lotus Golden

Although the sun was shining during the day which definitely helped matters a bit, there also was a strong wind from the north coming right off of the East River. In this case it is important to dress warmly in layers. If you are too warm and start sweating a lot, then you can get a chill when you run into the wind. Depending on your own metabolism, it is best to be flexible in the amount of gear you wear. Some people wore shorts while others were bundled up. I would take off my hat on the tailwind side and put it on when I ran into the wind.

I personally knew that I could not go all out in this race as I was not prepared to take it that seriously on a physical level. But I do have the attitude in this race as in any other race that since I am putting out all this effort and energy, I might as well use it to make some progress on the spiritual level. Using various breathing techniques and some chanting or singing, I tried to effortlessly move in a way that did not entirely depend on time and space.

Present in the moment

In other words, although I was physically going forwards and getting credit for each lap, I did not want to focus on the distance or time as my primary goal. If one thinks too much about distance and time in a long race such as this, one can easily lose inspiration and develop doubts or fear long before they reach the goal. Learning to be very much in the present moment only with the mind, body and soul, is an important factor in this type of race. Ted seems to do that quite well.

Since I was not really competing with anyone intentionally nor was I trying to prove anything to anyone, I tried to relax into a pace and rhythm that would keep me going for as long as possible. Although this may sound inspiring and somewhat effortless, it takes tremendous focus and discipline while having to also be aware of one's energy level, body temperature, and condition of certain muscles and skin to avoid cramping and blistering.

Any seemingly small problem can turn into a major disaster in such a long race if you are not aware of all the vital signs and physical systems and changes that you are going through from moment to moment..

This method seemed to be working for me for the first half of the race. In 12 hours I covered 67 miles which I would have been happy with even for a 12 hour race with my present level of fitness.

Rich Innamorato

Richie Innamorato, the race director, was thinking about turning it into a 12 hour race when the weather got colder and colder and there were some problems with the heaters for the helpers and in the rest areas.

After consulting a number of runners and Ted himself, who Richie was most worried about, it was decided to keep the race going through the cold windy night until 10 a.m. when it was originally scheduled to finish. Part of me was happy to keep going and try to reach the original goal of 24 hours while another part of me would have felt tremendous relief and a certain amount of happiness at finishing early.

Needless to say, the second half of the race was much more difficult for obvious reasons. The weather had gotten 10F degrees colder, the legs were getting much weaker and tighter and the tendency to want to sleep at night started setting in at around the same time. Fortunately I recognized two significant things that helped me to deal with these difficulties somewhat.

The first was seeing Ted staying the course and having to go through all the challenges we were facing. At age 84 and having more accomplishments under his belt than a dozen men half his age, he could easily have been home in a comfortable chair with a nice book and a cup of hot soup and nobody would have thought the lesser of him. Herein lies his greatness and here I was I was being part of it. After being around Ted I could never face giving up because of a few discomforts, tiredness and a bit of pain.

Lunar eclipse

Another special treat which created a pleasant diversion for us all was a full moon with a lunar eclipse which happened from 8 p.m. until about midnight. Watching a full bright moon disappear into the shade of the very planet we were running on and then reappearing again within two hours was an energizing experience.

To think that the moon has been doing laps around the earth for billions and billions of years at the same pace without once thinking about how far that is or worrying about the purpose of it all, and that we complain about a few hours around a tiny track because of a few discomforts, I felt that from this perspective it really was not a big deal to be able to finish this race.

After all, we were now over half way through, Although at least half the runners either quit or went inside the warm building to rest or sleep, I knew that if I kept my mind focused on only the positive things that were energizing and inspiring me that I would do much better than I could possibly do otherwise and enjoy the experience much more.

Needless to say, this approach worked along with a nice breakfast of fresh pancakes and a newly rising sun starting to raise the cold temperatures a few degrees. More importantly though, there was Ted, trudging around like a diehard rechargeable battery.

Ageless

Whenever I passed Ted, which was about every other lap, I would greet him or ask how he was doing. Usually he replied with a positive "O.K.", or just a friendly nod. Sometimes he was smiling and sometimes he seemed to be just trying to stay awake. In the cold of the night he wore a winter hat under his hood that covered most of his face and it seemed as if he was

ageless.

Earlier in the race I had noticed him wearing a hat I had given him for his 84th birthday back in January. Although I had purchased it in the tropical north of Australia, I felt that it would come in handy someday for Ted. This was a pleasant surprise that he chose this day to make good use of the gift I had given him ten months earlier.

I was fortunate enough to be with Ted in the last five minutes of the race and walk with him until the final whistle. For me this was an experience that made the long and cold 24 hours up to that point all worthwhile. Although I felt some joy at what seemed like my own accomplishment of 112 miles and fourth place overall, I was much more uplifted and honored by Ted's accomplishments. [Final results](#)

Footnote: Andy Milroy of the Association of Road Racing Statisticians reports that Ernie Warwick of Great Britain holds the world 24-hour track record for 24 hours - 139.4 kilometres (86.61 miles) at Solihull in 1997.

More information:

- [New York Ultrarunning](#)

 15 November 2003