

# TED CORBITT: CINCINNATI'S OWN RUNNING LEGEND

Back when everyone else thought the marathon was the limit of human endurance, Ted Corbitt was about to make his mark, which would earn him the title as the "Father of Distance Running." Ironically, he started his running career with games like hide and seek, baseball and foot races with friends.

A transplant to Cincinnati from South Carolina when he was young, Corbitt attended the University of Cincinnati. There were not many track meets in the Midwest during Corbitt's time at UC. Further complicating his college running was the fact he was black and he never knew what reaction he might get at a track meet in another city or state. Traveling and finding places to stay were problems, and there were two colleges that would not permit the University of Cincinnati to bring black track athletes to meets.

As a senior in 1938, Corbitt received an invitation to join the prestigious Cincinnati Gym Club. The letter was based solely on his records because the club was restricted to whites. So he joined a club founded by a black mortician called the New York Pioneer Club. The name was based on the fact that members were accepted without regard to race or qualifications.

As a runner, he pioneered ultramarathoning in the United States when most people thought the marathon was the absolute limit of human endurance. Corbitt would run for hours, even days, connected to electrodes to study the effects of

running on the human body. He has held American records for 25-, 40- and 50-mile marathons. Corbitt ran

1 9 9 marathons and ultramarathons during his career and he was an American and Canadian marathon champion. He was a member of the 1952 U.S. Olympic marathon team and won the National AAU Championships in the 30K, the marathon and the 50-mile events.

Corbitt is a highly regarded physical therapist. Earning his MS in physical therapy from New York University in 1950, he worked at the International Center for the Disabled. He eventually worked his way up to Assistant Director of Physical Therapy. Corbitt co-authored one book and contributed to several others. He wrote articles on athletics and physical therapy and eventually taught at Columbia University, New York University and, to a lesser extent, Long Island University, Ithaca College, Downstate Medical Center and Toro College.

He was inducted into the Distance Running Hall of Fame in 1998 and he is largely responsible for

the movement to strict measurement criteria and course certification. Many feel there wouldn't be a sport

of distance running if not for Corbitt.

He ran the Boston Marathon many times between 1951-1972. In 1952 and

1956, he finished sixth. At age 84 early in November he participated in a 24-hour race that is named in his honor. This year was the 30th anniversary of the American 24-hour record that he set at age 54. Descriptions of the race and his com-

ments can be found at: [http://www.srichinmoyraces.us/transcendence/Ted\\_Corbitt](http://www.srichinmoyraces.us/transcendence/Ted_Corbitt).

Now for the rest of the story.

Don Connolly noticed Mr. Corbitt's name as an entry in the recent Thanksgiving Day Race. Unfortunately we did not get to contact him but if you look up his name in the results you shall see:

#2884 Ted Corbitt Overall Finish 8377 5th in the 80-85 division Time 1:36:53

So, if you saw an elderly African-American man on Thanksgiving Day morning, you may have brushed by an individual to whom we all owe a debt for what he has contributed to our sport.

A photo of him standing before the Paavo Nurmi statue outside the Olympic Stadium in Helsinki in 1952 is on display in the Running Spot museum.

**Thanksgiving Day Race**  
**Ted Corbitt**  
**#2884**  
**Overall Finish: 8377**  
**5th in the 80-85 division**  
**Time: 1:36:53**