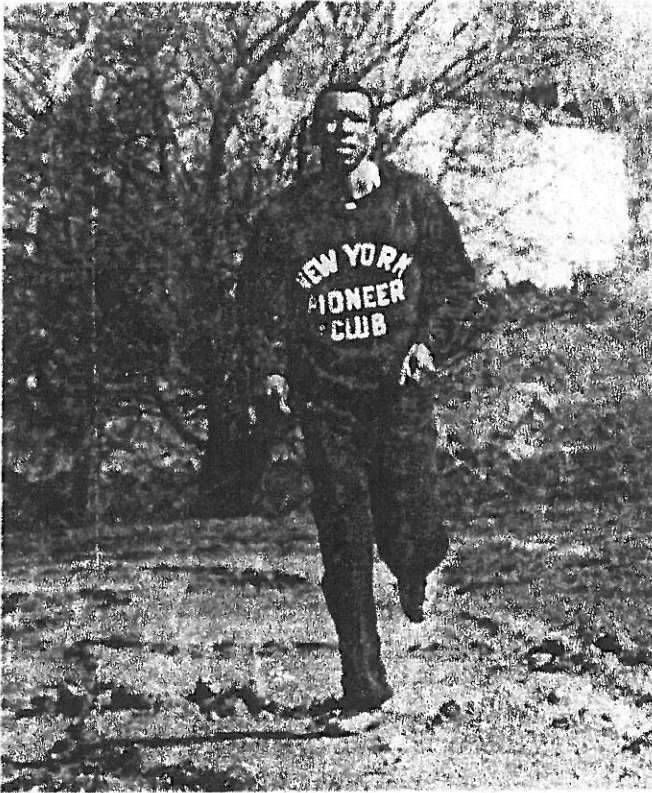


THE ULTRA-MARATHONER

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TED CORBITT

A 50-mile drive on our modern highways is not considered to be much of a trip and usually requires about an hour. On the other hand have you ever considered how long it might take you on foot? Some men repeatedly run this distance and often have to pay good money to gain the privilege of doing so!

In the course of a recent investigation, we had the fortunate opportunity to meet and examine just such a man, a most unforgettable athlete. This man is Ted Corbitt, a good sprinter who has become an exceptional distance runner. It is not too unusual for men who compete in the 220, 440, and 880-yard dashes to move up to the longer distance with considerable success. However, in Ted's case we would be modest in using the term "moved up" since his transition was of leaping proportions. Ted specializes in marathon races of 26.2 miles and "ultra-marathon" races of up to 52.5 miles.

Ted Corbitt, a 48-year-old physical therapist at the Institute for the Crippled and Disabled in New York City, began running competitively in 1933. During his early years of competition, he ran the dashes (100, 220, and 440) in high school and in college at the university of Cincinnati. He first began competing in A.A.U. sponsored races after college graduation. Although he ran some cross-country and road races while he was in the army, it was not until 1947 that he attempted races longer than 10,000 meters. Ted ran his first marathon (26.2 miles) at Boston in 1951 and has now competed in 116 marathons or untramarathons (up through 52.5 miles). In his 35 years of running, he has never failed to finish a race, a feat which represents tremendous desire and determination under the most adverse conditions.

As a collegiate sprinter, he ran 10.4 for the 100-yard dash and 50.7 in the quarter mile in 1941. In 1943, Ted ran his best 2-mile in 9:06, a very exceptional performance at the time since the world record had just been lowered to 8:51 by Gunder Hagg. After several attempts at longer and longer races, Ted's first year of marathon competition, 1951, was quite successful. He placed 13th at the Boston Marathon and was the 10th American to finish. The following year, he qualified as a member of the U.S. Olympic Marathon Team. Since that time, he has won three National A.A.U. Marathon Championships, the Canadian Marathon Championship in 1955, and the National A.A.U. 30-kilometer Championship in 1956 and again in 1957. Between 1952 and 1959 Ted never finished worse than 11th in the Boston Marathon. This year, 1968 he finished 43rd in a field of 1014 entries. During a 12-year period from 1952-1964, he was either 1st or 2nd in the New York Metropolitan Marathon Championships, 7 times the winner, and has won numerous other Metropolitan distance running championships.

Ted's best time at the marathon distance was 2 hours, 26 minutes and 44 seconds in 1958 at the age of 38 years. His performance at Boston this year was classified by him as a failure. Despite a strong head wind and unseasonably warm weather, his time was 2 hours and 52 minutes. It was his second slowest time in 17 years. The soft-spoken athlete's only excuse was "I was just too kind to myself."

Since 1962 Ted has enjoyed an international reputation as an ultra-marathoner. While competing in the London to Brighton (England) 52.5 mile races, he placed 4th in 1962, 2nd in 1964 and 1965, and 5th in 1966. His best time for this distance was 5 hours, 40 minutes and 42 seconds, or an average of 6 minutes 29 seconds for each mile, a pace that would exhaust most 48-year-old men riding down hill on a bicycle.

How does a man prepare himself to run 52.5 miles? Ted runs 20 to 35 miles every day. In recent months, a typical weekly workout schedule would include a 30-mile run on Sunday, 20 miles each of the other mornings (Monday thru Saturday), with an additional 11.6 to 13 miles each evening. Such training requires an average of four hours each day. With this volume of training, one would consider any overdistance workouts impossible, yet Ted is able to run 62 miles on several occasions each month. In a month of training, he is able to cover more than 800 miles, more than most family cars accumulate in the same period. Most of his training distance is covered at between 7 and 8 minutes for each mile, since very little emphasis is placed on speed. However, Ted does not want to become a "shuffler" so he may occasionally do some interval running: sprinting 110, 220, and 440 yards.

While the amount of time required to complete such a strenuous training schedule is more than any other runner is willing to dedicate, another barrier which Ted is constantly confronted with is the problem of recovering from each training session so that he is ready to attempt the task of the following day. So highly adapted is his rate of recovery that after running to exhaustion twice in one day at our laboratory, he was able to place second in a 30.1 mile race on the following day and improved his best time by 10 minutes.

A normally active man will generally burn about 2500 calories each day and must, therefore, eat an equal number of calories if he expects to maintain his normal body weight. Laboratory findings indicate that Ted Corbitt requires 2890 calories to complete a 30-mile workout. His estimated daily requirement is about 5500 calories, which is necessary if he

hopes to retain 131 pounds on his 5 foot 9 inch frame. It is easy to understand why Ted Corbitt seems to eat twice as much as everyone else. He does!

During our laboratory examination, Ted demonstrated some very unique physiological qualities. One of the limiting factors in any endurance activity is the capacity of the respiratory and circulatory systems to deliver oxygen to the working muscles. The greater the runner's oxygen consumption capacity, the greater is his potential for distance running success. The average 48-year old man might be able to consume about 34 milliliters of oxygen per minute when corrected for his body weight in kilograms (ml/kg/min.) during the most exhaustive work. Ted was found to have a comparable capacity of 66 ml/kg/min. while running a 5-minute mile. The highest oxygen uptake capacity previously recorded for a 48-year-old man was 60 ml/kg/min. by Clarence DeMar, better known as "Mr. Marathon."

After 35 years of running, we might expect a man to run very efficiently, yet this was not found to be true of Ted Corbitt. At every running speed, he was found to require significantly more energy than any of the other marathon runners tested. This might be explained that his strength and speed have depreciated with age. Another indication of Ted's working inefficiency was observed by a fellow competitor, Ed Winrow, 1966 National A.A.U. 30-kilometer Champion. "You can always hear Ted coming up on you from behind. His heavy steps and breathing are a sure sign that he has you in his sights." Laboratory examination of Ted's respiratory patterns indicates that he breathes 25 to 30 percent more air than his competitors at any running speed.

A somewhat unexpected finding was that the size of Ted's heart is not much larger than that of many inactive men. Distance runners are generally expected to possess very low resting heart rates. One of the runners in our marathon research project had a heart rate of 31 beats per minute. Ted's resting heart rates varied from 68 to 78 beats per minute, which is somewhat higher than one might anticipate. Externely high resting heart rates have caused Ted to be disqualified from competition on several occasions. In 1957, a physician disqualified him prior to the Boston Marathon because of an apparant heart murmur and a pre-race heart rate of 140 beats per minute. While not officially entered, Ted competed in the race despite the physician's warning and finished sixth.

His many years of training and competition appear to have left him with two unique capacities. Ted is able to tolerate a much higher rate of energy utilization than most distance runners. That is to say, he is capable of employing more of his circulatory and respiratory capacities for longer periods of time. Ted is also capable of performing better on a hot, humid day than most runners. During the 1968 Boston Marathon, he lost about 5.1 pounds (sweat) as compared to the average weight loss of 7.4 pounds. Such tolerance may account for his success in completing all races he has attempted during his running career.

When asked why he continues to run, his answer was, "When I first started running distance races, I was motivated by the enjoyment of competition and a natural sensation of playing. Today, I run because my day just isn't complete unless I have run 20 or 30 miles. I am also driven by a fear that if I ever stop running for any period of time, I may never be able to get started again."

The desire for competition has cost Ted



TED CORBITT at statue of Paavo Nurmi outside Olympic Stadium, Helsinki, Finland July 1952.

more than just time and energy. Although he represents the New York Pioneer Club, Ted must finance all competitive trips and entry fees. "I'm not sure how much my running has cost me over the years, but my wife has hinted several times that there must be a less expensive hobby."

The amazing dedication of this most unusual athlete has been recongnized for years by his competitors. His quiet, yet confident, manner has attracted a great deal of admiration and respect from all persons associated with road running competition. While many athletic stars have shone brighter, the will to win was never greater.