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Gary Corbitt profiles his legendary dad, Ted Corbitt

GARY CORBITT | 10/31/2013, 2:55 p.m.



The legendary Ted Corbitt, running in the 1952 Olympic Games in Helsinki. He will be inducted into the New York City Road Runners Hall of Fame during New York City Marathon 2013 race week activities. Gary Corbitt

I started the Ted Corbitt Archives to document my father's accomplishments as a long-distance runner and physical therapist. This collection also recognizes the many pioneers in running history. The mission is to package history in a manner that inspires generations of young people toward a lifetime of physical fitness and higher education.

In 1952 in Helsinki, Corbitt became the first African-American to represent the U.S. in the Olympic Marathon. In 1954, he became the first African-American to win a national marathon championship. Corbitt was the first president of the New York Road Runners Club in 1958 and 1959. Today, the club is the largest local running community in the world, with over 60,000 members, and it stages the world's largest marathon. During a 12-year period (1969-1981), he

held the distinction of having run more marathons than anyone in the history of the sport. His most important contribution to running was his leadership in developing a system used to accurately measure running courses. For the sport to gain legitimacy, a system was needed to verify performances and records and ensure that courses were measured in a consistent and correct manner. His over 18 years of leadership made this happen.

An ultramarathon is defined as distances greater than 26.2 miles. **Corbitt is considered “The Father of Ultramarathon Running in the U.S.”** He set seven American records between 1956 and 1974. The last record he set was at age 54 during a 24-hour race. He covered the distance of 134.7 miles for an American record. He ranked No. 2 in the world throughout the 1960s based on his five appearances at the famed London-to-Brighton 52.5-mile road race. Perhaps his greatest achievement was at age 82, when he walked 303 miles in six days and set a new age group world record for a six-day running event.

The Ted Corbitt Archives wishes to use its resources to further document running history. The Ted Corbitt Archives is announcing the following two history projects involving track and field, long-distance running, race walking and civil rights history.

The New York Pioneer Club was started in 1936. It was cofounded by longtime coach Joseph Yancey. It was one of the first interracial athletic clubs in any sport—amateur or professional. My father joined the club in 1947. I hope to build awareness about this great club’s history and inspire others to research and write about this history. If you have stories you’d like to share about the club, please contact me.

Many credit my father as the first African-American long-distance running champion. However, history shows that there were African-American runners dating back to the pedestrian era of the 1880s. This project will look at the history of African-American male and female distance runners.

Corbitt was born Jan. 31, 1919, the same day as Jackie Robinson. For more information, go to www.tedcorbitt.com, contact me at corbittg@comcast.net and like the “Ted Corbitt – Pioneer” page on Facebook.