

Former Olympic runner still giving back to games at 77

By Marc Weiszer
STAFF WRITER

Like the Olympic Torch scheduled to arrive Tuesday, Ted Corbitt came to South Carolina this week to share a bit of the Olympic spirit with Greenville.

The 77-year-old Corbitt, a native South Carolinian, ran the marathon in the 1952 Olympics, which may have prepared him well for a marathon-like schedule here as part of WorldFest, the city's three-day Olympic celebration.

Corbitt fired the gun to start the four-mile Torch Run for Hope Sunday night and patiently signed autographs Monday morning in the heat at the Youth Track and Field Day at Mann High School.

He visited Children's Hospital in the afternoon, threw out the

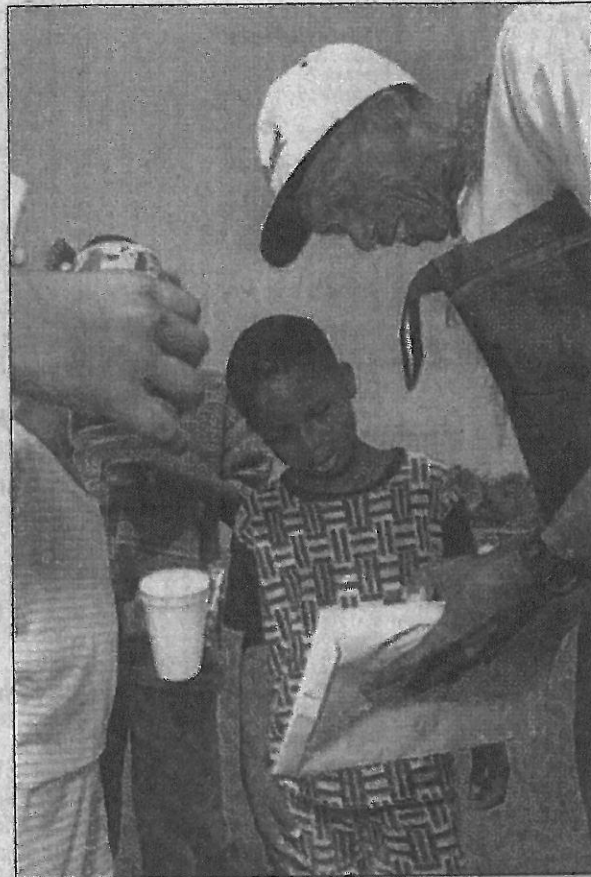
first pitch at the Greenville Braves game Monday night and also dined with community leaders.

"I think it was important to come," said Corbitt, who grew up on a farm outside of Dunbarton in Barnwell County and now lives in New York. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime thing. Sometimes they need bodies, and I realize that."

"They've put some energy into the Olympic Games in Atlanta," said Corbitt, who visited the Olympic city for the U.S. track and field trials last week. "Just looking at the torch adds energy. Any participation contributes."

LaToya Gaines, an 11-year-old who lives in the Jesse Jackson Townhomes, waited in a crowd of about 200 kids at Mann to get

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ALAN HAWES/Staff

77 and still going strong: South Carolina native Ted Corbitt signs an autograph for Maurice Keys at J.L. Mann High Monday.

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Corbitt's signature.

"He's the first person I've met that's run in the Olympics," said Paines.

Twelve-year-old Brandon Ferguson, a student at Lake View Middle School, said he planned to put Corbitt's autograph on a wall alongside those of some Greenville Braves

and Berea High running back Snowball Baker.

Corbitt said he got his start running as a young boy, when lived almost two miles from school and sometimes ran to get there.

He moved from Dunbarton to Knoxville, Tenn., when he was 8 and then to Cincinnati.

Thirteen months after running his first marathon, he ran in the Olympics in Helsinki.

Corbitt finished 44th out of 67 starters in 2 hours and 51 minutes

after suffering sharp pains in his side and friction burns on a couple of toes.

"I don't think too much about it, but I am thankful that I finished the race," Corbitt said. "It was the warmest day of the Games. That was not the cause of my problems though. ... I was about two minutes slower than I expected to run.

"I had no chance to win, but I didn't think on those terms. I was thinking of a personal best. I was happy that I broke three hours and

finished."

Corbitt retired from full-time work as a physical therapist in 1993, but still is active. He has walked the New York City Marathon the last five years and also walks 6-hour and 12-hour races.

He will return to Atlanta next month for the Olympics as a fan, but once again will pay close attention to the marathon. He will write an article about the men's and women's races for a British road runners club.