



THE SAGA OF THE MARATHON :

SECOND AND FINAL PART

BY JAL PARDIVALA

The 1912 Olympic Marathon in Stockholm was the first to be held on an out-and-back course, with the start and the finish in the stadium. All wheeled traffic was forbidden: the roads were swept, watered and put in good order. With Dorando Pietri's experience still fresh in their minds the Swedish officials did their utmost to make things easy for competitors. The course distance was 40,200 metres (24 miles, 1,725 yards) due to the religious sentiments of the Swedes, who wanted to have their church, Sollentuna, as the turning-point.

World War I (1914-1918) saw international sporting activity draw almost to a close. When the war was finally over, a period of Finnish domination followed in the form of Hannes Kohlehmäinen. Hannes had won the 5,000 metres and the 10,000 m in the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games.

Eight years later, Hannes appeared in the Olympic Marathon of the 1920 Antwerp Games and won it in 2 h. 32'36". This was considered a truly remarkable performance, since the measured course was 42,750 km (26 miles, 990 yards) - the longest distance in the history of Olympic Marathons.

Hannes' mark remained as the Olympic record until the 1932 Los Angeles Games. The finish of the Antwerp Games race was also considered the closest until then, since the man who came in second, Estonian Juri Lossman, was less than thirteen seconds behind the winner.

To some, age is no barrier. This was proved by Albin Stenroos, who had inscribed his name in the Finnish record-books as early as 1907. In the Stockholm Games of 1912, Stenroos had been third in the 10,000 metres. Then, in the 1924 Paris Olympics, he carried the Finnish colours to marathon victory at the age of thirty-five. Second was Romeo Bertini of Italy and third the American Clarence Demar. (Demar was a fabulous figure in the annals of American marathon running, having won the Boston Marathon on seven occasions - the first in 1911, aged 23, and the last in 1930, aged 42 - a remarkable achievement, if ever there was one).

The marathon "itch" began infecting many parts of the world and, suddenly runners from Argentina and Japan were on the scene. Kanematsu Yamada and Seiichiro Tsuda (Japan) finished fourth

and sixth, respectively, in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games. The winner was Boughera El-Ouafi, an Algerian representing France. The 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games saw Carlos Zabala of Argentina wear the marathon crown in 2 h. 31'36". Zabala who had been given up by his parents, started racing in 1927 at the age of sixteen and soon achieved prominence. In 1931, he had been invited to participate in one of the well-known marathons of the world : Kosice (Czechoslovakia). At that time, he was just twenty years old, but had left Europe's best far behind with 15' to spare in a time of 2 h. 33'19".

Britain, the home of middle and long-distance races, has produced a number of noteworthy marathoners. Of these Samuel Ferris who, when he was in his thirties, was second only to Carlos Zabala at Los Angeles, losing by only 19". deserves notice. Los Angeles was Samuel Ferris' third Olympic appearance, the previous ones having been in Paris (1924) and Amsterdam (1928), where he had stood fifth and eighth, respectively. Ferris had won the British Marathon Championships continuously from 1925 to 1927.

Next, suddenly, men from the Land of the Rising Sun appeared on the scene. In 1935, a year before the Berlin Olympic Games, news came from Tokyo that Fusasjhiji Suzuki had been timed a fantastic 2 h. 27'49".

That was not all ! Three days later, another Japanese, Yasua Ikenaka, ran the gruelling distance in 2 h. 26'44" again in Tokyo ; and, before the year was out, came the news that a Korean, Kitei Son, had improved on the above performance by 2" (also at Tokyo) on the same course. Under these circumstances, the arrival of Japanese athletes, especially marathoners, was keenly awaited at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, held from August 2 to August 16. The three Japanese who had qualified for the Berlin trip were : Tamau Shiaku (2 h. 26'53"). Shoryu Nan and Kitei Son. Their main rival was the 1932 Los Angeles winner, Carlos Zabala ; however, Zabala, unfortunately, had to retire due to cramps, after covering thirty two km. Thus Kitei Son went on to finish the marathon in a record time of 2 h. 29'19"2. This was more than two minutes less than Zabala's mark of four years ago. Earnest Harper of England was second in 2 h. 31'23"2, while Shoryu Nan was third in 2 h. 31'42". With Europe and much of the world in turmoil during World War II (1939-1945), there was not much scope for marathoners for some time. Only in



Boughera El Ouafi

America did the Boston and New York Marathons go on. Soon after the war, however, sportsmen throughout the world wanted the Olympics to be resumed. London, though completely battered, was game enough to stage the 1948 Olympics.

At that time, exactly 40 years after the 1908 London Games, Dorando Pietri's saga was almost repeated during the finish of the marathon in the first Olympics to be held after the Second World War. To quote the well-known Belgian sports writer, Willy Meist :

"Dorando Pietri the Second - that is what I should like to call that very gallant Lieutenant of the Belgium Parachute Regiment, Etienne Gailly ! At the 74th Olympic Games in the star-studded field of marathon veterans, this twenty-one years old cross-country runner made an unforgettable debut. Like Dorando, he failed to win, but sure/y never was a marathon race run and finished with more supreme courage 1).

"I must be the first to enter the stadium !" With those words, Gailly did enter first, tottering, shuffling with utter exhaustion, but with unflinching determination, to finish the race, which he managed to do a few hundred metres ahead, only to collapse and be carried off on a stretcher. Delfa Cabrera of Argentina entered the stadium full of go and overtook Gailly, followed by Tom Richards of Britain. Cabrera, almost in his forties, finished the race in 2 h. 34'51"6. Richards followed 16" later ; and Gailly was third in 2 h. 35'33"6.

"I've never run a Marathon before, but don't you think we ought to go a little faster?" These words were addressed by a runner in the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Marathon to his companions, Gustaf Jansson of Sweden and Jim Peters of Britain. Much to their amazement, may be even annoyance, the two were unable to come up with a ready retort ; however, shortly afterward, that runner decided, all by himself, to run the race in his own style.

That runner was none other than the marathoner nonpareil Emil Zatopek ! His most glorious moments were at the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games, where he brought of the incredible triple of a gold each in the 5,000 metres, the 10,000 metres and the marathon - all in Olympic record timings ! On July 20, 1952, Zatopek won the 10,000 metres in 29'17" - an improvement of 42'6" on his own London Olympic timing, winning by almost 90 metres. Two days later, on July 22, 1952, he ran the 5,000 metres heats, coming third ; then, on July 24, 1952, he breasted the tape first in the final of the same event - in 14'6"6, improving upon the Olympic record by 11". Three days later, on July 27, Zatopek ran the Marathon (for the first time in competition) and won the gold medal in 2 h. 23'3"2, leaving his nearest rival, Argentina's Reinaldo Gorne, almost 700 metres behind ; Corne's time : 2 h. 25'35". Up to this time, the Soviet Union, in spite of an array of middle and long-distance runners, was not in the marathon picture. But suddenly, in the European Athletic Championships of 1958 held in Stockholm, Sergy Popov and Ivan Filin brought the USSR to the forefront in the event when they finished first and second, respectively, in the marathon. Popov had a fast pace from start to finish and won the event in 2 h. 15'17" - the world's best performance up to that date.

By the same token, the total athletic might, the natural strength, power and endurance of Africa had yet to be felt in the athletic programme ; however, in the last twenty years or so, quite a few Africans have made their presence felt in the international and Olympic arena. Pride of place here goes to Abebe Bikila (which means budding flower in Amharic), Emperor Haïlé Selassie's unknown body-guard. Bikila will be remembered as the first man ever to have made a successful defence of the Olympic Marathon title. Abebe Bikila, born in August 1932 and unheard of outside his own country, running only his third marathon race (that too barefooted) over the cobblestones of the Appian Way in the Rome 1960 Olympics, made



Emil Zatopek

history by completing the event in the world's best time of 2 h. 15'16"2. Then, four years later, in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, this time running with shoes, Bikila put up an even more astonishing performance by establishing a record world-best time of 2 h. 12'11"2 for the event, beating his nearest rival by a margin of over 4' - that is, a distance of almost 1,200 metres - and averaging 5'2 per mile ! In 1969, however, Bikila sustained spinal injuries in a car crash, which paralysed him completely from the waist down. He was a special invitee to the 1972 Munich Olympic Games and then, when he entered the stadium for the Opening Ceremony in a wheelchair, he was given a standing ovation, a tribute he richly deserved. Unfortunately, in 1973, Bikila suffered a brain hemorrhage and died on October 25 of that year, aged 41.

With Abebe Bikila setting the pattern, stan-

dards were improving all the time and more than three dozen Marathon races were started in America alone. As a result, the number of top-level performances inevitably went up. In 1963, there had been only 22 performers who could run the marathon distance in 2 h. 20'.

From 1964 to 1969, there were, in yearly order, 47, 44, 70, 58, 93 and 82 runners ; in 1970, there were 103.

Since Bikila was the first to run the distance in 2 h. 12', the world's best road-runners were battling to approach the 2 h. 10' barrier. Among those who could possibly smash the barrier first were the Japanese Kenji Kimihara, the New Zealander Mike Ryan (second and third, respectively, at the 1968 Mexico Games), the Britisher Basil Heatly (second in Tokyo - best time: 2 h. 13'55") and another Japanese, Mori Shigematsu (with a classic time of 2 h. 12'. achieved in 1965).

Actually, however, the 2 h. 10' barrier was smashed by a British-born Australian settler, Derek Clayton, when, on December 3, 1967, he blitzed the Japanese Fukuoka Marathon course in 2 h. 9'36"4 - an average of under five minutes per mile and better than Mori Shigematsu's mark by more than two minutes ! Mel Watman, Editor of Athletics Weekly, London, considered this performance an amazing one, since Derek Clayton had, early in the same year, been operated upon for a very badly broken Achilles' tendon and was out of tune for months.

Then, in 1979, on May 30 at Antwerp, Clayton came up with another amazing performance of 2 h. 8'33"6, which until recently was the best in the world. Derek Clayton thus showed the way and, with more and more runners trying to emulate him, the standard kept rising. From 1969 to 1975, the 100th best all-time performance in the world improved from 2 h. 17'7"8 to 2 h. 13'40" and the number of 2 h. 20' performers increased from 82 to 271.

So far, the best product of Britain has been Ron Hill who, on July 23, 1970, at the Commonwealth Games held in Edinburgh, ran the gruelling distance in a classic time of 2 h. 9'28'. In 1969, Hill had won the European Marathon in Athens and, in 1970, he went to Boston to win in the course record time of 2 h. 10'30". Ron Hill ran consistently, returning good timings for a number of years; but his Edinburgh performance (2 h. 9'28") achieved in heavy rains, remained his best.

In 1970, the best Americans were Ramon

O'Reilly and Kenny Moore. However, in 1971, the limelight was stolen by Frank Shorter, whose first mark was 2 h. 17'44"6. Shorter went on to win the Pan-American Marathon title as well as the 10,000 metres and ended the year with the Fijuoka course victory in 2 h. 12'50"4. In the American Olympic Trials for the Munich Games 1972, he tied for first place with Kenny Moore.

In Munich, Frank Shorter was invincible against the best marathon runners in the world, such as defending champion Mamo Wolde (Ethiopia), Karel Lismond (Belgium), Kenny Moore (USA), Kenji Kimihara (Japan), Ron Hill (Britain) and Derek Clayton. Shorter won the marathon gold medal in 2 h. 12'19"8. His final time could perhaps have been even better, if that famous imposter had not entered the stadium first, posing as the near winner. That imposter's intrusion not only confused the crowd at the stadium, but also acted as a setback to Frank Shorter, who was dumbfounded, after all that gruelling effort, to see someone ahead of him ! In December of the same year (1972). Frank Shorter

Abebe Bikila



went again to Japan, participated in the Fukuoka Marathon and won the race in the magnificent time of 2 h.10'30" for the fourth time in succession. Shorter's Munich triumph, which was televised throughout the world, had created a terrific impact in his own country. In 1971, 1,120 Americans had run the distance faster than three hours ; consequently, by 1975, this figure had shot up to 3,005. In 1970, the 10th best US performance was 2 h. 34'39" ; in 1975, it was 2 h. 24'22".

The Americans were not the only ones running faster. The mood to run long distances had gripped the entire world and, of this multitude, came Ian Thomson of England. In 1973, Thomson did the second-fastest AAA Marathon in 2 h. 12'40" and, only three months later, on January 31, 1974, won the Christchurch Commonwealth race in the almost unbelievable time of 2 h. 9'12". In the same year, at Rome, Ian Thomson clinched the European title in 2 h. 13'19".

The new enthusiasm for the event also produced the American Bill Rodgers, who was named the Master Marathoner. Rodgers, as a young resident of Boston, was lured by the race's annual grind and splendour. His first try was in 1973, but he did only 21 miles. Undaunted, in 1974, Rodgers tried again and registered 2 h. 19'34".

However, 1975 was a golden year for Bill Rodgers. On April 21, after concentrating on more speed workouts, he created history in Boston. Riel Hauman reported about this race as follows :

"Rodgers kept up with Drayton until 15 miles, then decided to push the race. Push he did - so hard that he crossed the finish-line in 2 h. 9'55".

This was an American best and it remained as the Boston course record until Bill Rodgers himself ran the distance in 2 h. 9'27" in 1979. Rodgers also won the New York Marathon for three consecutive years - 1976 in 2 h.10'10"; 1977, and 1978 in 2 h. 12'12". Also, the Fukuoka in 2 h.10'55".

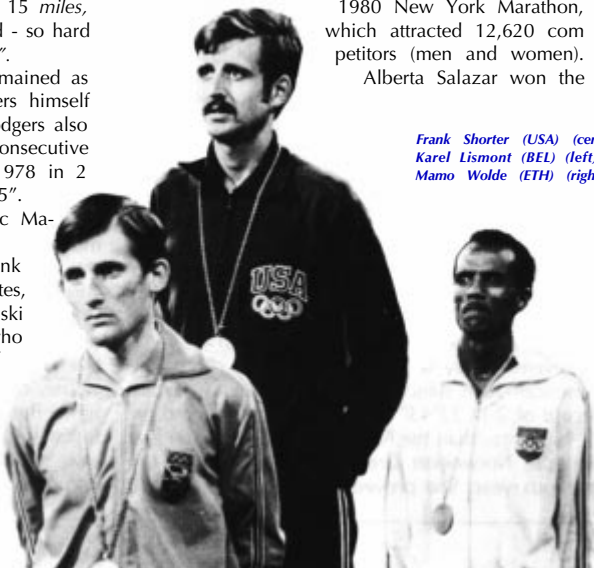
On to Montreal 1976 ! The Olympic Marathon is ever full of surprises. America's two top contenders, Bill Rodgers and Frank Shorter, came to Montreal as hot favourites, but few reckoned with Waldemar Cierpinski (CDR). So much so that Frank Shorter, who was sanguine about matching the feat of the late Abebe Bikila, was reported as saying : "I knew Cierpinski was a good steeplechaser, but, to tell you the truth, I just never thought of him as a marathon contender.

Waldemar Cierpinski completed the 1976 Montreal Olympic Marathon (his fifth) in the formidable time of 2 h. 9'55", cutting over two minutes from Abebe Bikila's Olympic record. Cierpinski achieved this feat in the face of a continuous drizzle. Rain or shine, Waldemar Cierpinski became the fourth-fastest marathon runner of all time to that date.

Frank Shorter, though almost two minutes faster than at Munich in 1972 (2 h. 10'46"), had to rest content with second place. Bill Rodgers was nowhere in the picture. The same year (1976) however, Rodgers won the New York Marathon, for the first time. By the end of 1977, starting with Toshihiko Seko (2 h. 20'21" at Fukuoka), the Japanese once again dominated the scene at various courses in the world. Shigeru Sou had been a nonentity at Montreal in 1976, having stood 20th (2 h. 18'2"). However, on February 5, 1978, at Beppu (Japan) Shigeru Sou carried all before him to return a time of 2 h.9'6" and figure in the top list of the world. Shigeru's twin brother, Takeshi Sou, finished second (2 h.12'49"). By the end of 1978, more men from Japan were ranked in the world list : Toshihiko Seko fourth (2 h. 10'21") ; Hidika Kita fifth (2 h. 10'21") ; and Takeshi Sou ninth.

Again, the name of Bill Rodgers was coming up with regular monotony. In 1979, Rodgers topped the world list on his mark of 2 h. 9'27", achieved on April 10 at Boston.

It will not be out of place here to mention the 1980 New York Marathon, which attracted 12,620 competitors (men and women). Alberta Salazar won the



Frank Shorter (USA) (centre)
Karel Lismon (BEL) (left)
Mamo Wolde (ETH) (right).

event in 2 h. 9'41". while Norway's peerless queen, Crete Waitz, finished the distance in 2 h. 25'42" to breast the tape first among the women. The New York Marathon was the third one of her life and her third consecutive world's best. Crete's overall position in the race was 74th. What an achievement ! None can say how far the boycott of the 1980 Moscow Games by certain leading nations affected the total performance at that Olympics, but the Marathon there was a triumph for Waldemar Cierpinski, who joined the late Abebe Bikila in the history books by winning this Olympic event at two successive Games.

On October 25, 1981, the New York Marathon was held and Mel Watman wrote in *Athletics Weekly* on November 7, 1981 :

"The New York City Marathon continues to be the biggest and the best in the world. The 7987 edition, staged in ideal weather conditions (50°F) was a record-breaking affair on all counts : Alberto Salazar ended Derek Clayton's long reign as world's fastest marathoner with a time of 2 h. 8'73". Allison Roe succeeded Crete Waitz as the quickest ever female with 2 h. 25'29' : and participation reached new levels as 74,496 runners started and 73,360 finished. More than 25,000 others had their entries rejected. The standard was staggering as 44 ran inside 2 h. 20' (as against 33 last year), 7,603 bettered 3 hours (compared to 7,357 in 1980), and 9,172 broke 4 hours (8,637 in 1980) ».

Just after the above marathon, on December 6, 1981, the Australian Robert de Castella, who had announced earlier in the year that he was aiming for Derek Clayton's mark, ran a brilliant race in the 16th edition of the Japanese Classic at Fukuoka in 2 h. 8'18". This would have been the world's best, had not Alberto Salazar shot to 2 h. 8'13" in New York. Castella missed the mark by just 5" ! It must be recorded here that gradients differ from course to course.

But, gradient or no gradient, it looks as though Alberto Salazar, or someone else, will be running the marathon in under 2 h. 8'. And running it sooner rather than later !

The organisation of the first women's Olympic marathon in Los Angeles was a tribute to the great achievements by women in endurance races. The American Joan Benoit had seen the extraordinary record of 2 h. 22'43" she had worked so hard for (2'46" faster than the New Zealand girl Allison Roe and the Norwegian Crete Waitz) challenged the previous year. She proved that she was truly the



Joan Benoit

best, achieving a time in the Games of 2 h. 22'52" over the 42.195 km, the second best world performance of all time, in conditions not favourable to great performances : in the morning and at a high temperature. Waitz, the best female marathon runner in the world since 1978, came second in this historic race, in front of the Portuguese girl, Rosa Mota.

The Spanish school of long-distance running was crowned, alongside Mota's bronze medal, by the gold won by Carlos Lopes, easy victor in the men's went and Olympic long-distance champion at thirty seven years of age. Previously well known for his exploits over 5,000 and 10,000 m (he had won the silver in Moscow over the latter distance), Lopes had made a brilliant venture into marathon running. In 1983 in Rotterdam, he had been two seconds away from a surprise victory over Robert de Castella, who put up the best performance of the year : 2 h 8'37" as against 2 h 8'39". A year later, Lopes saw himself crowned the victor while de Castella and the other "big names" in marathon running, Salazar and Seko, were pushed out of the medals.

The 1984 season still held a few more surprises. At the end of October in Chicago, the Welshman Steve Jones was to bring the record down to 2 h. 8'5". One week later in Lisbon, Cidalio Ciaeetano, a thirty-two year old Portuguese, previously credited with 2 h. 11'42", equalled Jones's time ! But faced with this unheard-of event and the fact that most of the contestants had smashed their own records, the regularity of the race was called into question !