

## EMIL ZATOPEK IMMORTAL

He is one of those champions who never die. Their tracks never fade, and they are conjured up by a memory: a photo, or a clip from a film, yellowed by time, restore them to us in all their glory. These are the immortal athletes, and Emil Zatopek, who recently died at the age of 78, is among them.

A pioneer of long-distance running, he was one of a kind: in his seven-league spikes, he was indeed able to push human limits further than could be imagined, shattering world records. He was also a revolutionary who dared to impose upon himself a training schedule which was considered crazy, based not only on endurance, but also resistance. His preparation remained secret for a long time, but after his first international successes, it was discovered that he had taken advantage of the methods initiated by Rudolf Harbig, the world 800m record-holder, who based all his preparation on speed.

Emil Zatopek, who thought that he was slow, became aware of his physical shortcomings very early on. He was less gifted than most of his predecessors, such as Sweden's Gundar Haegg. To overcome these shortcomings, he created a system of repetition over short distances – fifty 400-metre sets, with a very short recovery period in between each lap of the track. This method paid off. His rough style, his grimaces – which were nothing more than a means of breathing better – made this man, known as the Human Locomotive, a legend. Having begun to compete relatively late in life because of the war, he belonged to the generation of athletes who started their careers at the Games of the XIV Olympiad in

by Robert Parienté

London in 1948. At the age of 26, he won the 10,000m almost an entire lap ahead of the Frenchman Alain Mimoun, who was always second to Zatopek until the Games of the XVI Olympiad in Melbourne in 1956, at which the disciple finally beat the master in the marathon. It is true that, in sport, eternity lasts only for a moment, and the times set by Zatopek from 1948 to 1955 today bring a smile to our faces. But comparisons with the past are always unfair, as they do not take into account the state of sport nor the state of mind of the champions.

I was at the Colombes stadium in May 1954, where I produced my first

report for *"L'Equipe"*, when Zatopek ran 13'57"2 to break the world 5,000m record which Haegg had held for 12 years. This achievement, which it most certainly was, was considered at the time to be big news. It immediately conditioned Zatopek's career, which culminated in the Games of the XV Olympiad in Helsinki in 1952, with three gold medals in the 5,000m, 10,000m and the marathon - an imperishable masterpiece. This was a triple crown that no other athlete has since managed to achieve, and to which Dana Zatopkova added a fourth jewel by winning the javelin.

A self-trained athlete, Emil Zatopek was also a cultural autodidact. A sports humanist, he was one of those people who constantly look to establish relations with all the citizens of the



*Emil Zatopek (left) moving ahead of Douglas Pirie and Herbert Schade in the 5,000m in Helsinki.*

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## Obituaries

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world. Besides Czech, his mother tongue, he spoke German, English, Russian, Polish, French and Chinese. Thanks to his multi-lingual gifts, he became a speaker of authority. With a military career, serving as a colonel in the army, he had everything to lose when he participated actively in the Prague Spring of 1968. He did not hesitate, however, to become a freedom fighter, as he had been on the track: he demonstrated on the side of the rebels and signed the 2,000-word manifesto which demanded a return to democracy and freedom in Czechoslovakia. He was demoted and relegated to forced labour, which makes those who sought to dishonour him unworthy.

Once he was given back his freedom, Zatopek never stopped fighting for



*The IOC President (foreground) at Zatopek's funeral service, along with IAAF president Lamine Diack and NOC president Milan Jirasek.*

peace. He was as great in this task as he had been in sport. With this double title, he deserves to go down in the history of the century which has just come to an end. He was, to quote Antoine Blondin's great definition, the kind of person who managed to push back the walls of his prison.

Emil Zatopek was born on 19 September 1922. Four-times Olympic champion (10,000m in 1948; 5,000m, 10,000m and marathon in 1952; twice European champion in 1950), he had to his name 18 world records, from the 5,000m to the 30km. In particular, he was the first to run 10,000m in less than 29 minutes and cover over 20km within the hour. He died on 21 November 2000 in Prague.

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## JACQUES GODDET, A TRUE VISIONARY OF SPORT

**S**ome men leave an everlasting impression on the people around them through their commitment, passion, creativity and foresight.

Jacques Goddet (1905-2000) leading press baron and lifetime journalist, was one such person. A man ahead of his time, linking the past and present to the future, he reminded me of the hero in René Clair's film, "*C'est arrivé demain*", insofar as he predicted or imagined what sport would become, above and beyond the task of simply reporting daily events in his newspaper.

by Robert Parienté\*

Jacques Goddet spent the 20th century inventing a brand new form of press. He was fortunate, it is true, to be born into the right circles: in 1903, his father, Maurice Goddet, and Henri Desgrange, founded sports daily "*L'Auto*", whose success was based primarily on its coverage of the Tour de France for bicycles and automobiles. Learning from the most reliable sources, Jacques Goddet acquired a broad sports education at an English

school near Oxford, where he rowed, ran and played rugby, before his father called on him to work alongside him at "*L'Auto*". Hence, in the 1920s he became a journalist, learning his trade through stints in each department of the newspaper and making his mark as an inspirational reporter of the Tour de France.

In 1932, he was the only member of the French press sent to the Olympic Games held far away in Los Angeles. There, he covered many different sports, running to and fro between the main venues in order to wire back to