

THE OLYMPIC WALKS
By
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Australian Olympic representative, 1968

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I have been asked to make a few comments on the two walk races held in the '68 Olympics at Mexico City. Since I competed in both events, my observations were limited and even those are not necessarily correct. These, coupled with the results and information I have gathered, make up the following.

In the 20km there were 33 starters and 29 finished. Muller of West Germany and possibly Saito of Japan were disqualified.

The starting time was 4.30pm. The weather was overcast, fairly humid and with a solid breeze blowing. (This was felt only in sections of the road.) The lap and a bit of the Olympic arena was as expected, with the big field a bit rough, with the only casualty being the loss of a shoe by a Mexican. The course wound up from the stadium then down to the main road and across into the University where the circuit began. At the beginning of the circuit, which was about 1500m from the stadium, the field was very bunched and only one or two stragglers had been dropped.



*The opening laps of the Olympic 20km walk – Frank Clark is 4th from left, at the back of the pack of 4
(photo Bob Gardiner)*

Here, Golubnichiy (USSR) and Laird (USA), who were leading, went straight instead of turning into the circuit. They lost some 20 yards but Golubnichiy caught the leaders again within 200 yards, while Laird never snapped out of it and finished a disappointing 25th.

With 5km passed in 23.10, Smaga (USSR), Golubnichiy and Haluza (USA) were leading a bunch of 15 or so. There were only 6 or 7 seconds separating this trio. From here the field spread out and I can only say that I passed many and many passed me before the finish.

The circuit had a fairly steady rise and fall in it. I managed to hold most walkers uphill and on the flat but lost terribly on the downhill section. The oxygen debt hit me not long after 5km. This came in the form of severe stomach cramp and a feeling of sickness. Over the last 5km it was all I could do to finish. I dread the thought if I hadn't been so fit.

From what I saw, the Russians were the best stylists, with Rudy Haluza the biggest surprise, while Jose Pedraza (Mexico) was feely tipped to win if he were allowed to finish.

It was most unfortunate that we finished the last 1800m in darkness except for 3/4 lap of the track.

The 50km was an entirely different set-up for me. I knew I hadn't trained enough for a really good one over the distance, but I was determined to better my 16th in the 20km.

The weather was hot at the start and for the hardest part of the race. A maximum temperature of 85degF did not compare with the heat on the road. The tar was melting in places and it seemed in the mid-nineties.

There were 40 entries, 36 starters and only 28 finishers. I know of only one disqualification. This was (Bernhard) Nemerich of West Germany who was in 2nd place just before 45km. The Tokyo gold medallist, Pamich (Italy), dropped out as did the silver medallist, Nihill (UK).

The 1.5 laps of the track saw Della-Rossa (USSR) well clear of the field but he was a non-finisher. He was the guy, I think, who a few years ago was supposed to have broken 4 hours for the 50km.

The whole secret for non-altitude trained athletes seemed to be for one to start slow as hell and quicken the pace as the race progressed. Many an Olympic dream ended in the heat of the first 20km which was hilly and the hardest part of the course.



*1968 Olympic 50km: Goetz Klopfer (USA), Frank Clark (AUS), Brian Eley (GBR) and Shaun Lightman (GBR)
Photo Frank Clark*

I don't know what happened up front as I was never there. At 5km I was 90 secs behind the leaders (and there were many). I was third last and walking with Brian Eley (7th) and Shaun Lightman (18th), both G.B.

My plan was to stay with a group till 35km then come home, but my group broke up at 15km. I had the advantage of many walkers' bad luck. I was able to pick up the slowing early speedsters. This was an experience in itself as when one normally passes a fellow competitor early in a 50km he cheers opposition, but in Mexico they were so dead it was amazing. At 10km I was 3 minutes behind the leaders. From there till 35km I moved through to 8th place, 7 and a half minutes behind the leader. Just prior to this 35km spot I passed Agapov (USSR) and I think that, besides finishing, this gave me my greatest pleasure of the race. It was here that my chances ended and the race started as I suddenly died. The altitude was taking effect again. I had averaged 27min for each 5km to that stage, but then did 33min from 35km to 40km. I never thought I would ever again experience the horrors of the 20km but here it was, the same cramps and murder!

I was lucky somehow. I kept going and did 31min for my next and 28.30 for my last. This was nearly as fast as any other competitor.

The course after 20km was flat and straight. At sea level it would have been regarded as a most ideal course. My last 8km was completed in the darkness. The closeness for me in this race is shown by the fact that 7th place was only 2min30sec ahead. The feeding and sponging stations were a real credit to the organizers.

I felt that the timing setup was poor. It consisted of a car-borne large clock. One had to read one's own times and when tired this is often quite difficult, especially if one is not expecting to see it and it suddenly appears.

I saw (the winner, Christoph) Hohne in training often and his style was good even if he didn't look too fit. He always carried a watch for pace judgement in training. Bobby Gardiner (Aust) suffered the same fate as most of the world's best. Only Hohne and Seltzer (4th, East Germany) of the early leaders survived. The fact that Bob finished shows what a fine walker he is, and given a fair chance at sea level will be up with the world's best. The four weeks Bob and I had to acclimatise were just not enough for us to do any better than we did.

A lot has been said and written since the Mexico Olympics that we Aussies were too fair in comparison to the majority of other competitors. There is no maybe about it. You walk to the rules or you don't and we do. But as I see it you are either fair – or not. There is no maybe. Either one walks according to the International rules or not – and we do.

RESULTS

20 KILOMETRES

| | | |
|-----|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1. | V. Golubnichiy (URS) | 1:33.58.4 |
| 2. | J Pedraza (MEX) | 1:34.00.0 |
| 3. | N. Smaga (URS) | 1:34.03.0 |
| 4. | R. Haluza (USA) | 1:35.00.2 |
| 5. | G. Sperling (GDR) | 1:35.27.2 |
| 6. | O. Bartsch (URS) | 1:36.16.8 |
| 7. | H. Reimann (GDR) | 1:36.31.4 |
| 8. | S. Ingvarsson (SWE) | 1:36.43.4 |
| 9. | L. Karaiosifoglu (RUM) | 1:37.07.6 |
| 10. | P. Frenkel (GDR) | 1:37.20.8 |
| 11. | A. Jones (GBR) | 1:37.32.0 |
| 12. | P. Busca (ITA) | 1:37.32.0 |
| 13. | T. de la Oliveros (MEX) | 1:38.17.0 |
| 14. | A. Kiss (HUN) | 1:38.24.0 |
| 15. | S. Lindberg (SWE) | 1:40.03.0 |
| 16. | F. Clark (AUS) | 1:40.06.0 |
| 17. | T. Dooley (USA) | 1:40.08.0 |
| 18. | K. Merschenz (CAN) | 1:40:11.0 |
| 19. | C. Sowa (LUX) | 1:40.17.0 |
| 20. | A. Campos (MEX) | 1:41.52.0 |
| 21. | S. Andersson (SWE) | 1:41.58.0 |
| 22. | J. Webb (GBR) | 1:42.51.0 |
| 23. | R. Pfister (SUI) | 1:43.36.0 |
| 24. | R. Hughes (GBR) | 1:43.50.0 |
| 25. | R. Laird (USA) | 1:44.38.0 |
| 26. | M. Rutnya (POL) | 1:47.29.0 |
| 27. | C. Calzado (CUB) | 1:49.27.0 |
| 28. | F. Ortiz (GUA) | 1:54.48.0 |
| 29. | B. Castellanos (SAL) | 1:58.48.0 |

50 KILOMETRES

| | | |
|-----|--------------------------|------------------|
| 1. | C. Hohne (GDR) | 4:20.13.6 |
| 2. | A. Kiss (HUN) | 4:30:17.0 |
| 3. | L. Young (USA) | 4:31.55.4 |
| 4. | P. Selzer (GDR) | 4:33.09.6 |
| 5. | S. Lindberg (SWE) | 4:34.05.0 |
| 6. | V. Visini (ITA) | 4:36.33.2 |
| 7. | B. Eley (GBR) | 4:36.33.2 |
| 8. | J. Pedraza (MEX) | 4:37.32.2 |
| 9. | K. Merschenz (CAN) | 4:37.51.4 |
| 10. | G. Klopfer (USA) | 4:39.13.6 |
| 11. | H. Magnor (FGR) | 4:39.43.2 |
| 12. | F. Clark (AUS) | 4:40.13.8 |
| 13. | S. Andersson (SWE) | 4:40.42.6 |
| 14. | G. Weidner (FGR) | 4:43.26.2 |
| 15. | S. Grigorjev (URS) | 4:44.39.2 |
| 16. | C. Sowa (LUX) | 4:44.45.2 |
| 17. | K. Saito (JAP) | 4:47.29.6 |
| 18. | S. Lightman (GBR) | 4:52.20.0 |
| 19. | R. Gardiner (AUS) | 4:52.29.0 |

| | | |
|-----|--------------------|-----------|
| 20. | E. Stutz (SUI) | 4:53.33.8 |
| 21. | H. Delerue (FRA) | 4:57.40.2 |
| 22. | M. Rutnya (POL) | 4:58.03.8 |
| 23. | F. Cappella (CAN) | 4:58.31.6 |
| 24. | S. Ladany (ISR) | 5:01.06.0 |
| 25. | P. Colin (MEX) | 5:01.30.0 |
| 26. | D. Romanski (USA) | 5:38.03.4 |
| 27. | I. Hernandez (MEX) | 5:56.09.2 |
| 28. | R. Cruz (SAL) | 5:56.22.0 |