

1976 OLYMPIC 20KM WALK

Vic Miller, one of my racewalking stamps contacts, recently sent me the following wonderful photo from the 1976 Olympic 20km walk, highlighting the main contenders during the early stage of the race



The three (East) Germans and the trio of Mexicans who battled for the medals at the 1976 Summer Olympics are visible here: Domingo Colín (#7), Daniel Bautista (#13), Karl-Heinz Stadtmüller (towering behind Bautista), Peter Frenkel (#23), Hans-Georg Reimann (mostly obscured by Frenkel) and Raul Gonzalez (faded in the background - and the race) (photo http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/uploads/2018/07/23/d98c1545b71532370541_standard_desktop_medium_retina.jpeg)

So time for a bit of a story on this event.

In a black segment of Olympic history, the 50km racewalk was dropped after the 1972 Olympics, one of a number of events targeted in a move to reduce the size of what was seen as a bloated monster. Thus West German walker **Bernd Kanneberg** was deprived of the chance of back to back Olympic 50km golds. There is little doubt that he would have won, having set new world records for 1 Hour, 2 Hours, 20,000m, 30,000m and 50,000m track walks in the final years leading up to the 1976 Games.

But the scenario was even worse than that, with the 20km also rumoured to be on the chopping block, and with the prospect of no walks at all in the 1980 Games.

The lack of a 50km event had the effect of concentrating all the world's walking talent into one race. Mexican **Daniel Bautista** went in as the firm favourite, but the minor places were wide open, with the other Mexicans, the East Germans, the Russians and, of course, Kanneberg himself, all in contention.

Now to the race itself, which saw 38 walkers from 29 nations, ensuring the strongest field of walkers ever assembled for a single race. Alas, 3 walkers failed to make it to the start line, with two Ethiopians and one Kenyan falling victim to the African withdrawal. With countries like Colombia, Honduras, Japan and Malaysia entering walkers, the sport was at last gathering a world wide following. The 20km walk also provided one of the widest age ranges in the Olympics. Eighteen year old **Bengt Simonsen** of Sweden finished 26th while 48 year old **Alex Oakley** of Canada placed 35th.

The race started with four laps of the track and, by the time the walkers left the stadium for the 500m climb to the 8x2km park circuit, the Mexicans and the East Germans were in front, with the rest of the field already spreading out behind them. By 10km, **Domingo Colín** had been disqualified and the leading group was down to five – **Peter Frenkel** forcing the pace with 42:23, just ahead of team mates **Hans-Georg Reimann** and **Karl-Heinz Stadtmüller**, along with Daniel Bautista and **Raúl González**.

González was the first to fall off the pace, just before the 13km mark and, by 15km, it was Bautista in front and forcing the pace, level with Reimann, Frenkel on his heels and Stadtmüller a little way behind.

Bautista timed his race to perfection, breaking clear with 2km to go and storming home to win by 33 secs in a new Olympic record of 1:24:40.6. The short, supple and long striding Mexican was clearly in a class of his own. One of the best stylists of all time, you should check him out his winning walk in this youtube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38LlrvclmK>.

Defending champion Frenkel, who had bravely forced the pace for most of the race, was eventually relegated to third behind his countryman Reimann, the Munich bronze medallist four years before. With Stadtmüller fourth, it was a dominant East German performance. Fifth place went to Raúl González, who would eventually win his Olympic gold 8 years later in Los Angeles. **Volodymyr Holubnychiy**, the great Russian walker, failed to win his fifth consecutive Olympic medal but was by no means disgraced, finishing 7th. History shows that Kannenberg, the 20km world record holder, failed to finish. Losing contact with the leading group, he retired after only 5km. He did not race again in major international competition. For Holubnychiy, Reimann and Frenkel, this was also their last international appearance.

Bautista's win was Mexico's first ever athletics gold medal. He was so dehydrated at the end that he had to drink 10 cans of soft drinks before he could produce enough urine for the dope test.



Daniel Bautista wins in the 1976 Olympic 50km – perfection in motion

Australia's sole walking representative was Victorian **Ross Haywood**. Ross was a top walker and a top runner and he narrowly missed selection for the 1970 Commonwealth Games in the 3000m steeplechase. Putting this disappointment behind him, he concentrated on his walking, winning 6 successive Australian and Victorian 3000m track walk championships from 1971 to 1976. He finally earned an Australian vest with selection for the 1974 Commonwealth Games 20 mile walk where he finished 7th. He followed this up with selections in both the 20km walk and the marathon in the 1976 Olympics. His 12th placing in the walk (out of 38 finishers) in 1:30:59 cemented his place as an international standard walker. At the age of 31, he retired from serious training to concentrate on his business in 1978.

20km Walk Men

1.	Daniel Bautista	MEX	1:24:40.6
2.	Hans-Georg Reimann	GDR	1:25:13.8
3.	Peter Frenkel	GDR	1:25:29.4
4.	Karl-Heinz Stadtmüller	GDR	1:26:50.6
5.	Raúl González	MEX	1:28:18.2
6.	Armando Zambaldo	ITA	1:28:25.2
7.	Volodymyr Holubnychiy	URS	1:29:24.6
8.	Vittorio Visini	ITA	1:29:31.6
9.	Gérard Lelièvre	FRA	1:29:53.6
10.	Roberto Buccione	ITA	1:30:40.0
11.	Brian Adams	GBR	1:30:46.2
12.	Ross Haywood	AUS	1:30:59.2
13.	Otto Barch	URS	1:31:12.4
14.	Olly Flynn	GBR	1:31:42.4
15.	Viktor Semyonov	URS	1:31:59.0

16. Imre Stankovics	HUN	1:32:06.6
17. Jan Ornoch	POL	1:32:19.2
18. Gerhard Weidner	FRG	1:32:56.8
19. Ernesto Alfaro	COL	1:33:13.8
20. Ron Laird	USA	1:33:27.6
21. Boguslaw Duda	POL	1:33:53.4
22. Larry Walker	USA	1:34:19.4
23. Marcel Jobin	CAN	1:34:33.4
24. Vinko Galušić	YUG	1:34:46.8
25. Godfried De Jonckheere	BEL	1:35:03.8
26. Bengt Simonsen	SWE	1:35:31.8
27. Santiago Fonseca	HON	1:36:07.0
28. Lucien Faber	LUX	1:36:21.2
29. Todd Scully	USA	1:36:37.4
30. Paul Nihill	GBR	1:36:40.4
31. Rafael Vega	COL	1:37:27.4
32. Khoo Chong Beng	MAS	1:40:16.8
33. Pat Farrelly	CAN	1:41:36.2
34. Yoshio Morikawa	JPN	1:42:20.6
35. Alex Oakley	CAN	1:44:08.8
36. Henry Klein	ISV	1:50:50.4
Bernd Kannenberg	FRG	DNF
Domingo Colín	MEX	DQ

And what of the 50km. The IAAF, always a strong supporter of walking, staged its own IAAF 50km World Championship in Malmo, Sweden, later in the year. 42 walkers turned up, with **Veniamin Soldatenko**, the 1972 silver medallist, winning with 3:54:40. One can only guess at the mighty battle which would have ensued if it had remained an Olympic event and Soldatenko and Kannenberg had faced the starter's gun shoulder to shoulder.

History tells us that, as a result of continued lobbying by the IAAF, the 50km walk was reinstated for the 1980 Olympics and has been staged in every Olympics since. But that's a story for another day.

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