

ARMANDO LIBOTTE - ONE OF THE WALKING GREATS

The following news flash (<http://www.iaaf.org/news/Kind=2/newsId=43059.html>) was aired on the IAAF website in late January 2008.

Race Walking pioneer Armando Libotte passes away

Sunday 27 January 2008

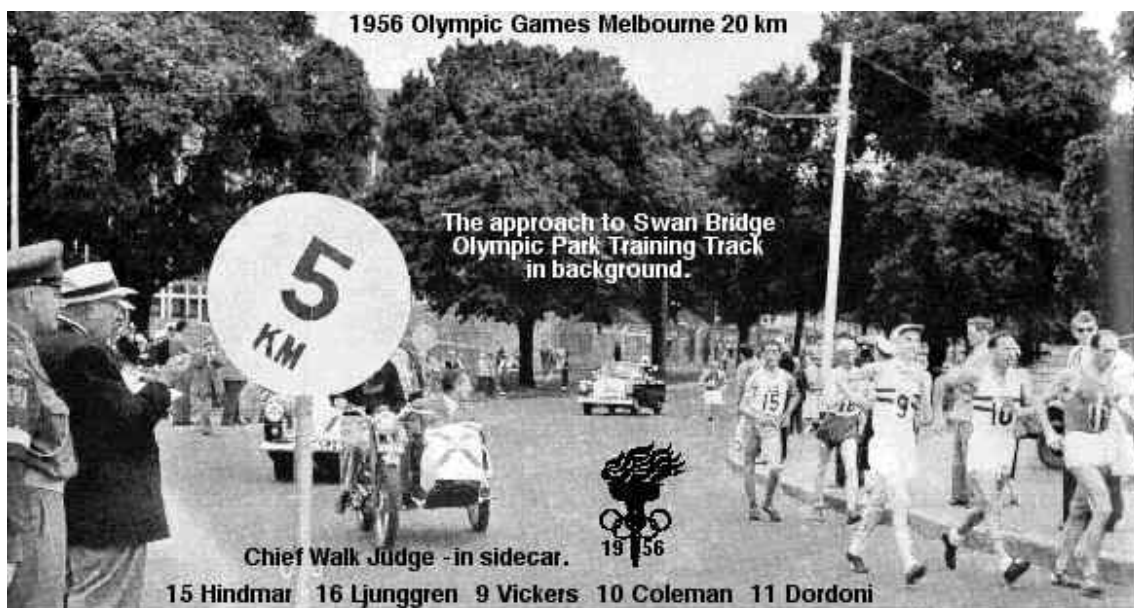
The IAAF has learnt the sad news that at the age of 90 years, Armando Libotte (SUI), a distinguished IAAF International Race Walking Judge, has passed away.

Libotte was a famous walker and a well known sports journalist. For many years he was also the leader of the SAL Lugano, the club which organized some famous Race Walking events inside the Swiss Canton of Ticino.

Along with others in Lugano, such as Mr. Mercalli, Libotte came up with the idea of an international Race Walking competition for national teams, and so the Lugano Trophy race was born in 1961. Then only for men's teams, it was eventually combined with a women's competition, the Eschborn Cup (est. 1979), and so what we know today as the IAAF World Race Walking Cup was established.

Funeral ceremony took place on 22 January 2008 in Lugano.

It hardly does justice to one of the towering figures in the world of race walking. Armando Libotte, born 6th December 1917, was a journalist and writer as well as an athlete, winning the 50 km championship of Switzerland in 1951. In 1952, the IAAF appointed him a member of the Race Walking Committee and an international racewalking judge. Ironically, this meant he was the only Swiss participant in the 1956 Olympic Games (where he was one of the walk judges) because Switzerland had boycotted the Games because of the invasion of Hungary by Soviet troops.



Armando Libotte is seen here sitting in the motorcycle side car as the 1956 Olympic 20k field crosses the Swan Street bridge not far from the Olympic Stadium (photo from 1956 Olympic 50 km walker Ray Smith)

It was while he was in Melbourne that the idea came to him of creating a competition that would find international recognition without the troublesome interference of politics. At first, his initial proposal to the IAAF for the creation of a World Cup in different disciplines including a 20,000m race walk was rejected. But he did not give up and his new idea of a Nations Cup for racewalking received an enthusiastic response from Harold Whitlock (GBR) and from the Swede Linde. In 1957, he presented his idea at the annual Lugano 100 km racewalk (of which he was one of the organizers and a former participant). However, 4 more years were to elapse before the IAAF agreed to the proposal and the first race walk World Cup was held in Lugano in Switzerland in 1961. It was named the "Lugano Trophy" and the initial staging was sponsored by the Lugano Tourism Association.

The IAAF had supreme control over the event and granted powers to the Race Walk Committee to supervise and control the competition. The competition would be conducted in two phases – a preliminary round based on geographical proximity in which the winning team would qualify for the final based on a points system, and a final round.

The competition initially comprised two track walks, over 20,000m and 50,000m, with three participants per country in each event. Each country had to cover its own costs in both the qualifying and final rounds with the organizing country covering the visiting countries' accommodation expenses.

In the 1961 staging, 10 countries contested the qualifying rounds in 4 zones with GBR, DEN, ITA and HUN qualifying for the final. The two German states, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) were treated in the same way as had been decided for the European Championships and competed as a joint team.

Zone 1: London (Wimbledon Park) : 1 GBR 41; 2 GER 39; 3 BEL 12

Zone 2: Copenhagen, DEN: 1 SWE 50; 2 DEN 23; 3 NOR 18

Zone 3: Spoleto, ITA : 1 ITA 48; 2 FRA 27; 3 SUI 17

Zone 4: Turkey did not present and Hungary went through to the final

Thus the Final saw only 12 walkers in each event and, overall, GBR won on a count back from Sweden with points as follows

Final: Lugano, SWI: 1 GBR 53; 2 SWE 53; 3 ITA 28, 4 HUN 23

From this small beginning, the event quickly blossomed and continues today as the World Racewalking Cup. And we can thank Armando Librotte in big part for it all.