

UGO FRIGERIO, TRIPLE OLYMPIC WALKING GOLD MEDALLIST

Ugo Frigerio was born on 16 September 1901 in Naples. In his life, he achieved much – Olympic champion, Italian sporting legend and International racewalking administrator.



Frigerio wins one of his two gold medals at the 1920 Olympic Games

He was an early developer and won his first Italian Open 10,000m walk title in 1919 at 17 years of age. The next year, he was again successful, winning gold in the Italian 10,000m and silver in the Italian 3,000m championship walks. These performances gained him selection for the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp as an 18 year old.

A great favourite with the crowds, his mannerisms were typically Italian. When other walkers became nervous or annoyed when a judge got down on his hands and knees to scrutinise their style, Frigerio seemed to enjoy the attention and always made a point to thank the judge when he had finished. He also enjoyed the attentions of the crowd, sometimes taking the time to exchange remarks with spectators and even leading cheers for himself. His flamboyance often obscured the fact that he was a superb athlete who combined great speed with perfect style.

Just before the beginning of the 3000m walk, he approached the conductor of the band in the middle of the field and handed him several pages of sheet music which he requested be played during the course of the race. Accompanied by the proper background music, he moved quickly to the front and led the entire race, pausing only once towards the end to admonish the band for not playing in the correct tempo. He won easily by 20 metres in a new Olympic Record. In the longer walk it was a similar story; he won by nearly 2 minutes in a masterful display of walking and with the same exuberance.

Men 3000m. Walk. Olympic Games 1920, ANTWERP

1.	Ugo FRIGERIO	ITA	13.14.2	OR
2.	George PARKER	AUS	13.19.6	
3.	Richard REMER	USA	13.22.2	
4.	Cecil McMASTER	SAF	13.23.6	
5.	Thomas MARONEY	USA	13.25.0	
6.	Charles DOWSON	GBR	13.28.0	
7.	William HEHIR	GBR	13.29.8	
8.	William ROELKER	USA	13.30.4	

Men 10,000m. Walk. Olympic Games 1920, ANTWERP

1.	Ugo FRIGERIO	ITA	48.06.2	
2.	Joseph PEARMAN	USA	49.40.2	
3.	Charles GUNN	GBR	49.43.90	
4.	Cecil McMASTER	SAF	50.04.0	
5.	William HEHIR	GBR	50.11.8	

6.	Thomas MARONEY	USA	50.24.4
7.	Jean SEGHERS	BEL	50.32.4
8.	Antoine DOYEN	BEL	56.30.0

For the next 4 years, he was virtually unbeatable. He regularly won the Italian 10,000m and 3,000m titles and in 1922, he won the English Amateur Athletics Association 2 Mile track championship.

So to Paris in 1924, and the row over walking which had been "cooking up" for some time. Frequent disqualifications in the earlier Games had led many to wonder if the walks should be retained. In Paris the 3,000 metres was dropped and only the longer distance race, 10,000 metres, was scheduled. It kept those interested in walking and many who would not normally bother with walking, in a turmoil of excitement throughout. But there were no doubts about Frigerio's action as he walked away with the final by nearly 1 minute. He was now a triple Olympic Gold Medallist and a national hero back in Italy.

Men 10km. Walk. Olympic Games 1924, PARIS

1.	Ugo FRIGERIO	ITA	47.49.0
2.	Gordon GOODWIN	GBR	48.37.9
3.	Cecil McMASTER	SAF	49.08.0
4.	Donato PAVESI	ITA	49.17.0
5.	Arthur Tell SCHWAB	SWI	49.50.0
6.	F. Ernest CLARKE	GBR	49.59.2

But before that milestone was reached, happenings in the heats had made it reasonably certain that walking would not remain in the Games. The trouble developed over variations in the interpretation of walking and over difficulties in language. When an Austrian was ruled out, he appealed to the Jury on the grounds that he did not speak the language of the Judges who had disqualified him and had not understood the warnings they had given him. The jury agreed with the walker, over-ruled the Judges and ordered that the Austrian should compete in the second heat. The result was obvious. The panel of Judges resigned, and a new one had to be found before the event could go on. It only wanted something like this to happen, coupled with earlier troubles, and the fate of walking in the Games seemed sealed.

With the future of walking now in doubt, Frigerio travelled to America in 1925. There, he had a most successful indoor season, being the first European walker to compete on the small board circuits. He returned to Europe to find that walking had indeed been ruled out of the 1928 Amsterdam Games. He immediately retired. The 1928 Olympics came and went with no racewalks and no Frigerio.

Fortunately there followed a change in walking fashions. The popularity of road walking was increasing and British officials came together and put in a bid for a road event to be included. It was accepted and the first Olympic Road Walk was announced, over 50 km, at Los Angeles in 1932.

Frigerio now returned to training. He won the 1931 Italian 10,000m walk title and then travelled to England and won the English Amateur Athletics 7 Mile championship. He was duly selected to represent Italy in the 1932 Olympics but this time the short distance track walker had to reinvent himself as a 50 km distance walker.

Now over 30 years of age, Frigerio was still the same happy type, full of enthusiasm and confident he could win. He had not allowed, however for the great British interest in this event and their determination to win it. British hopes were pinned on a stocky, cheery little Belgrave harrier from Eastleigh, Tommy Green, who was nearly 40. He won by nearly seven minutes in tropical conditions from Dalinsch (Latvia) with Frigerio third.

Men 50km. Walk. Olympic Games 1932, PARIS

1.	Thomas GREEN	GBR	4.50.10
2.	Janis DALINS	LAT	4.57.20
3.	Ugo FRIGERIO	ITA	4.59.06
4.	Karl HAHNEL	GER	5.06.06
5.	Ettore RIVOLTA	ITA	5.07.39
6.	Paul SIEVERT	GER	5.16.41
7.	Henri QUINTRIC	FRA	5.27.25
8.	Ernest CROSBIE	USA	5.28.02

For Frigerio, it was a wonderful walk and gained him his fourth Olympic medal. He remains even today one of the greatest Olympic walkers of all time. Returning to Italy, he retired again, well satisfied with his achievements.

In 1934, he wrote his autobiography, titled *Marciando nel nome dell'Italia (Walking in the Name of Italy)* and went on to contribute valuable work on the International Walking commission.

When he died on 7 July 1968 at 67 years of age, he was regarded in Italy as a National Treasure.