

KEN MATTHEWS

Club member Len Duquemin recently gave me a newspaper article, dated Monday 8 June 1964, about one of Ken Matthew's many memorable races and I thought that, rather than simply focus on that article, it was time to put fingers to keyboard and paint a bigger picture of the remarkable career of this English and World champion.

Kenneth ("Ken") Joseph Matthews was born on 21 June 1934 in Birmingham. An electrician at a power station near his hometown of Sutton Coldfield, he became one of England's most successful ever racewalkers and dominated the world stage throughout the early 1960's.

He did not dominate as a youngster and it was not until 1959 that he won his first British titles – the RWA's 10 miles road title and the AAA's 2 miles and 7 miles track titles. ¹ From then on, he was pretty much unbeatable in England but the British race most people remember is, interestingly, a loss rather than a victory.

In spectacle, excitement and sheer athleticism, the 1960 AAA 2 mile duel between Stan Vickers and Matthews stands comparison with any of the great races in the history of the championships. Scrupulously fair, yet at the fastest pace ever seen in Britain, the two kept within a yard or so of each other, Matthews leading until the bell, when Vickers powered past to cut 9 sec from George Lamer's 56-year-old record, with 13:02.4, and Matthews, 13:09.6, also inside the old figures. ²



Vickers beats Matthews in the 1960 AAA 2 Mile Championship

That same year, Matthews modernized the championship best for 7 miles with a breakthrough winning time of 49:42.6.

Expectations soared for the 1960 Olympic Games with Vickers already European champion over 20 km (1958) and still improving, and Matthews even faster. But Matthews, weakened by a recent bout of flu, wilted in the Rome sun. Vickers, concerned about his team-mate, eased his pace, until Matthews, who was shortly after taken to hospital, urged him on. Vickers finished in the bronze medal position, less than a minute down on the winner.

Matthews consigned his first Olympic disappointment to experience and prepared for the next Games. In 1961, he won the Lugano Cup 20 km event, in 1962, he won the European 20 km title and in 1963 he won the Lugano Cup 20 km again, thereby becoming the unbackable favourite for 1964 Olympic Gold. He was also unbeatable on the local English front and by 1964, he had raised his tally of AAA titles to ten.

Recently, Ken told Mark Wall an interesting story about his Tokyo Olympic preparation. The Electricity board gave

¹ Luckily, although the 10,000m walk had been taken off the Olympic program after 1952, track walks remained on the AAA championship schedule and served as a useful speed test for road walkers and brought their skills before a public who would not otherwise see them.

² Much of the information in this article is taken from *The Official Centenary of the AAA* by Peter Lovesy, 1979

him Wednesday afternoons off to train but he found it a waste of time after a few weeks so went back to working a full week. It was indeed still the day of the amateur sportman!

In the 1964 Olympics, he felt he would win only if his wife, Sheila, could join him in Tokyo. His mates agreed and collected £742 to send her along. Sure enough, he took the lead after 5 km and was never headed he crossed the finish line far ahead of the others. In an unforgettable Olympic moment, his wife Shiela broke through stadium security, rushed onto the track, and gave her husband what was probably the longest victory kiss in Olympic history. At the post race interview, Matthews said, *"My legs hurt me at the end of the race. They still do. But I wouldn't mind going dancing now."*

Golubnichiy, although still the world record holder, could not match Matthews and faded to third, his second Olympic medal. Sixth place finisher Ron Zinn died in the Vietnam War less than nine months later. He was 26 years old. 3 Australians competed in the event with Noel Freeman finishing just outside the medals in 4th place.

1.	Ken MATTHEWS	GBR	1:29:34.0	OR
2.	Dieter LINDNER	GDR	1:31:13.2	
3.	Vladimir GOLUBNICHYI	SOV	1:31:59.4	
4.	Noel FREEMAN	AUS	1:32:06.8	
5.	Gennady SOLODOV	SOV	1:32:33.0	
6.	Ronald ZINN	USA	1:32:43.0	
7.	Boris KHROLOVICH	SOV	1:32:45.4	
8.	John EDGINGTON	GBR	1:32:46.0	
22.	Ron CRAWFORD	AUS	1:38:47	
	Robert GARDINER	AUS	DNF	



Ken Matthews powers down the final straight to victory in Tokyo



and was then embraced by his wife in a moment that was captured for posterity

Matthews was one of four British athletes who won Gold in these Games. Three were awarded M.B.E.s. The fourth, Matthews, was not. The reason was never really known and it was not till 14 years later that the injustice was rectified

and he belatedly received his award.³

Matthews held the unofficial world best for 5 miles (34min. 21.2sec.) and 10 miles plus every U.K. record from 5 miles to two hours. Every year from 1959 to 1964 he won the RWA's 10 miles road title and in 1959, 1961, 1963 and 1964 won both the AAA's 2 miles and 7 miles track titles. There were no other titles he could win because the Commonwealth Games did not feature race walking at that time.

Nowadays, Ken lives in Wrexham. He has long since packed up his walking shoes but was still an enthusiastic cyclist at 70 years of age when interviewed on the occasion of the 2000 Olympic Games. He appears occasionally at Midlands walking events and the Ken Matthews trophy is awarded to the highest point scoring Midlands team in the RWA titles.

And finally to the newspaper cutting that Len passed onto me. It is dated Monday 6 June 1964 and tells the story of one of his most famous record breaking walks in the leadup to the 1964 Olympic Games.

Britain's No. 1 Pedestrian

If you think you can beat him to the bus, look at these figures

- Seven Miles in 48:22.2 (British and Empire Records)
- Eight Miles 1,151 yards in an hour (British and Empire Records)
- Ten Miles in 1:09:40.6 (British and Empire Records)
- 20 Kilometres in 1:28:45.8 (British and Empire Records)
- 15 Miles in 1:52:14.4 (British National Record)
- 15 Miles 1,556 yards 1 foot in two hours (British and Empire Records)

Ken Matthews is a pedestrian who moves so fast you feel he ought to put money in a parking meter when he does stand still.

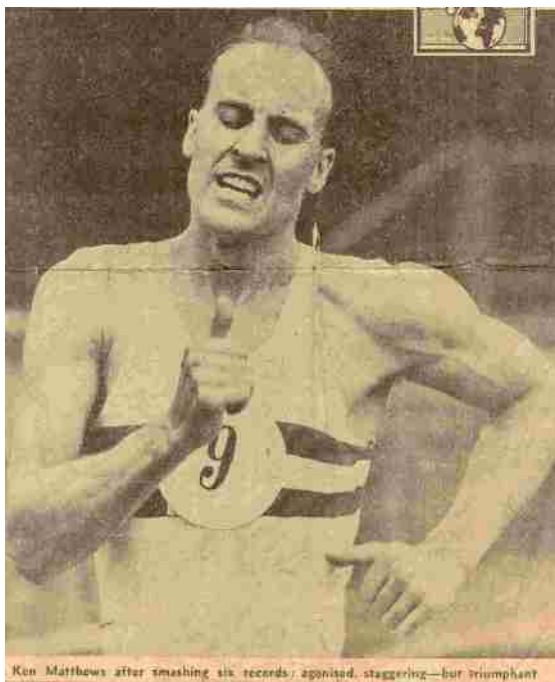
At the weekend he walked his way through six records : seven miles, 1 hour, ten miles, 20 km, 15 miles and 2 hours.

Round the track at Walton-on-Thames he first skimmed then plugged along, finally staggered.

But by the end of it, he confirmed that he is Britain's outstanding Olympic gold medal challenger for Tokyo.

Two of the records he broke had stood in Britain for 50 years.

Yet after it all, Matthews confessed he was disappointed. "I was aiming for the world record at 20 kilometres, but a few laps from it, my legs went. On the 47th lap he staggered and appeared ready to collapse. His wife Shiela ran to the centre of the stadium and, running alongside – that's the only way to keep up with Matthews when he's walking – asked if he was all right. Another competitor, Enfield policeman Charlie Fogg, drew alongside Matthews and from there to the end, pleaded with him to keep going. And Matthews did. At the end Matthews, a 29 year old electrical maintenance man from Sutton Coldfield, had lost 5lb. From his 6ft. 1in. Frame.



³ The other three 1964 British Gold Medallists were Lynn Davies (men's long jump), Mary Rand (women's long jump) and Ann Packer (women's 800m)