

## 1 THE HISTORY OF RACE WALKING

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## CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EARLY RACE WALKING CAREER?

It was quite a rocky one. I was Junior champion and I was also Senior champion at 10km and 10 miles. Then I got shin splints for 10 years and they didn't see any way out. I was still racing clubwise but I could only train 2 or 3 times a week and then the doctor at Roehampton Hospital found this new operation. So I was the second person who went in and in those days it was 10 days on each leg. So I had the operation in August and October 1971 and within 3 months I was British Champion again. It was one of those incredible things actually and by then I was in the Olympic team.

## HOW DID YOU PREPARE FOR THE GAMES?

Diet wasn't really looked on much in those days – I mean my colleague Paul Nihill literally won an Olympic medal on burgers and chips. I mean that was his whole diet! Not a good precedent nowadays. We were actually sent to St Moritz. First time we went was in April before the Olympics for 2 or 3 weeks and then prior to the Olympics they sent us to St Moritz for a month. At altitude, your body has to take in more oxygen to breath and in that way the body forms more haemoglobin in the blood cells which enables you, when you get down to sea level, to take more oxygen in which means you go faster. It was quite early days for altitude training, they knew the benefits but they didn't know all the minor details. And the minor details turned out to be major ones because we came down – I think it was 8 days from altitude before the competition – and it now turns out that that was the worst period. You either came straight down or you came down somewhat later. So we – all the walkers and marathon runners – got what we call the bends during the competition which, OK, wasn't that severe but it made a difference between my colleagues winning medals or not winning medals. So we were all about 10-20% down on performance.

## **YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS AT THE MUNICH GAMES IN 1972?**

I think it was total awe. I mean, apart from two small international competitions this was really my first international and to go to the Olympics on your third international was quite something cos' you wouldn't do it nowadays. You would get a much longer run up to the Olympics. I think it was the pure vastness of it. Of course it was the first major competition in Germany since the Second World War so it was really bringing Germany into the real world. But .... The Olympic stadium was fantastic it was that new revolutionary one with all the glass – but of course your first Olympics, you always do

## **MEMORIES OF YOUR 20KM RACE?**

I mean for me I was almost physically sick – and I understand this is fairly common in major championships. I can remember just having a bowl of cornflakes and that was about all I could get down. And going to a stadium with 80,000 people there – it was something I'll always remember for the rest of my life.

The international regulations for courses are no longer than a 2km loop. So its sometimes quite difficult when you've got a stadium to go out of onto a course because most stadiums are around major roads so they have to close off all the major roads.

So this one in particular went into a park and it was a pretty haphazard course because there were planks of wood across little streams that you had to race to get into this park and back again. I think, looking back at it, it was only my third ever 20km race and I suppose, looking back, it was just a matter of finishing – not racing, that's the difference

I remember in 1972 and 76 we were going to East Germany to train to find out what their secret methods were – unknown to us it was called drugs. And although it's unfair to completely blanket all the athletes with taking drugs, friends of mine in East Germany had no choice. They had to take the drugs or they were just dropped. So, yes, some of the world records still stand in track and field and also in race walking and although you can't prove it, it was fairly obvious they were on drugs.

## **CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE ISRAELI HOSTAGE INCIDENT?**

We didn't know anything it until I had a phone call from my mother on the day it happened and said, " How are you?" And I said "Why? What's happened?" and she said that the Israelis have been killed and attacked and we didn't know anything about it and even during the whole games we never actually saw what part of the village – I think the Israelis even then were separated because there was a security risk up to a point but, yeah, we didn't know, didn't hear any gunfire. I think that part of the village was surrounded by tanks but we never saw or heard them.

Before the incident, the security was virtually non-existent. You had a pass round your neck but you could pass that over to anyone to get into the village, it was that easy. Literally the day it happened, the security completely changed. There wasn't the bomb checking machines like there is now but the whole village was surrounded by soldiers and armed police. That was the last of the old type games.

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There was a great pressure to cancel the Games. They stopped the Games to think about it and then they realised that they were giving in to the pressure of terrorism even

.... I think that was the first time we had a terrorist attack – so the next day they had a memorial service actually in the stadium. Obviously, it was a non-denomination one but I remember it was very dour. So the day after, the Games started again

## 1976 – MONTREAL

After the Munich Games, it wasn't all sports but the Olympic Association tried to reduce numbers and one of the events – including swimming – was the 50km walk. We actually led the fight back in England because there was no particular reason why the 50km walk should have come out. So we actually had protests going into Parliament. We actually marched from Westminster to the Houses of Parliament – 200 or 300 people – to meet the then Minister of Sport, Dennis Howell. And eventually, we flew people to all over the world to OAC meetings. And it was too late for Montreal because they'd actually got the programme sorted out but the time Moscow came, it was back in because the Russians were favourites to win in the 50km in Moscow. And since then it's in.

In those days you could take reserves to certain events and I went there as a reserve but I was also standing for the first time for the membership of the IAAF (International Amateur Athletics Federation) So I was standing to be a member of the walking committee there. Britain still had quite a big standing in the world so virtually anybody from Britain who stood on any committee got on. I didn't do any lobbying at all for 76. I was so naïve, I didn't really know what I was standing for but my Federation put my name forward – I got on and I've been there ever since.

## CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE JUDGING PROCESS FOR RACE WALKING?

In Olympics and World Cup Championships the competitions are always held in either a 1km or 2km loop. That way the judges can decide whether they are breaking the rules. There's normally 8 judges on the course of a 2 km loop which is either up and down or round. Those 8 judges are selected by a governing body 3 or 4 years in advance and there's only one comes from each country. So Great Britain can only have one and they judge independently so they have ... if they decide there's an infringement. They have an electronic system now which ... they just punch in the athlete's number and it goes directly to the Chief Judge. Then it goes back onto an electronic score board saying number 21 has got an infringement. When there's three infringements come up from 3 independent judges, then the athlete is disqualified or eliminated. But the other judges do not know what the other judges have sent in. So you would see people on the loop – if you've ever seen the Olympics – so you'll have these judges round the course deciding if the person is breaking the rule. But it is an opinion again. So that is why they have 3 independent judges to decide.

## HAS THE SPORT CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

It's changed completely now. I mean up to 1972 it was very much a European sport, very much British, Italian. And it was more like a marching event –if that's the word – if you think of it as race walking even though it was particularly fast. The Eastern block had just started spreading their wings but they also walked in the same technique as most European countries but suddenly Mexico arrived and the whole technique changed.

People called it straight leg running because to race walk you're supposed to have one foot on the ground at one particular moment. Their technique made it very difficult to judge the point of contact so there was some controversy in race walking because the judges couldn't tell if the person was lifting or not and because all the videos and cameras were coming out

showing the walkers what they call 'off the ground'. So they changed the rules – very conveniently – to judging from the human eye because they did actually take counsel on whether you could use video cameras and the Council said you can but you've got to video or film every athlete for every step of the way in the whole competition to make it feasible. And in a 50km race – impossible.

### **WHY THE DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF UK RACE WALKERS?**

A lot of it goes back to the police you see because the police were always part of race walking, they used to do .... The police, the RAF and the Stock Exchange were the major groups of race walkers from the turn of the century to about 1980. So we took most of our recruits from there but now everything's got rather difficult with the police, you can't have time off for training so it's somewhat depleted now

Schools had this great competitive side to them for many, many years and, for whatever reason, Government then decided that they wanted to lose the competitive side of schools and not only race walking suffered but all sports suffered. Not even 'taking part' was part of the schools .... It was looked on as almost indecent to compete so you've lost one or two generations now. It's gradually coming back but it's difficult.

### **2012 – WHAT WILL YOUR INVOLVEMENT BE?**

Obviously at my age now – I'm 69 this year – Beijing was my last Olympics although I'm doing Berlin this year for my last world championships but in 2012 I will be an advisor. London Marathon Company will be organising all the out stadia events – the walks and the marathon – and the last I heard about a week ago that because there were a couple of major roads between the stadium and the proposed course, it was going to be almost impossible to close off these roads. So I understand its going down the Mall which for race walkers is going to be fantastic because doing a 2 km loop, it would go down towards Buckingham Palace, turn round – I think it's the Victoria memorial – and back again. So, yes, for the publicity side it's going to be tremendous. And of course, the women's volleyball – no the women's beach, women's volleyball, is going down there as well. So I think that's going to be an even bigger attraction than race walking.