

ALSO RANS REAL HEROES OF RACE

Late Marathon Finishers Must Brush Aside Ribbing Fans as They Struggle to Tape

BY GERRY HERN

To many an outlander visiting with us today the ankling exhibition sponsored by the Boston Athletic Association will seem to be a barbarian spectacle staged because of some weird tribal custom and consisting of young and old men of varied athletic abilities running slightly over 26 miles for the privilege of a hot shower at the end of that distance. Even to the quick and casual local surveyor the affair leans heavily to the eccentric side, but those among us who have been raised and nurtured on the idea that Paul Revere and the Marathon winner of that particular year shared the ballyhoo of April 19th, the event is the most appealing of the sports year.

A Marathoner is by nature an obscure man. Fame touches him lightly one day a year and then passes on to someone possibly less worthy and certainly less of a dreamer. To run 26 miles, 385 yards is in itself a feat. There are scoffers who say it is not an athletic feat but only a demonstration of a man's ability to withstand fatigue and pain. There are others who point out that the race is merely a survival of ancient days when there was no better means of communication and as such should have been discontinued long ago. No matter what the opposition says, the runners in this classic of foot racing can always answer, "At least we're amateurs."

AMATEUR ATHLETES KICKED AROUND

The amateur ideal has been pretty badly kicked around lately. College football players used to be considered amateurs and those who are wealthy or inept still are, but football players of the same financial standing as Marathoners aren't amateurs. Amateur fighters are only relatively amateur.

They fight more often than professionals and for a lot less. Indoor track stars can write their own figures on expense accounts. But these lean-shanked men who plod their even way from Hopkinton to Exeter st., Boston, pay \$1 to enter the race and receive in return a cloth-backed number identifying them as contestants, a free ride to Hopkinton, the use of a bench in the dressing room and a free bus ride for their street clothes back to Boston. Almost forgotten was the piece of soap, some hot water if they finish within the first 50 performers and a beef stew, rolls and milk.

You ask what more could a man want for just 26 miles and 385 yards? You jest. The Marathoners want, and get, more than that. They have the great pleasure of notifying themselves that once again they have mastered the internal impulse which tells them to quit, to stop at the side of the road for a few minutes and cool their steaming feet or to wait at the side of the road for the B. A. A. bus which picks up as many stragglers as wish to hang up their hopes.

To the hundreds of thousands of people who will wall the route from Framingham on, the Marathon is primarily the battle for the lead, the crafty jockeying for position behind the pace setter and the tortuous struggle on the hills of Newton. But the men engaged in that are merely the possible winners. They are the men whose photos will adorn the newspapers. They are the men who are the skilled, talented athletes of the day. They are the men to whom the day of glory comes easily because they have planned on it or hoped for it.

TARGETS FOR COMEDIANS

But the people who make the Marathon a great spectacle are not the front runners or place winners but are the simple, unspoiled runners who have no intention of finishing the course in less than four hours. By the time their pattering feet go through Kenmore sq. the police detail will have been disbanded and the only audience will be strays returning from the Braves doubleheader. A few comedians who missed their vocation in life will holler, "Do you think you'll make it," or "Don't hurry, we're leaving the track down all night," but that won't bother these weary, footsore but not beaten, travelers.

If they weren't so arm-heavy they would wiggle their extended hand from the end of their nose and give raucous answers to the jibes. But they aren't dismayed by the comments. The Marathoners are doing what not very many men have ever done, run steadily for 26 miles. It may not be a great accomplishment when stacked up against deeds of valor in combat or works of great value to the human race but by the ordinary standards of ordinary men, it is something big, something unforgettable for one who has done it.

And for one day in the year of 1947 men of little except family reknown become unusual personages—competitors in the Marathon! Only 184 will start and less than 100 will finish. That in itself creates an aristocracy. So, you see there's more than a hot shower and a bowl of beef stew at the finish for the Marathoner.