NOT SO FAST

By PERCY C. MADEIRA

(Amateur One-Mile Champion of America, 1884)

I had come a long way to see that mile race. A long way, that is, for a man seventy-three years old. I had read about Cunningham, Bonthron, Venzke and Lovelock. I had read about 4:10 miles and 4:05 miles and even 4:06 miles, and my curiosity had got the better of me. I wanted to see what manner of men these were who were waggling their fingers derisively at Father Time.

I have never lost interest in running. I couldn't have lost interest if I had wanted to. For, thirty years after I hung up my spiked shoes, my son Loui ran in the general direction of the horse tracks. I ran around city blocks to get wind, and I developed my muscles in a gym, swinging Indian clubs and dumbbells. As for diet, this was what I was told to do:

"Keep out of the dust, or, when you are in it, put a handkerchief over your nose and mouth, so that you will not breathe dust. Little or no water, confine yourself if possible to a glass a day. Very rare beef and mutton; go easy on vegetables and fruit. Cut out sugar, drink tea instead of coffee at your meals, stale bread, or toast, without butter."

That was my "scientific" diet, but I did not follow it.

Instead of the oval ribbon of pressed einders in the Palmer Stadium, I saw the track marked out on the grass at the old Germantown Cricket Club, where the University of Pennsylvania held a meet. The track was marked out on the cricket pitch by stakes and a rope. A lot of the contestants didn't have spiked shoes. They ran in tennis shoes or sneakers. The fans stood up to look and walked around.

That night when I reached home after watching Lovelock's victory, I got out my pencil and paper and did some figuring. Lovelock, Cunningham, Venzke and Bonthron had not had piano-wire-and-rubber legs and streamlined bodies at all. Their legs were no longer, their muscles were no stronger, their lungs and hearts no bigger than the muscles and lungs and hearts of the men I had run with fifty years before. They lived no cleaner. They worked no harder to get themselves into shape. I have checked on these points. "What have they got," I asked myself, "that we didn't have?"

Looking Backward

The gun coughed once more. This time for the "gun lap." Lovelock finished first. The hands of the big electric clock at one end of the field showed approximately four minutes and twelve seconds, and the crowd muttered. They were disappointed. They had come to see a world's record broken. They had come to accept broken world's records as a matter of course.

I didn't see the runners walk off the track and pick up their sweaters and sweat pants. I didn't see the barbered and maneuvered track with each wrinkle pressed out of it by a steam roller. I didn't see feet reaching out spiked shoes of kangaroo hide to pull in the einders, limbs glistening with wintergreen and oil from the rubbers' hands, and fat stomachs filled with the remnants of a scientifically prepared meal eaten at just the proper interval before the race. I saw a different scene. There was no Ted Husing in it, telling unseen millions of a close finish, through a portable sending set. There were no 40,000 spectators sitting on the slope of a concrete bowl, looking through binoculars and holding expensive souvenir programs.

I saw a skinny boy with legs so long he seemed to be split almost to his collar button. He was lugging a battered leather satchel over cobblesstones. He climbed into a horsecar which ran in the general direction of a trotting-horse track. I saw him running on a dirt track in a pair of sneakers, and afterward putting on his street clothes over the dirt and sweat, because there were no showers. Then he went home in the horsecar once more.

Sneaker Versus Spike

That boy was myself. The time was 1879. During the week when I couldn't go to the horse tracks, I ran around city blocks to get wind, and I developed my muscles in a gym, swinging Indian clubs and dumbbells. As for diet, this was what I was told to do:

"Keep out of the dust, or, when you are in it, put a handkerchief over your nose and mouth, so that you will not breathe dust. Little or no water, confine yourself if possible to a glass a day. Very rare beef and mutton; go easy on vegetables and fruit. Cut out sugar, drink tea instead of coffee at your meals, stale bread, or toast, without butter."

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After a while I figured it out.

The answers may not satisfy you. But they satisfied me, and I don't think that it is merely the wish being father to the thought.

I realize that if there is one thing more fruitless and futile in sports writing than another, it is one of these imaginary contests on paper about the champions of a bygone day and the champions of today. But even knowing that, I'm going to take a crack at it. We know how fast the present-day crop of trackmen can run, and we know how fast the old-timers could run. Or do we? That last question is what I am getting at.

As far as the sports writers and track fans of today are concerned, the debate is ended before it begins. They say, "All you've got to do is look at the records. Cunningham and Hornbostel and Eastman and Peacock would make them all look as if they were running in sand up to their ankles."

To the people who talk like that, I have only one thing to say: "Sometimes they did run in sand up to their ankles." I ran a race on the old track of the Williamsburg Athletic Club, at Brooklyn, on September 27, 1884. The Spirit of the Times said, in its follow-up story of the meet, "The track in many places was nothing but sand, ankle deep, through which the runners had to wade."

But what about the results of my paper and pencil and figuring?

First, I told myself, they have faster tracks. The tracks of today are constructed by track engineers with a base of heavy einders, a layer of clay and a
layer of fine cinders on top. They are planned for resilience and spring. They are planned to drain easily. They are swept and rolled before big races. They are cared for constantly, every day, until they are like billiard tables.

According to Mr. William J. Bingham, Director of Athletics at Harvard University, it has been estimated that the present stadium track is about six seconds faster than the first Harvard stadium track, the one built in 1897.

Lawson Robertson, the Olympic coach, who knows more about track athletics than any other man I know, is of the opinion that the track in the Olympic Stadium at Los Angeles, which has a base of peat, is some seconds faster than the Harvard track.

It was on a fifth-of-a-mile track, with two more turns to the mile than the modern quarter-mile track, that the early Intercollegiate Association and the National Association held their meets.

Second, today we have tenth-of-a-second stop watches. Fifty years ago, the stop watches cut the seconds into quarters, later into fifths, and now into tenths. If a man ran a hundred yards in nine and eight-tenths seconds fifty years ago, his time would be recorded as ten seconds. In order to get a better record, he would have had to run fast enough to register nine and three-fourths, and he might have had to run it in nine and six-tenths to have cut his official time down to nine and three-fourths seconds.

I asked Lawson Robertson what advantage it would be fair to say the tenth-second stop watch gives the present-day runner, and he said, "The advantage would be about two-tenths of a second."

Third, the modern crouching start. All races used to have the leaning or crouching start when I was running. Mike Murphy, who developed the crouch start, used to say it was worth a tenth of a second to a runner. Robertson thinks it is worth more than a tenth of a second.

Fourth, the 220 used to be run around a curve, and the start was at the beginning of the curve. The lanes were not staggered; in fact, there were no lanes. The result was a crowding of the contestants, a jostling and pushing and elbowing, and an inability really to get under way until the straightaway was reached. A man on the outside sometimes had to run yards farther than a man on the pole. I asked Robertson to figure the time advantage the modern 220 straightaway gave a runner.

"One full second," he said.

I asked him, "What about the elimination of one curve from the quarter mile? We used to run it around two curves. By the time the runners have hit the first curve now, they are staggered out, and all scrambling and jockeying has been eliminated."

Robertson thinks that a man running a quarter around one curve instead of two has a time advantage of eight-tenths of a second before he even steps on the track.

In addition to these things, I thought of others, no less important to my mind. As a matter of fact, perhaps more important than improved tracks, crouching starts and tenth-second watches.

First, expert coaching. Second, competition. Third, a new mental ceiling.

**Educating Feet**

The clubs, colleges, universities, high schools and prep schools of today employ men whose business it is to polish and perfect the form of the young men under them. They know about rhythm, timing, co-ordination and obtaining a maximum result from the minimum effort. They make sure that their teams will go into a race at the peak of conditions. No coach or manager took care of all the petty and annoying little details of buying tickets, arranging hotel accommodations, transportation to and from the meet, and of seeing that our baggage was in the dressing room for us when we got there. No manager kept an eye on the progress of the meet and saw to it that we were warmed up in time and out on the track to report to the clerk of the course.

(Continued on Page 77)
The following table gives the theoretical performance of 1886 and the actual performance of 1935:

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
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*No curve, eight-tenths second eliminated.

If these adjustments are correct, it would appear that the men of fifty years ago ran nearly as fast as the men of 1935. The greatest discrepancy appears to be in the half mile, for the men of today run this relatively faster than the other distances. Robertson tells me it was only about twenty years ago that men really learned how to run the half mile.

The rules under which the shot and hammer were thrown fifty years ago are different from the rules in force today, so that no comparison is possible in these events.

The hurdles are now run over individual barriers and in individual lanes. Each hurdle is built so that it tips over when it is touched, without necessarily breaking a hurdler's stride. In my day, there was one stiff bar all the way across the track, held by rigid supports at each end, so that if a hurdler tipped it he would fall, the hurdles being marked and no individual hurdles for each man, running and jumping. The idea was to make the hurdles clear and it with plenty to spare. They sailed through the air at it, and not until the individual hurdle came into that men really learned how to run the half mile. With this odd sail the hurdler didn't come down run, as he does today. There was a distinct pause after each hurdle while he gathered himself for the run to the next hurdle.

Track athletics fifty years ago were confined to a few Eastern colleges, New York amateurs, Oxford and Cambridge universities in England, the Irish universities, and the Harriers, Myers, of the Manhattan Athletic Club, W. H. Goodwin, of Harvard; H. S. Brooks, Jr., of Yale; H. H. Lee, of the University of Pennsylvania; and W. G. George, of England. But their names were magic names to conjure with fifty years ago. Whenever men gathered for athletic conversation, their feats were hashed over and discussed and marveled at.

Horace Lee ran the hundred in ten flat on grass, and he had a way of beating the other ten-second men by a couple of yards. An old professional runner, Scotty McMaisters, told me how he had frequently timed Lee in better than ten seconds, and he warned me that a cut of a quarter of a second. "Even time" for the hundred was reached as early as 1878. The ten-second mark was set as a sort of barrier. It was universally agreed that no man could run faster than that, and many a clocker holding a watch on men like Lee, Sudoku. And he would never believe his own eyes when the hands showed a fraction less than ten flat, and, rather than be laughed at, would put down as incompetent timers, announced the number only about 500 were good enough to enter a track-championship meet. Today, in Germany alone, there are upwards of 350,000 men taking an active part in track and field athletics, and in America there must be 1,000,000. There are only a few old-timers like myself who have ever heard of Wendell Baker, of Harvard; L.E.

And we paid our own expenses.

Competition today is sharply different in this respect from competition of my day. The number of contestants in one of our national championships of today would be about equal to the number of spectators in an average meet of fifty years ago. The number of athletes who competed in a fixture like the Penn Relays last year was greater than all the track athletes in the world when I first ran in a race. The modern Olympic Games were years away. The number and quality of competition today cannot but force each athlete to faster and faster times by sheer pressure of numbers, if by nothing else. And last, but not least, there is the matter of a competitive mental ceiling. When a young man of today steps out onto the track to run a quarter mile, he does so with the knowledge that a human being has run the distance in forty-six and a fraction seconds. In his mind, consciously or subconsciously, he tells himself, "If Bill Carr and Ben Eastman can do it, I can do it."

The dash man of today thinks in terms of nine and two-fifths and nine and two-fifths seconds. Robertson, who agrees that I have watched the decorative art of athletics, as incompetent timers. Announced the number and quality of competitors today from the competition of my day. The number of athletes in an average meet of fifty years ago. The number of contestants in one of the many meets each year would be about equal to the number in track and field athletics, and in America there must be 1,000,000. There are only a few old-timers like myself who have ever heard of Wendell Baker, of Harvard; L.E.

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The quarter-mile track was measured by Mrs. Talbot, and was accepted by several Harvard students, and there is no possibility of error in their length.

Wendell Baker noted that his left shoe was split down a little at the heel, and called his attention to it, but there being no clerks at hand and as he thought he would risk it in the quarter mile. At the start of the quarter, Goldie said, "I do not think this shoe is good with that shoe;" but Baker answered, "I can't help myself, and must try it." At the quarter yard mark, timekeepers that Baker was in trouble with his shoe. At 250 yards he began to try to pick it up, and succeeded a little further down, measurement subsequently made to where the shoe fell after he threw it off almost entirely. But he said afterwards, "I was behind, it occurred to me that perhaps he was tired, too, and his mouth was full of cotton wool just as mine was. That thought set me on like a stimulant, and I speeded up. Yeomans only went one-half of the way and stopped. There was still one of the lights in sight; and he said, "Now, there's one mile."

This clipping brings home the point that the old system of taking the slowest time if the matches disagreed. Nowadays it is customary to take the middle watch time if three or more watches are stopped with varying figures.

**A Great Athlete's Speed Formula**

I. E. Myers was at the top of the athletic ladder in those days, or at least he was until Wendell Baker cast his shadow over the events. He won eight national championships in his time. Fifteen in the United States, ten in Canada and three in England.

Like all of the stars of his day, he worked out his own theories on running. He had no one to tell him, no hints. He never figured to figure things out for himself. One day he let me in on his secret. It still has the ring of genius to me.

He said: "Don't run on the ground; run over it. Lengthen your stride and reach for the ground in front of you, so that you pull yourself over the ground instead of pushing yourself over it. You must develop your body muscles, for you cannot lift your leg with any muscular effort from the body. Wife next winter in the gymnarnasium—lifting your knees as high as possible in front of you, throwing your feet back as far as you comfortably can. This will develop the body muscles and increase the stride, for the fewer steps you take, the more you cover in a given distance.

After working out Myers' training ideas in the gym all winter, I found I could run easier. With him I would get in the one minute of the American Athletic Club's Spring Handicapes Games on June 7, 1884. It was the first time I had ever run in New York. I can still feel the fresh and lonely sensation that engulfed me on the elevated train to the Mott Haven grounds at 150th Street. I can still recall how scared I was. I had heard the announcement advertising the fact that E. M. Yeomans would attempt to beat the American record for the mile run that afternoon. The stories of the race seemed ten feet high to me. There couldn't be any larger letters in the world. There were eight entries for the mile, with Yeomans on scratch. I was given twenty yards on Yeomans. The others were given from fifty to forty yards from myself.

Yeomans caught up with me in the first hundred yards, and together we were with the other man, waiting for Yeomans to dash ahead and make that advertised new world's record, but when we were 150 yards from home, I knew Yeomans was ahead of me. I was in the second place, thinking he was going to win. But he slowed down, and behind me, it occurred to me that perhaps he was tired, too, and his mouth was full of cotton wool just as mine was. That thought set me on a stimulant, and I speeded up. Yeomans only went one-half of the way and stopped. There was still one of the lights in sight and he said, "Now, there's one mile."

I can remember only one occasion in which I was more nervous than before that race with Yeomans. Burr W. McIntosh organized the Keystone Athletic Club, of Pittsburgh, and invited various trackmen from the East to the inaugural meet. When I arrived there I found a notice on the track that said for me and that I was supposed to do an exhibition run, either the mile or half mile. I said I would like to do the mile, and then Yeomans was supposed to run in and the race. They were to keep the watch running, and I was to do the mile. I refused as firmly as I could, since I knew nothing of heel-and-toe walking.

Training in the Art of Jogging

I was in front of my eyes and said that my name was printed in it as walking judge and I couldn't let him down. I should have walked over the entire mile, but this is not necessary. I only had to jog around the track. One represented the gashouse, the other the steel works. So Pittsburg man, of course, refused to do it. I told McIntosh that I wouldn't jog two miles around that horse track and then walk and then jog and then do a mile and walk. I didn't want a track match, nor a two-mile walking match. I refused to run any of these events. I ran the 3000 yard race and the 220-yard dash and the 200-yard dash. I also ran the 200-yard dash with no one to tell me, and my hints fell upon deaf ears.

In the history of athletic sports, Lon Myers is the greatest. He has done what no man ever did, i.e., hold records from 100 yards to 1000 yards.

He also holds the following records:

- **50 yards:** 55.75 seconds
- **75 yards:** 75.36 seconds
- **100 yards:** 101.75 seconds
- **110 yards:** 115.85 seconds
- **120 yards:** 121.25 seconds
- **200 yards:** 202.18 seconds
- **300 yards:** 300.85 seconds
- **400 yards:** 433.85 seconds
- **480 yards:** 489.85 seconds
- **550 yards:** 558 seconds
- **600 yards:** 615.90 seconds
- **900 yards:** 912.90 seconds
- **1000 yards:** 1000.85 seconds

Those records at 50, 75, 100, 110, 120, 200, 300, 400, 450, 500, 600, 880 and 1000 yards were the best ever made by an amateur. Those records were the best made by an American amateur.

I submit that Lon Myers is quite an athlete.

**A Place in the Sun**

In these days of indoor meets which pack Madison Square Garden, of running tracks laid in armories and on the athletic fields of our colleges and universities, the winter months are the time to recognize the American track man. It is hard to visualize the conditions brought out in the foreground to the program of the sixteen annual spring games of the New York Athletic Club held on June 7, 1884.

**The New York Athletic Clubhouse**

It is remarkable that most of our large cities have, as yet, nothing worthy of the name of a first-class gymnasium. The principal gymnasium of New York today is down in a cellar, and so shut in by buildings that the sun has to make violent efforts to get in at all, while the accommodations are indifferent—nothing to what they should be. . . . It is not too much to say that attractive and well-equipped gymnasiums are waiting for them.

The New York Athletic Club proposed to remedy this sad state of affairs by erecting a new clubhouse at the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and 55th Street.

I cannot leave that program without quoting from a remarkable bit of writing which appeared there, called "A Woman's View of Athletics".

**No wonder the old Greeks worshiped the perfect human form. No wonder the Princetonian looked down the ranks of the New York Athletic Club stadium admiring glances with their cheeks flushing as the games progressed.**

"Curses, Assholes, and a Denting..." With my eyes open they were my chance to enjoy the sun of the wild excitement of the moment.

Training innovations were slow in coming. In an old copy of Outing, the advantages and disadvantages of the shower bath for athletes are described:

"Before going further, it may be well to discuss the merits of shower baths for discovering the sweat glands. One man before a shower bath will compare with his, and the probabilities are that no man will. [They hadn't invented the razor yet.] In a month or two the man who has been proved himself the greatest winner at all distances between 100 yards and three-quarters of a mile, as the world ever saw.

He has done what no other man ever did, i.e., hold records from 100 yards to 1000 yards.

In the history of athletic sports, Lon Myers is always and will always be pre-eminent.

No man before the man who stands at the top of his profession will be able to take him if they are repulsive. They do more harm than good if the subject does not take kindly to them, and if there is no:

(Continued on Page 80)
A few drops of 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic

Keep what you've got

A Slick Trick

A few drops of 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic rubbed into the scalp every morning during the summer will counteract the drying effects of hot sun and water...protect and supplement the natural scalp oils...keep the hair in place without looking greasy. Keep a bottle handy at home and one in your locker, and use them regularly.

Vaseline HAIR TONIC

With the regular use of 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic you stand a better chance to keep your hair...and to keep it good looking. Massage it liberally into the scalp before each shampoo to stimulate circulation that feeds the hair roots...to keep the scalp from getting tight and clogged...to soften the hair, prevent and overcome any tendency to dryness and dandruff.

(Continued from Page 78)

question about them being a shock to such an athlete, and continued indulgence in them will affect his vitality...

Some professional trainers forbid shower baths under any consideration, others allow them in moderation.

I think William Byrd Page was one of the most remarkable athletes I ever saw.

I knew him from the time when he was a little boy, when his ankle and knee joints were not strong and he was obliged to wear heavy iron braces from his waist to his feet. When he was about eleven he was given a bicycle. He practically lived on it, and it developed the most beautifully muscled legs I ever saw.

As soon as his legs became useful, he began to high-jump. He fitted up crossbars in his yard and practised for hours.

By the time he went to college in the Class of '87, he was jumping more than five feet. He raised this height until he cleared the bar at six feet, four inches—nine inches over his height, and the world’s record.

He had worked out his own technique. His take-off was from five to six feet from the bar. He approached it in a series of bounds, running straight at it, then gathering himself under the shadow of the bar itself, bounding straight up in the air like a rubber ball, twisting his feet and body in the air and landing facing the bar.

A Grasshopper of the 80’s

How high he could have gone with his natural spring using the modern Western roll, or dive, and with a coach to help him who could teach him all the modern refinements and economy of clearance when clearing the bar, I can’t say. My guess would be that he could have cleared twelve inches over his head instead of nine. I defy the present crop of grasshoppers to better that.

A recent letter from him says that he made a study of cat movements and jumped from a catlike crouch. When he was jumping, a mental picture of a leaping cat was always in his mind.

He says, "When I was about twelve years old and studying to develop a style, I experimented long with the right-hand run to give me a right-side jump. I went higher that way than in any other. This style would, of course, have been ruled out as a dive. Since the head or one shoulder or arm, or perhaps all three, preceded the last leg over. Therefore, I developed the front run with the twist.

Page held one record that has never been challenged: The horse jump. He jumped over two horses seventeen hands high from a level, dead take-off, and landing facing the bar.

In talking of the jump, Page says, "This obstacle being about seven feet wide and five feet eight inches high, required a much stronger push than the ordinary high jump. The distance from take-off to landing was twenty-one feet."

I used to practice for the horse jump by jumping over two sets of high parallel bars, an ugly obstacle to go at cold blood.

I shudder when I think of those parallel bars. A fraction of an inch mistake in judgment and a toe caught in one of the parallel bars, and the man who tries it will never jump again.

Perhaps the most cherished memory of my days as a competitive athlete is mixed up with my part in the making of one of the first motion pictures ever made.

It was photographed at the University of Western Roll-over, or live, and with a coach this natural spring using the modern refinements and economy of clearance.

Mr. Muybridge, who was a Swiss, was commissioned to perfect experiments he had just begun at Leland Stanford University. He was strong and imaginative.

The 781 plates described in the catalogue comprise more than 20,000 figures of men, women, children, animals and birds, all actively engaged in walking, galloping, flying, working, playing, fighting, dancing, or other actions incidental to everyday life, which illustrate motion and the play of muscles.

The photographs were taken at intervals of one-fiftieth of a second, with an exposure not exceeding one five-thousandth part of a second. Mr. Muybridge announced with justifiable pride, "The author believes that with the facilities at his command he will be able, in the completeness of his work, to satisfy the diversified requirements of Art, of Science and of popular interest." I high-jumped, ran, did a hitch and kick, started from a standing start, broad-jumped, did a standing broad jump, and cleared a hurdle for him while the cameras buzzed and clicked like horns on their shelves.

The Dream Track Meet

One of the things Muybridge discovered with his rapid photography was that the front foot of a moving horse is not pointed with toe down, but with toe up. On this he based the paintings and statues of horses from the beginning of time had been wrong. His first photographs were made with wet plates, then with dry plates, and finally with film and then came the movies. All of which is probably aside from the point.

Although I spoke further back in this article about the futility and utter waste of time involved in writing about one of those imaginary contests on paper between athletes of a bygone day and the athletes of today, I guess that is what has been really working inside of me like yeast all along. My legs are not so strong and supple as they once were, but I would travel to the ends of the earth to see a much race between W. G. George and Venzke or Cunningham, a quarter-mile contest between Ben Eastman and Wendell Baker on the Los Angeles Olympic track or the Princeton track, and a high-jumping event in which William Byrd Page and Walter Marty met, with the roll legal, as it is today.

Perhaps it’s just as well that no such track meet will ever be held. I don’t think my arteries could stand it.