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OLD JOHNNY KELLEY, winner of the Boston Marathon in 1935 and 1945, still active at age sixty-one. Photo by Jeff Johnson



PETE MUNDLE, "king" of the Master's Mile, has one lap to go in his mile in the San Diego Meet June 1, 1968. Time: 4:34.3. Photo Murdock

OVER-40 RUNNING and THE MASTERS MILE

BY JAMES HARTSHORNE

The over-40 runner has been around for many years, perhaps almost as long as running itself. In the past his numbers have been relatively few and his efforts were directed largely towards the longer distances which, more often than not, took him out on the inconspicuous side roads for his training and kept him pretty well hidden from the public as well as his fellow runners. When he competed, he was usually buried in the pack so that his younger rivals often overlooked him and the public rarely knew he existed. To the dedicated runner, old or young, such lack of attention is of little significance since loneliness is second nature to distance running.

Few are the great runners of the past who have continued competition after school or college. This, of course, is not peculiar to running but reflects the broader picture of the rapid decline or complete cessation of active sports participation of our young men after leaving their institutions of learning. Indeed, it seems the greater the school athlete the worse his chances of being a model physical specimen in later life. The reasons for this lamentable state of affairs are many. Surely among the most important must be the easy living and many diversions of modern day life that wean us away from the healthier but more rugged discipline of sports competition: the general ignorance and

misconceptions that dictate, even among many of the medical profession, that vigorous exercise is something the adult past 30 would do better to avoid; and the short-sightedness of organized sports in the States that almost completely ignores the senior citizen in its program. Although far from ideal, the Europeans are considerably saner about their approach to organized sports than we are, particularly in regards to where they place the emphasis. Their academic institutions give far less time to sports than the States, allowing the young adult more efficient use of his time for the main purpose of such institutions--learning. After leaving the academic life many young adults--a good number of whom have participated in little, if any, sports while in school--join one of the many available sports clubs to begin work on their bodies at a time in life when it really counts.

Although relatively few in numbers, the Europeans have had sports clubs for the senior athlete for some years now. The Veterans Athletic Club in England, to name but one, was founded in 1931 and has met continuously since its inception... even through the devastating years of World War II. In the States such clubs have been virtually unknown until recently. One of the most active, influential, and fastest

growing clubs of this kind is the Seniors Track Club which operates in the area of Los Angeles. This organization was formed with a handful of men in January 1966 with the main purpose of promoting and establishing events for the over-40 runner. Under the able and forceful leadership of such men as Howard Barnes and Stan Stafford membership has shot to over 150 in just three years. Through affiliation with such organizations as the RRC of America and the German International Older Men's Distance Club they have strengthened their position, and by initiating or co-sponsoring such things as a national age-group cross-country championships and the U.S. Masters T & F Championships (the greatest meet of them all) they have proved their worth as a moving force in the promotion of senior running events.

The Road Runners Club of America, founded in 1957 by the incomparable Browning Ross (who also gives us the Long Distance Log), has given a much needed boost to distance running in this country. It is perhaps only fitting that a branch of this organization under the leadership of such men as Aldo Scandurra and Joe Kleinerman should receive the credit for being the first to give special recognition to the senior runner as a result of their establishing an over-45 age division in many of their RRC meets in the early sixties. Today Kleinerman is running an over-40, over-45, and over-50 division in all of the N.Y. Met RRC weekly races from five miles on up.

Gabe Mirkin with the help of Hugh Jascourt, both medical doctors, started the first "Run For Your Life" program in Baltimore in 1964. The following year, when he moved to nearby Washington, Mirkin began a similar program which, on some meet days, became associated with events sanctioned by the RRC and the AAU. The RFYL runs are by definition non-competitive and open to all except those actively engaged in competition. To reduce the spread in times and make it more interesting to the senior runners, Mirkin soon introduced a system of handicap. Although not ideal, this appeared to be a move in the right direction and soon led to the introduction of age-group runs which culminated in RRC National Championship events specifically for the over-40 runner.

Having grabbed a slice of the cake for their very own, in so far as the longer distance road runs and cross-country events are concerned, the senior runners now turned their attention to the shorter track races. The first Masters Mile ("Masters" being equivalent to "Seniors," "Veterans," or "Old Timers"--listed in order of descending popularity) devised especially for the 40-and-over runner, was born in Balboa Stadium as part of the San Diego Invitational Track & Field Meet on June 11, 1966. Skeptics among the officials questioned the wisdom of such an event lest it produce a dud, or far worse, a cardiac. Fortunately, neither of these fears materialized and the throng of 10,000 that cheered the senior runners through each lap of that mile convinced the skeptics that the Masters Mile was not a lemon but a winner with a refreshing new look. In the surprisingly short span of but two years the Masters Mile has been added to the programs of most of the major track meets in California. That the mile turned out to be the chosen running event adopted for the over-40 group in the majority of these large meets is not surprising since it is short enough to squeeze into many of the already crowded programs and yet long enough for the runners to develop tactical maneuvers and the spectators to generate interest.

On the East coast an aspiring Masters Miler from Ithaca, N.Y. watched the developing trend in the West with more than casual interest. In the winter of 1968 he convinced the necessary officials at Cornell University that it would be a democratic gesture for them to add a Masters Mile to the first annual Cornell Indoor Invitational. Since this was something quite new to the East, an arduous search was necessary to locate the most accomplished senior milers east of the Mississippi. Fearing a dearth of willing milers at this age-level, the promotor was pleasantly taxed to beg for extra program time in order to accommodate over 20 eager senior contestants who would be run in two sections. As the West had already learned, the Masters Mile proved a real success and stole the show. Masters Miles soon appeared in Colby College's Invitational, the DC AAU Championships, and the Danvers Mass. Kiwanis Track Meet; and promises of serious consideration were given for 1969 in the Boston Garden's Mass. K of C Meet, the Heptagonals Championships, and the outdoor Penn. Relays.

The 1969 Mass. K of C Meet held in the Boston Garden was the first real test in the East of the Masters Mile's spectator appeal. The race produced no real stragglers, the lead was passed about among three of the main contenders, and the finish produced a real cliff-hanger that witnessed Ted Vogel, 1948 Olympic marathoner, "out-chest" Jim Hartshorne for the winner's circle. Sixty-one-year-old Johnny Kelley, better known as "Mr. Marathon" or "Ol' Kel," was the only man lapped and then only on the last lap. The crowd cheered enthusiastically throughout



JAMES HARTSHORNE wins the mile event in the Heptagonal Games over Joseph Burns with 4:46.0. Dr. Sheehan followed with 4:47.7 (a National best for 50-year-olds). Photo by Tom Hartshorne



(Above) Master's Mile at the "Cow" Palace with 440 to go. No. 9=Bill Fitzgerald (1st) with 4:51.2. No. 2=Don Pickett (3rd) with 4:55.7. No. 3=Bill Mackey (4th) with →



4:56.0. Not shown Gene Haynes (2nd) with 4:54.0. John Cherry was fifth also under 5:00 - 4:58.8. (Above) Start of the race in San Francisco. Photos by Jeff Kroot

the race and on Ol' Kel's last lap they rose to their feet with shouts of approval to bring him home in the impressive time of 5:19. The press was most responsive to the event and trumpeted such phrases as "brought down the house" and "hit of the year."

Jim Gorrell (47), a bread salesman from Apple Valley, California, took command of that first Masters Mile in Balboa Stadium on June 11, 1966 and during the next two years he reigned as the supreme king of this event. Each time he established a personal best time it also became a National Masters Mile record. Beginning with a 4:55.4 in Balboa Stadium, he gradually lowered his mark and the National Masters record to the 4:43.1 which won him the event in the 1968 San Diego Indoor Invitational. During this period Gorrell displayed an enviable competitive drive, for although he was frequently challenged down to the tape, he never lost a Seniors Mile race. On the East coast the spotlight favored no one person for long. Brownie Ross (44) took the first big one at Cornell's January 1968 Indoor Invitational with an impressive 4:45.0. This was the ex-Olympic Steeplechaser's first and last attempt at the Masters Mile, but it was enough to serve notice on the rest of the field that he had a considerable way to go before bottoming-out at this distance. Jim Hartshorne (45) took over the lead sport at this point for the remaining Masters Miles run in the East last year, and in June checked in for the 1st U.S. Masters T & F Championships to take home the National Masters Mile title as a result of his win in a close tactical race.

Peter Mundle (40), a newcomer to the Seniors ranks, is probably the most outstanding over-40 runner actively engaged in competition at this time. During the past year this trim, quiet-mannered mathematician has established National Seniors records in the three-mile (14:53.2), two-mile (9:36.8), and the one-mile (4:30.0) runs. It was at the latter distance last June that Mundle put an end to Gorrell's West coast reign. As impressive as these times are when compared to his contemporaries they by no means represent his full potential. A pupil of the famed taskmaster Igloi, Mundle might well be the master at all distances from the 880 through the marathon were he to concentrate on each individually for any length of time. His enviable mile times alone are far below those of any other senior runner to date, and when one realizes these times were all established with

no one nearby to nudge him, one wonders where he may eventually deposit the Masters Mile mark. Leaving his natural God-given talents aside, one might gain some understanding of this phenomenon's performances when one realizes that an average interval workout for him might consist of 20-440's interspersed with 10-220's and a heavy workout could push him to 40-440's and 30-220's in alternate set of ten!

One might briefly review the current status of the Masters Mile in this country in so far as its present position in the track world and its outlook for the future are concerned. Although most of the major indoor and outdoor track meets now feature this event in California, the Masters Mile is just beginning to enjoy a portion of the limelight in the East. Regarding the availability of runners and their qualifications to supply the necessary manpower for this event, the East and West coasts are about on a par. At the time of writing there are approximately 15 senior milers on each coast who are running below the seniors "five-minute barrier" -- the bulk of them in the 4:50's, about ten of them in the 4:40's, and only one of them consistently in the 4:30's. Although the running fields have been reasonably well balanced on both coasts in the past, the West has produced a more consistent winner--first with Gorrell and more recently with Mundle.

In the East Ross led off with the opener followed by Hartshorne for a few rounds, and most recently Vogel and Packard (the 40-year-old Masters Marathon Champion) have come to the fore to share in the honors. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to predict the appeal of this event in the future for either the spectators or the runners themselves; but one thing is certain, as with other athletic endeavors, the times will get better and better. Dare we predict a possible limit? With Mundle already at 4:30 with no one to push him, surely a figure in the teens is not unrealistic. But then who remembers that wonder from England who at age 40 came over to this country and ran the fastest mile of his life while a freshman at McNeece College? Give up? Why, Fred Norris, of course! One yes, his time? 4:13! Did someone ask about the "four minute barrier" and the Masters Mile? ...well, I've stuck my neck out far enough at this point!