

# FINNISH RUNNING SECRETS





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# FINNISH RUNNING SECRETS

by **Matti Hannus**

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# FOREWORD

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Munich, Sept. 3, 1972—Final of the Olympic 10,000 meters: Midway through the race, Lasse Viren had tripped and fallen heavily. Now he was back in the chase. Coming off the last bend, past a cluster of Finnish fans waving their blue and white flags, Emiel Puttemans spurred around Viren for the lead. The move didn't ruffle Viren. He accelerated smoothly. One hundred meters later, the gold medal and a world record were his...and Finland's.

Viren was to win another race—the 5000—at this Olympics, and Pekka Vasala was to add a third title for Finland in the 1500. But Viren's 10,000 victory, more than the others, was symbolic of all that had happened to Finnish running in this century. This race revived an old tradition that had been given up for dead—a victim of World War II.

Before the war, the Finns had won every Olympic 10,000 race except one. And between 1920 and '36, they'd won nearly every other middle and long distance event at the Games as well.

After the war, hard times set in. In the six Olympics before Munich, the Finns had won nothing. They hadn't even had a serious contender. By the early 1960s, Finland seldom was able to turn out a runner of world class.

But a spark of *sisu* still smoldered in the country. *Sisu*, according to an earlier booklet on the 1972 Olympic Games, "is a concept that defies translation into English. Roughly, it is a combination of pride, stubbornness and guts, and it is a national characteristic of the Finns."

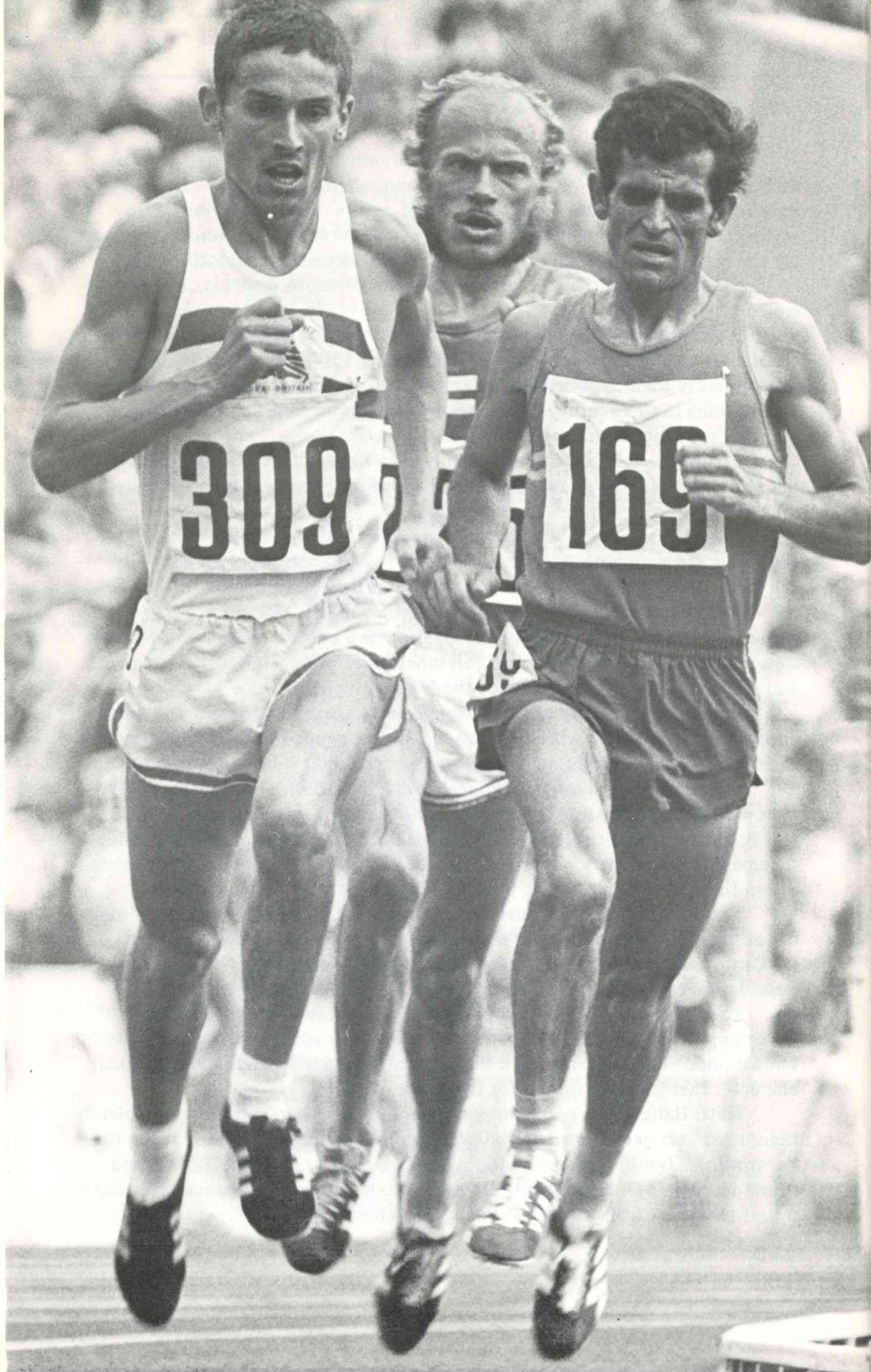
The Finns are proud of their distance heritage, and stubborn and gutty enough not to let it die without a fight. All they needed in the 1960s were the right tools. And the right man came along at the right time to provide them.

Lennart Strand wrote in *Runner's World* before the 1972 Games, "The man who relit the fire was the New Zealand magician Arthur Lydiard, who was Finnish national coach several years back. Lydiard's demanding training scheme and the country's mystical ingredient—*sisu*—have combined with a tradition that never quite died to produce a new generation of champions."

The country's runners have done in the last few years what Lasse Viren did at Munich. They've picked themselves up after the fall and have rushed back into the race. They've done it so successfully that the northern European nation of barely five million population again is a world leader.

The "secrets?" If you're looking for a new way to train or to race, this isn't the place to find it. The methods of the Finns are the standard and well-known ones. Their "secrets" are the enduring running legends and a national character that is ideally suited for the sport.

Matti Hannus writes of those legends and that character more completely than it has ever been done before in the English language. Hannus, at the time he wrote this book, was a 26-year-old language (specializing in English) and sports teacher in Oulu, Finland. He runs club-level middle distance races and is a staff member of the Finnish running magazine *Juoksija*.



## Chapter I

# THE ROOTS

**RIGHT:** Olavi Suomalainen (whose last name means “Finnish”) carried on a proud Finnish tradition by winning the 1972 Boston marathon. Here Suomalainen (facing camera) hugs American friend Tom Fleming. (Rick Levy photo)



**LEFT:** The Finnish sensation of '71, Juha Vaatainen (center, behind Ian Stewart and Mariano Haro) brought in the fresh wave of champions. (Tony Duffy photo)

# BEHIND THE TRADITION

Maybe some people don't realize it, but Finland is a very good place to live. No wars any more, no revolutions, no fights between black and white or any other races. The people here usually mind their own business. The long and freezing winters pass by. Then gradually the shortest and most beautiful summers in the world arrive. It is as if the people woke up from long, long sleep. And when summer is here, Finnish runners go mad.

Nothing changes rapidly in Finland. Of course we have the youth even here, wanting to kick their parents out of the picture. But President Kekkonen has been steering our national ship for 17 years now, and being exceptionally fit for his age it seems he will continue for a long time. We have our political quarrels in Finland, but compared with those of some other countries they only make you laugh.

If you look at the Finnish map, its outlines make a kind of human body. That is the famous "Finnish Maid" with her only arm pointing to the northwest. Independent since 1917, she still is among the youngest nations in the world. It looks as if she had left her stormy past behind now. We hope that after many severe trials she is finally getting more relaxed. But one must admit that she has been a very tough girl.

In a way, it is not true that Finland is a small country. It has more square miles than Great Britain. But this land has only five million inhabitants. There is plenty of room in Finland. You can travel mile after mile in the middle of Finland without seeing a man or a building. This is Finland, one of the few places in the world where you can enter nature just by opening your door. No wonder Finnish people have always been sports-minded.

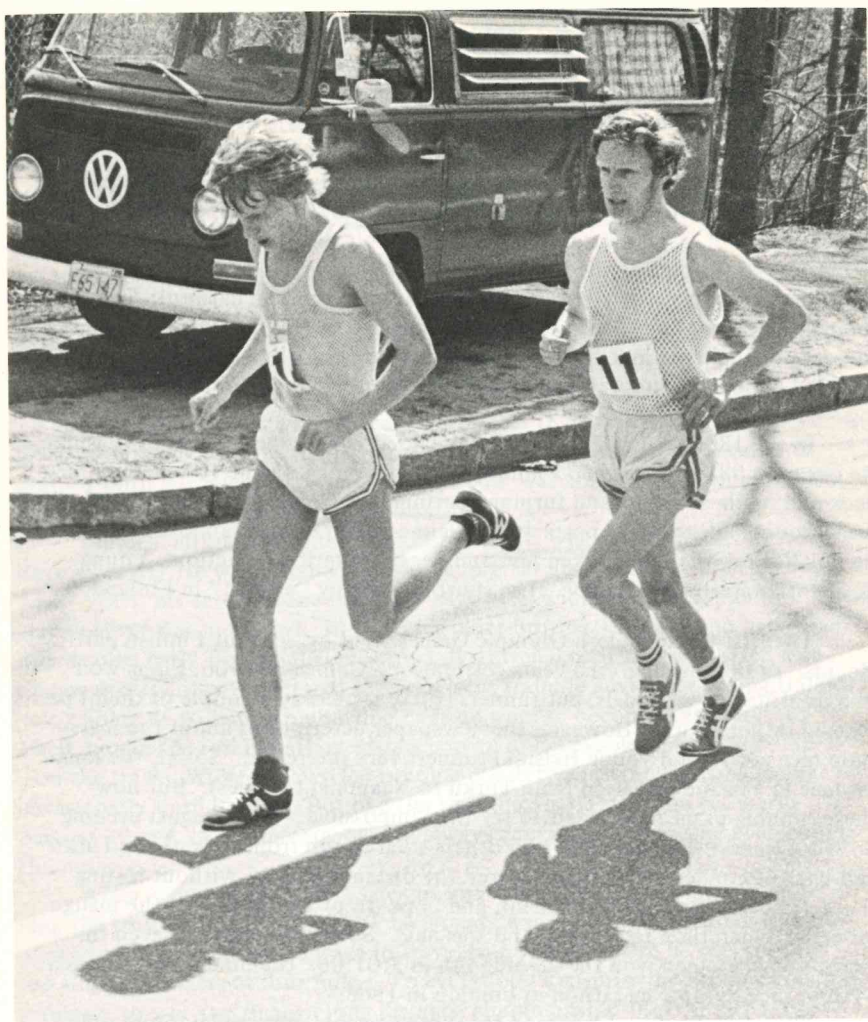
Ancient Finnish legends tell of gigantic contests between local heroes. They ran, they jumped, they threw different objects. Aleksia Kivi, a famous 19th century Finnish author, in his best-known work, *Seven Brothers*, tells how these children of nature loved to play games and wrestle with each other. When their house burned down on Christmas evening, they ran, naked and barefooted through snowy and icy winter forest to the nearest neighbor, many miles away.

Maybe that was the beginning of the Finnish distance running tradition.

During the 19th century, the big industrial revolution gradually spread into Finland. Some of the people suddenly had more spare time. The first ideas of competitive running came from Britain and Sweden, but in this respect it still was very quiet time. It is told in old newspapers that the first British professional runner in Finland visited Helsinki in 1830. Others followed him every now and then, but they usually performed in circuses alongside magicians and fire-swallowers.

The first Finnish running competitions must have been amusing occasions. The oldest newspaper description of a race is from the year 1878. Oddly enough,





**Finland's "marathon craze" of 1906 never subsided. Olavi Suomalainen (left) won at Boston 66 years later. (Rick Levy)**

it was in the middle of winter, on the ice of a lake! The winner dashed the circular course of 216 meters (about 240 yards) in 36 seconds, presumably with boots and heavy winter clothing.

The next year, a German professional runner was supposed to run a one-hour race against a young Finnish boy. The German became nervous after noticing how easily the Finn in simple street clothes (and without any running training whatsoever) was following him. After running only three times around the 1000-meter course, he picked up the speed, left the boy a few meters behind, jumped over the table of the time-keeper and shouted, "Can't you see that the boy is unable to follow me!" The crowd chased the German across the square with a mad roar, but he escaped with his life...

Toward the end of the last century, the esteem of sports increased in Finland, but at that time gymnastics still was considered the most important activity. Occasionally there were running competitions. Most of them were army races, the general tone of sports being extremely patriotic because in those days Finland still belonged to large Russia.

Most Finnish races were sprints, because there were no sports grounds. Longer distances were usually run in the streets and along the paths in the woods. In 1884, a mile was run in 5:37. At about the same time, Walter George loped through a mile in Britain in 4:12.

Early Finnish sports leaders deemed distance running harmful. They thought it was too one-sided. Big muscles and a beautiful body were the target. Consequently, Finnish championships were originally held only in pent-, dec- and all kind of umptathlons. But the era of distance running was approaching.

In the 1880s a British professional named Dibbles performed in Helsinki. He once ran 9815 meters in 33 minutes. He ran on a straight 100-meter course, back and forth, stopping and turning continually. He must have been an exceptional runner, although a sports writer claimed he "ran ugly, almost like a little boy." Still, the public liked him and began imitating his action. Young boys got interested in running. The sport had finally "arrived" in Finland.

The first three modern Olympic Games went by without Finnish participants. In the so-called "10-years celebration" Games of 1906, Finns won two unofficial gold medals, but runners (there were only a couple of them) performed rather poorly. However, the newspaper descriptions about the marathon race got several young Helsinki runners very interested. So far, the longest race in Finland had been from Turku to Naantali (10 miles). But now these running pioneers decided to try the "impossible." One August evening in 1906, Kaarlo Nieminen and two others tried to run from Helsinki to Turku and back—25 miles. Nieminen covered the distance in 3:15 without resting.

That was the first experiment, and Sept. 16 of the same year the inaugural official marathon race in Finland was held. Seventeen started, seven finished, and Nieminen won the 25-mile run in 3:01:06. Nieminen later finished 11th in the Olympic marathon in London in 1908.

Why do I dwell so long upon these early events, now to be found only in the yellowed, fragile pages of ancient books? Because it was these men who started the first big explosion in Finnish running. From 1907-09, marathons were run frequently. Among the competitors was a young man named Hannes Kolehmainen, who did his first at age 17. In Turku, a dedicated 12-year-old boy was doing his training sessions in street shoes, wanting to become the best runner in the world. His name was Paavo Nurmi.

# THE FIRST GREAT FINN

Hannes Kolehmainen, one of the most famous sportsmen of all-time in Finland, the first "flying Finn," was born Dec. 9, 1889. He lived his childhood years in simple conditions. His father had died early and mother worked in a laundry. Young Hannes, his two sisters and two brothers—Tatu and Viljami (later William), who also were to become world-class runners—had to work 10-12 hours a day from their early years to support themselves. But the "Olympic fever" was so high in Finland that after work the boys ran, skied, skated or jumped until late evenings. Hannes reportedly was able to long jump over 20 feet in spite of his rigorous running routines.

Hannes' intuitive training sessions were just what modern science nowadays suggests. He was running and skiing in great amounts, but with no hurry. At 17 years, his aerobic capacity must have been enormous, although it of course never was measured. In 1910 his older brother Viljami, who had established some early Finnish distance records, traveled to America, started a career of professional runner and regularly sent training advice for young Hannes.

Some of William Kolehmainen's feats were to become legendary. In 1910, he ran the full marathon distance in an unbelievable time of 2:29:39.2—on the track. William's love for running did not vanish, and he was racing occasionally until his 40s. But like the third brother Tatu, who set world bests at 20 and 25 kilometers, he was always overshadowed by the ever-smiling Hannes.

After many years of solid background work, Hannes was beginning to reap the fruit. In 1910, at age 20, he already was the best in Finland, and the next year he got enough courage to travel to London, where he was to meet top English runners at four miles. To everybody's surprise, he became the first foreigner to win the English long distance championship.

The Olympics were approaching and Hannes began training twice a day, working only part-time and living like a monk. Friends helped him financially. His sessions consisted mostly of early morning walks, long steady runs and short sprints on track, and stretching exercises.

The Olympic Games in 1912 in Stockholm were the magnificent festival for little Finland, which still had to compete under the Russian flag. Hannes Kolehmainen's deeds were simply fantastic. Between July 7 and July 15, he won three gold medals (5000, 10,000 meters and cross-country), one silver (cross-country team competition) and set two world records (3000 meters, 8:36.9 in a team race and 5000 meters in 14:36.6). In the 10,000 final, he raced off like Emil Zatopek or Dave Bedford some decades later. He reached the 5000 in 15:11.4 (the world record was 15:01.2). But seeing others almost lapped, he eased up and jogged to victory in 31:20.8.

The final of the 5000 meters, is still remembered by old observers as the most exciting footrace of all-time—at least until Juha Vaatainen's and Jur-

gen Haase's fight 59 years later. The conditions were ideal, with the sky half-cloudy and air fresh after a slight rain, when Hannes, his dangerous rival Jean Bouin of France and the others toed the starting line in front of the nervous crowd. During the first few laps, Hannes and Bouin stayed at the end of the pack. The initial pace was much slower than in the 10,000-meter race.

Then Bouin took the lead and only Hannes was able to follow. One lap to go: the short, Chaplin-faced Frenchman led, with the taller, but slimmer Kolehmainen close behind. They strided around the last bend like half-milers. The final straight opened and Hannes began his drive. In the middle of the straight, side by side, they saw the white thread across the track—Olympic gold. Ten meters to go and no decision yet... Then, suddenly, Bouin was spent. Hannes coasted over the line, beautifully, not straining, with Bouin one meter back. The picture of this moment, signalling the start of Finnish distance running, is still considered as the most famous Finnish sports photograph ever.

Who had thought about the time? When time-keepers glanced at their watches, they didn't believe their eyes: 14:36.6 for Hannes—25 seconds better than the world record!

After the Games, Hannes moved to America, where he raced frequently and met his future wife. He was thought to have quit big-time running until, in early 1920, it was rumored he had begun serious training for the Olympic marathon in Antwerp. The rumors were true. In extremely cold and windy weather Hannes, 30 years old, arrived first at the Olympic stadium. After 25 miles of running, his stride was not springy any more, but his smile had not disappeared. He finished in 2:32:35 (world best for amateurs) and was wrapped with the Finnish flag by his jubilant countrymen. Since 1917, Finland has been independent, free from Russian power.

Like his brothers, Hannes raced for many years to come, and even ran in the Olympic marathon trials in 1924 and 1928, but other men were now running records for Finland.

# THEN CAME PAAVO NURMI

Today Paavo Nurmi is not a happy man: 76 years old, almost blind, a very sick person. Once he was the greatest human phenomenon of the globe. Now, early every morning, you can see him walking very slowly with his stick along quiet Helsinki streets: a lonely man, bittered to life. His eyes are old. It is easy to see he has suffered a lot. After many heart attacks, paralysis and a couple of unfortunate accidents, he must be careful. He blames Finnish doctors for almost everything, but nobody seems to agree with him.

Paavo Nurmi claims he does not care a bit about running, or any other competitive sports, any more. He very seldom gives interviews, usually only to old veteran editors. However, after the big Finnish moments in Munich, tears could be seen in his eyes when he said, "Those were very fine races. I was deadly scared Viren wouldn't make it after the fall... And Vasala, he is a magnificent runner. I am glad Finland has these boys." Nurmi's statements are often contrary to each other. But this is not new. All his life he has been a controversial character.

It is futile to try to find out who has been the greatest runner or the best sportsman of all-time, but surely Paavo Johannes Nurmi (born June 13, 1897) must rank among the top few. During his long career, which lasted from 1913 to 1934, he won nine Olympic gold medals and set so many world records that it is impossible to count them exactly. In the happy 1920s, together with famous film stars, he probably was one of the world's best known personalities. In Finland, he still is. Whatever unbelievable feats Finnish athletes will ever accomplish, Paavo Nurmi will always remain the greatest.

Like Hannes Kolehmainen, Paavo was born into a poor, hard-working family. (Until World War II, this was thought to be a "must" for a future long distance champion, "because it makes you harder.") Paavo's father was mentally strong but physically fragile, dying at age 50. His mother lived until her late 80s and was able to witness Paavo's running deeds. Paavo had one brother and two sisters who never competed in sports.

It is said that as a child Paavo was like all other boys, full of tricks, cheerful, always smiling. But in 1909, during the "marathon fever," he decided to become a runner. His life was completely changed. He concentrated so severely on his running future that it is almost impossible to comprehend. He left his early friends, and from a smiling boy became a quiet, meditating adolescent. He must have had a terrific self-confidence, for he has said, "I was certain I would make it. I had no doubt about it."

Paavo's plans were very precise. While only 12, he decided to train easily but regularly for five years, then add quality and quantity. How many young people of our time are able to think this way—or if they are, how many of them can keep the promise? When news from Kolehmainen arrived from Stockholm

in 1912, Paavo's enthusiasm increased. Hannes became his idol. But although Nurmi was excited, he did not rush ahead of his plan.

He began by running three to four times a week, usually in the forests, covering mostly from two to six kilometers. It was pure endurance training, no speed sessions at all. Who would have thought that some day he would be the fastest miler in the world?

At 19, he was training harder. He started long early morning walks of eight to 25 kilometers (this was the biggest mistake of his career, he has said later, but at the time all Finnish runners had walks in their programs). After work—in an engineering firm—he went to the track for newly-incorporated sprints, then took the usual distance run in the forests. In the evening, before going to bed, “he began jumping and throwing his arms all around the house,” as his mother once said. This was Paavo's stretching exercise program. He did not eat much: in the morning only coffee (his only “bad habit”) and bread, then midday lunch, and dinner late in the evening after “jumping around.”

Paavo began racing in 1914, and on four or five sessions of mixed endurance and speed training per week, he “progressed” as follows: 1914—3000 meters 10:06.5; 1915—5000m 15:57.5; 1916—15:52.8; 1917—15:47.4; 1918—15:50.7. It is easy to see Paavo was not developing as he hoped, but he knew the reason. It was the war, and he could not eat enough. But he still looked forward and did not give up.

After toiling for many years, seemingly in vain, Paavo Nurmi's big breakthrough started in April 1919, when he began his military service of 18 months in the garrison of his hometown of Turku. He was allowed to work as a gunsmith and was able to train without trouble. No wonder his results finally picked up. In July, on a soft 250-meter track, he won his first 10,000-meter race—from Tatu Kolehmainen—in 33:25.4. When the season ended, his personal bests were 8:58.1 (3000m), 15:31.5 (5000m) and 32:56.0 (10,000m). His superiority in sheer physical strength could be seen in army cross-country races, which were usually performed in full military equipment. The first time his victory margin was so big that he was accused of taking shortcuts.

The first Olympic Games after World War I were a big victory for little, independent Finland: nine gold medals in track and field, as many as the great USA. Nurmi began his long Olympic career in the 5000. He was trying to kill his opponents through hard pace, covering the first half in 7:11 on the slow track. But then his strength went. The pace dropped. Joseph Guillemot of France followed Nurmi pluckily and had more to give on the last lap. The Frenchman won—fine revenge after the Kolehmainen-Bouin race of 1912—in 14:55.6, with Nurmi five seconds behind.

At 10,000 meters, Nurmi had new tactics. He did not hurry but let Guillemot and Wilson of England lead. Sometimes it seemed he had lost contact, but five laps to go he was there again. The bell rang, and the Frenchman began his famous kick. But Nurmi remained cool, followed easily—and Guillemot was beaten. Nurmi's winning time was 31:45.8.

The game was 1-1, and the cross-country race (which was dropped from the Olympic program after 1924 because Finland always won it) was to decide who was better, Nurmi or Guillemot. But it was a simple story: the Frenchman injured his foot when crossing a railroad, and Nurmi easily took



**Those were the days: the 1920s and '30s. Finns dominated the distance running world, with none so dominant as Paavo Nurmi (29). The pacemaker here is Volmari Iso-Hollo, himself a two-time Olympic steeplechase winner.**

his second gold. And the third came from team competition. Well done for a newcomer.

During the years to come, Nurmi gradually developed an aura of mystery. People were watching him in sheer amazement. It is characteristic that when he dropped out of an indoor race in the United States in 1925 because of stomach trouble, it was rumored in Finland that Nurmi had died. There could not possibly be another explanation for his not finishing a race.

After 1920, Nurmi frequently attacked records. The sight became unforgettable: Nurmi striding all alone in his black track gear, with the watch in his fist. Then, with the bell ringing, throwing the watch on the infield, he was

lapping his fellow "competitors." When training on the track, he always timed himself. He became an expert in judging the speed.

It was clear now that Nurmi was the best distance runner in the world. Because no one could match him by 1923, he developed a new goal: the mile world record. In 1886, Walter George had run 4:12.8; in 1913, Norman Taber had done 4:12.6. These were the times to better. Now, fortunately, Nurmi had a worthy competitor. He was a Finnish-born Swede, Edwin Wide. The site of their epic fight would be Stockholm.

Because the Stockholm track was only 385 meters, Nurmi tried to avoid all errors. On the green grass of Helsinki Ball Park (beside which Olympic Stadium was built in 1938) he measured a running path of exactly 385 meters, chalked it, took his watch and began his new system of "rhythm training" which might be called an early version of interval training. He trained this way for weeks, running mostly at 4:10 mile pace. He gave one of his immortal comments: "I'll run 4:10. If Wide runs better, he will win."

Nurmi and Wide were the only competitors in this race. Wide led through 400 meters in 60 seconds. When he slowed slightly, Nurmi took over. Half-mile: 2:03.2. Nurmi had decided to drop Wide on the third lap and ran it much faster than was usual in those days: 63.5. Wide was still following, but was very tired. Gradually, the distance grew between them. Nurmi was striding effortlessly, but Wide began to tie up. Nurmi broke the thread in 4:10.4 (1500 meters 3:53.0—also a world record). Wide's time was 4:13.1.

The race must have been something like the magnificent fight between Roger Bannister and John Landy 31 years later. The whole of Finland was waiting for results eagerly, as was shown in this amusing piece in the newspaper *Vaasa* the day after the race:

"'We were kidding with a chap and said that Wide won. 'By how much did that devil do it?' 'By three seconds.' 'Well, that's not much.'

"'But then we said that no, we were kidding. Nurmi won. 'Hell! Is that true?' 'I can assure it is true.' 'I was thinking so. How much did he win?' 'Almost three seconds.' 'Good heavens! That's much!'"



# FINLAND'S GOLDEN ERA

Since 1920, Paavo Nurmi had raced from win to win in Finland. Nobody was able to follow him, not even half-seriously. But just before the Paris Olympics, he faced a dangerous opponent. He was Ville ("Willie") Ritola (born Jan. 18, 1896), who during his teens had moved to America like thousands of Finns of that time. His running career began from a bet, and being a physically and mentally rare specimen he soon began to draw attention. In 1922, he was second in the Boston marathon after the great Clarence de Mar. A year later, Ritola was good enough to win several American championships. Because he still was a Finn, the Finnish Olympic Committee sponsored him to train at home for the Olympic Games.

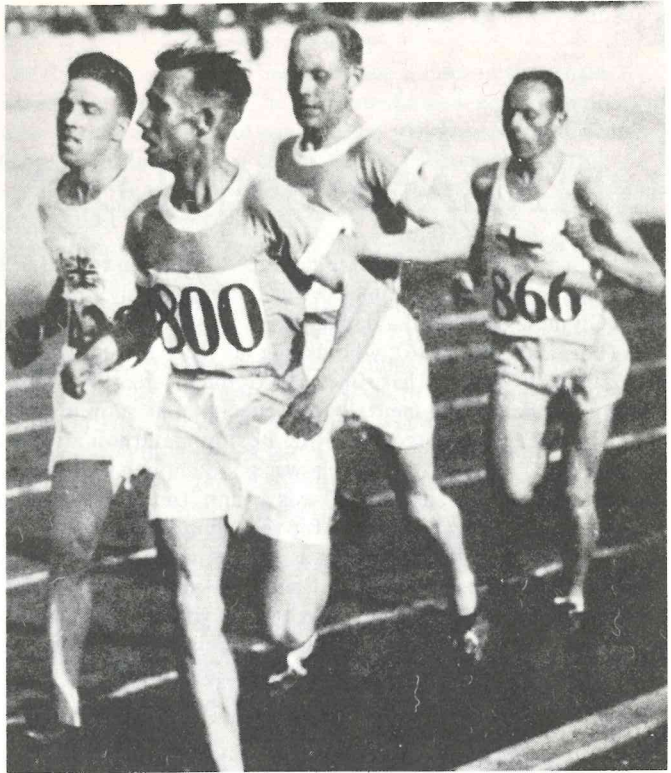
At the same time, Nurmi was encountering great difficulties. During the winter, he had trained more than ever—mostly three times a day. He was aiming at something unbelievable: to win the Olympic 5000 and 1500 meters with one hour's rest. Olympic officials had decided Nurmi wouldn't win everything in the Games and had scheduled the two finals for the same afternoon. But Nurmi did not panic. He became more determined "to show them."

All went well until late April. In a small cross-country race, Nurmi fell and hit his knee on a sharp stone. It was bruised badly. He had to rest for two weeks, and afterwards could walk only very stiffly. In the Olympic Trials, a month later, Nurmi won both 1500 and 3000 meters, but times were unimpressive. And what was Willie Ritola doing? In a downpour, with mud splashing all over the place, this "flying wolf," as he was called, ran a new 10,000-meter world record of 30:35.4.

But if anybody thought Nurmi's chances had gone, he was completely wrong. Paavo began to feel well again. In fact, he felt better than ever before. Many years later, he said the rest had been good for him. Otherwise, he might have peaked too early. In his "general rehearsal" for the Paris Games, the "unfit" Nurmi broke the world 1500 record with 3:52.6. Fifty-five minutes later, he ran again in the 5000. He was only trying to break 15 minutes, but was feeling inexplicably good. He was the old Paavo again, striding like a machine. He lowered the world record to 14:28.2.

As if it had been the easiest thing in the world, Nurmi repeated his trick in the Olympics and collected two gold medals in one afternoon with times only slightly slower than his world records.

The cross-country race at Paris made Nurmi almost a god. On perhaps the hottest day of Olympic history, when fellow competitors were fainting into the ditches and bushes along river Seine, Nurmi beat silver medalist Ritola by about 400 meters. Heikki Liimatainen of Finland was so exhausted that on the track he first chose the wrong direction, then fell a couple of times, lay on the cinders motionless for a few seconds and literally crawled over the



**Paavo Nurmi's leading home-country rival in the '20s was Willie Ritola. Here Ritola is leading the 10,000 in the 1928 Olympics, with Nurmi to his right. Nurmi won, Ritola was a close second.**

finish line—saving Finland a gold medal in team competition.

But this had not been enough for the insatiable Finns. On the first day of the Games, Ritola had won the 10,000 in a new world record time of 30:23.2. For five decades it has been speculated why Nurmi did not run. It was rumored that the Finnish Olympic Committee “presented” this gold medal for Ritola, not letting Nurmi participate. Moreover, in many books it is told that the day of the race, Nurmi, as angry as he ever was, ran 10,000 meters on the Olympic training track in 29:45.0. Nurmi has neither admitted nor denied this. So it will remain an unsolved mystery.

Ritola had also won the gold in the steeplechase from his teammate Elias Katz by 10 seconds. Willie had a unique technique of clearing the water jump. He did not even touch the bar with his foot, but always splashed straight into the water, knee-deep! He claimed: “It is faster this way...”

In the 3000-meter team race Finland was so good that it would have defeated the team of “the rest of the world.” Nurmi, of course, won individually.

One of the most moving events in Finnish running history was the mara-

thon race in Paris. Thirty-five-year-old Albin Stenroos, who had set Finnish records 17 years earlier, and had won an Olympic 10,000-meter bronze in 1912, had quit running in 1917. Then he had made a fantastic comeback after a layoff of four years, setting a 20-kilometer world record in 1923. In Paris, Stenroos won the marathon by six minutes, but in the heatwave the time was only 2:41:22.6.

Finland was still to win many more running gold medals, but not until Sept. 10, 1972 in Munich was this kind of feat to be repeated.

The next winter Paavo Nurmi did his most Herculean feats in America. He was invited to race on boards, later outdoors, and what a series it was to become! Sometimes he was racing twice a day in different cities. He was undefeated until his last race.

After 1925, Nurmi's star began to go out. The gigantic amount of races had been too much even for him. His legs became very fragile. He had rheumatic troubles. The years between the Paris and Amsterdam Olympics were quiet for Nurmi. He raced frequently, sometimes even world records, but that "something" was disappearing.

But Paavo was not through yet, nor was Willie Ritola. Across the Atlantic, Ritola had raced every now and then. And with Olympic bells ringing, these two old-timers were bound to meet again. But they never had more difficulties to win than in Amsterdam. In the 10,000, Nurmi played cat-and-mouse with Ritola, defeating him by a few meters. But then the unexpected happened. In the heats of the steeplechase, the two Finns were badly injured.

In the 5000 final next day, they were lame. Now Finnish "sisu" was needed. Never before or after were the Finns so much scared by their Swedish rival Wide. Nurmi had to give an all-out effort to leave him one yard back at the finish—but, fortunately, Willie Ritola had already won the gold with hurting legs. He had finally beaten the great Nurmi. Times: Ritola 14:38, Nurmi and Wide 14:41. After the race, Paavo Nurmi was lying on the grass, completely exhausted.

With that great run Ritola's fine career ended. He was satisfied and put away his spikes. He became a respected building contractor in America, but homesickness did not leave him. A few years ago, he returned home. Now 77, he lives in a Helsinki suburb with his American wife. Unlike Nurmi, he looks very happy. Always smiling and with a witty look behind his spectacles, he recalls those old times when he was young and very, very fit.

Paavo Nurmi was to have some big moments in front of him after 1928, but Amsterdam was, in many respects, a turning point in Finnish running history.

# EVEN WITHOUT NURMI

Nobody is able to stay at the top forever, not even Paavo Nurmi. He was getting old, and for the first time during his career he had to make a real effort to defeat his countrymen.

When Pekka Vasala won the 1500 meters in Munich, it was many times repeated in newspapers that "44 years had passed since the last Finnish 1500 victory in the Olympics." This surprising shooting star was Harri Larva (born 1906), a clever tactician and Nurmi's clubmate in Turku. Larva almost embarrassingly imitated the unique running action of his great idol. After training seriously only for one winter, Larva and Eino Purje beat Nurmi in the 1928 Olympic trials.

It was obvious that with these new names emerging, it was time for Paavo Nurmi to slow down. In an interview after Amsterdam he said, "This is my last year of competition. I have been doing it for 15 years and that's enough." But after breaking the world record in the one hour run, a new world suddenly opened to him: the marathon race the Los Angeles Olympics, 1932.

He began training for his last important race, and had decided to win at 10,000 meters as well. But fate had decided otherwise. At first, everything proceeded well. Nurmi did not change his training drastically. In spite of occasional 30-kilometer stints, his training was that of a middle distance man. At all costs, Nurmi wanted to avoid becoming a "shuffler." Speed was the key even in the marathon, he claimed.

When Nurmi lined up for the Olympic trials, he had never raced more than 20 kilometers before. His rivals had secretly decided to "run the legs off the newcomer." So they began unusually hard. Armas Toivonen, who was to finish third in Los Angeles, was leading briskly. But in fact Nurmi was running easily. After 27 kilometers, he said to Toivonen, "Let's pick up the speed. This is a bit slow, isn't it?" Toivonen: "Thanks, but this is enough for me." Nurmi: "Well, then, good-bye." And he was gone...

Nurmi never ran in the Los Angeles Olympic Games. There were two reasons for this:

1. Before the Games, the IAAF pronounced Nurmi professional. This had been rumored since his first American trip in 1925, but not until now had it been taken seriously. Documents were acquired to show Nurmi had received illegal travel expenses in Germany. It was a long struggle, but just before the Games it was announced Nurmi could not run. Nurmi became the victim because he was the greatest sportsman of the time.

2. Even if Nurmi had been allowed to run, he might have not been able to do it. The first marathon race had been too much for his legs. When he tried to train on ship-deck on the journey to Los Angeles, they got even worse, and in the Olympic Village he did not run a step. He could just hobble around.

Incredibly, Nurmi was permitted to race as a "national amateur." In 1933, he entered the 1500 meters in the Finnish Championships. Other runners were almost laughing. They said, "What is the old man (36) doing here?" But Nurmi was in great shape. With only 60 meters to go, he developed a mad dash from somewhere and beat, among others, the Los Angeles 5000 gold medalist Lauri Lehtinen.

Paavo Nurmi ran his last race on Sept. 16, 1934. In July 1952, opening day of the Olympic Games in Helsinki, 55-year-old Nurmi, with the Olympic torch in his hand, strode around the track in a slight drizzle. His stride was the same as before: long and springy. At the top of the Olympic tower, Hannes Kolehmainen took the torch and set fire to the big bowl, which was to burn for two weeks. The statue of Paavo Nurmi still stands in front of the stadium. It is a message from the great days of Finnish track and field.

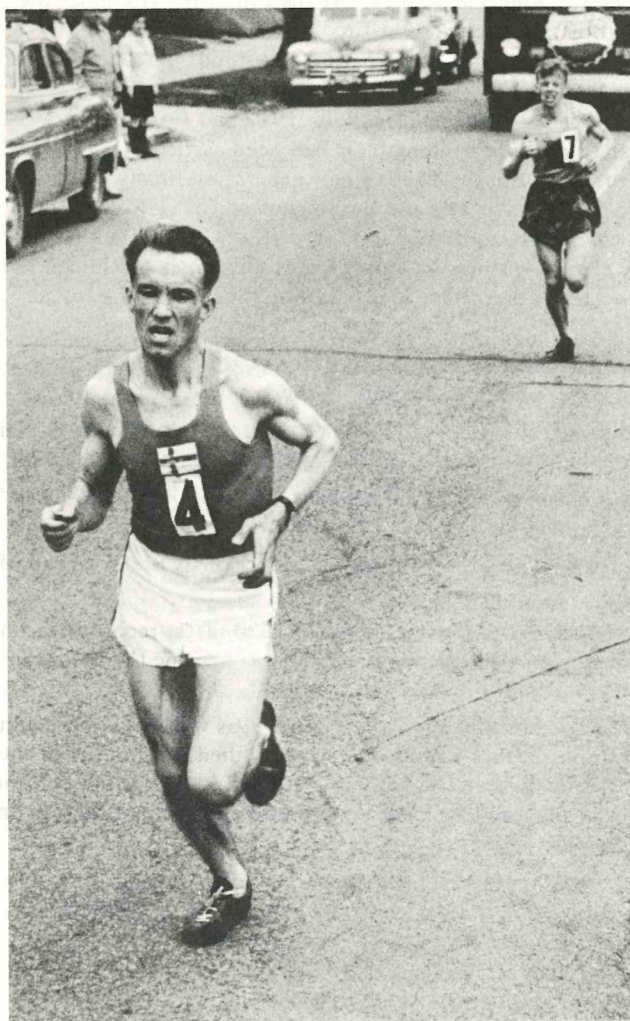
For two decades between Stockholm 1912 and Los Angeles 1932, nearly all of Finland's distance running fame had been carried by Kolehmainen, Ritola and Nurmi. But in the 1930s a new generation finally took over. The Olympic Games of Los Angeles and Berlin showed that Finnish supremacy had not come by chance. It continued to grow as five different runners won Olympic championships, set world records, or both. Although the five never surpassed the earlier Finns in reputation, they chipped away at Nurmi's records.

- **Ilmari Salminen**—led a Finnish sweep of the medals in the 1936 Olympic 10,000 and later set a world record in the event.
- **Volmari Iso-Hollo**—the only man to win the Olympic steeplechase twice, having done it at Los Angeles and again at Berlin five years later.
- **Lauri Lehtinen**—1932 gold medalist in the 5000, runner-up in '36, and a world record holder.
- **Gunnar Hockert**—the 5000-meter champion at Berlin, ahead of Lehtinen.
- **Taisto Maki**—though he set a world 3000-meter record the same year, he was left off the '36 Olympic team; later Maki became the first man to break 30 minutes in the 10,000.

Maki's barrier-breaking race came in 1938, as war was approaching. In World War II, Finnish track and field practically died. A number of international athletes either were killed or were wounded so badly that continuing sports was out of the question. There were no young runners. Only one bright star remained: Viljo Heino.

## Chapter II

# THE DECLINE



Even when Finnish running fortunes were at their lowest ebb, marathoners came through. This is Antti Viskari, 1956 Boston champion.

# WAR'S LONE SURVIVOR

The golden age of Finnish distance running ended with World War II. Who had time to train? Who could eat properly? Who had enough enthusiasm left to run his sessions in the tumult of senseless gunfire? Viljo Heino was the lone wolf of Finland in the 1940s. Without him, it would have been almost impossible to build it all up again. But when Heino was on the track, the stands were full of people. Running survived.

When war came, Heino was wounded in his leg and it seemed uncertain if he could ever run. But after months of inactivity he began again. It was not until 1943, when Heino turned 30, that he was able to train somewhat methodically. After training literally amidst bullets and shells, he sped 10,000 meters in 30:15.2—the leading time in the world for 1943.

In 1944, with the war nearing its end, Heino was training more than ever, and suddenly it became evident he was able to attack world records. (Heino was one of the first Finns to train year-round. And he never walked; he only ran.) In August, at Helsinki's Olympic Stadium, which had to wait until 1952 for the Games after cancelling the 1940 celebration, Heino almost broke Maki's record at 10,000 meters. With three kilometers to go, he was 10 seconds in front of Maki's schedule. But then Heino's foot, which had been injured before the meet and had been given pain-killing shots, began troubling him. He had to slow down, but he finished in 29:56.2—second man under 30 minutes.

Three weeks later, at the same place, Heino made it with 29:35.4. Witnesses said they had seen nobody run as beautifully as Heino. Unlike most of his predecessors in Finland, he was not struggling. He was floating economically, like in a dream. An editor wrote, "Heino is the perfect distance runner."

The 1948 Olympic Games in London turned out to be black fiasco for the once-so-good Finns, and for Viljo Heino. The best Finnish distance running performance was a fifth place in the steeplechase. In the 5000, the Finns were dead last. In the 10,000, Heino, who had been injured most of the season, did his best to follow Emil Zatopek, but folded completely because of stomach trouble and dropped out. (Another Finn, Evert Heinstrom, became delirious from the heat, hit an official in the face and fainted. When he woke up in the hospital, his first words were: "Did I finish?") In the marathon (his first and last), Heino was 11th. It took a long time for Finnish fans to recover from this shock.

Despite the fact that Heino was to run faster than ever the year after the London Games, the distance running pendulum clearly had swung away from Finland. The eastern Europeans, led by the magnificent Zatopek, were taking command.

In 1951, Heino admitted, "It seems even I cannot escape getting old." He retired from racing at age 37. Today, Heino is fit and well. He still runs every day and coaches young runners. Viljo Heino: A great runner and a great man whom even the war could not stop.

# MILERS, MARATHONERS

In Finland, the Olympic Games mean everything in sports. It does not really matter what happens between them, but every four years Finnish trackmen must be ready. Only genuine "nuts" keep in touch continually, but thousands of casual observers "wake up" in Olympic years. They begin reading the papers more closely and asking: "Well, what's the situation? It's the Games again!" This is the tradition of Finnish track and field.

It was a long time between Berlin 1936 and Munich 1972. During these 36 years, the Olympics were held six times. In track and field, Finland managed to win only two gold medals, both of them in the javelin. During the quarter-century between London and Munich, Finnish runners had a rough time.

Viljo Heino was the last real world-class runner in Finland until recent years. With him ended a unique era of a little country which had produced numerous world beaters. There were many reasons for this. First, the war. A whole new generation of runners had to be grown up. Second, when Nurmi ran track and field was known in comparatively few countries. After the war, new champions began emerging from all corners of the globe. It took a real effort not to lose contact completely. Third, running became an object of serious scientific study. New facts were found about human capacities. But Finland was lacking in resources. We had to copy other countries—always somewhat too late. And fourth, as odd as it may sound, the Helsinki Olympics. For the first time, the Finns could observe athletes like Zatopek, Rhoden, McKenley, Barthel and Dillard very closely. They beat their Finnish opponents easily, and this caused an inferiority complex which was to remain for almost 20 years. "The others are so terribly good," we moaned. "What can we do here, in little Finland? Our time has gone...."

But life always goes on. It is completely wrong to believe that Finland had no good runners after Heino. No, we had world record men, we had European champions, we had a new generation of athletes whom Finland could rely on. And among thousands of Finnish children who were running, jumping and throwing during the Helsinki Games were Jouko Kuha, 13, Juha Vaatainen, 11, Pekka Vasala, 4, and Lasse Viren, 3.

While they were growing up, milers and marathoners kept alive a spark of the once-proud Finnish tradition. In the 1950s, for the first time since Paavo Nurmi's and Harri Larva's days, Finland had excellent milers—three of them, in fact.

One windless, sunny July evening in 1957, the three broke the 1500-meter world record at Turku. They all ran their best ever race that day, the first name of all three was Olavi, all three were born in 1933, but their careers had quite different shapes.

- **Olavi Vuorisalo** was a youth sensation. Shortly before the Helsinki



Games, at age 19, he ran the 1500 in 3:52.6—same as Nurmi's one-time world record. In 1955, Vuorisalo reached world class by running 3:45.0. Yet he was left off the Olympic team the next year though he had run 3:43.8. This depressed him to the extent that he stopped running. But early in 1957, he decided to "show 'em."

● **Olavi Salsola** was considered the bad boy of the Finnish national team. He was known to have a "big mouth." He once said, "I have been winning so much lately that I have calluses on my chest. Those finishing tapes..." Sometimes he was dead last, the next day he beat everybody. He had run 3:42.0 in 1956.

● **Olavi Salonen**, who looked more like a weight-lifter than a middle distance runner, had a quick climb to the top. In 1955, he ran 4:05.0 in the 1500, the next year 3:44.6.

Salsola had promised early in 1957 to break Istvan Rozsavolgyi's world record of 3:40.6. But because Salsola boasted so much, no one paid attention. Vuorisalo had been running well, but not splendidly. And nobody thought about Salonen, who just was not "the right type."

Salsola and Salonen shared the new world record with 3:40.2. Vuorisalo was a tenth-second back but also under the old mark. They said afterwards that no one planned a record race. It was a mistake."

Alas, the record was not long-lived. The very next day, Czech Stanislav Jungwirth began a new era in middle distance running when he blasted the distance in 3:38.1. But the Finns had shown they could still do something...

"Marathon fever," which first attacked Kaarlo Nieminen and young Hannes Kolehmainen, never has found a remedy in Finland.

Kolehmainen won in Antwerp, Albin Stenroos in Paris. Martti Marttelin took bronze in one of the most exciting marathon races of all-time in Amsterdam. (Joie Ray was leading with one kilometer to go, but he was so exhausted that four men passed him.) In Los Angeles, Armas Toivonen finished third. Two years later, he became European champion. In those days, Finland was a respected marathon country. A tradition was established which never died, even during the darkest days of Finnish track running.

Vaino Muinonen (born 1898) trained for almost 20 years before he tried a marathon. He finished fifth at the Berlin Olympics at age 38—and his career was just beginning. Two years later, he won the European title by over two minutes. When the war ended, he was still running.

By that time, another Finn, Mikko Hietanen, ruled the world marathon scene. Like his countryman, Hietanen had matured late. He had been racing with modest results for 12 years before he won his first Finnish championship in 1945. He was already 34 years old. The European meet at Oslo in 1946 became a feast for these two old-timers as Hietanen won comfortably and Muinonen, almost 48, took silver.

In 1947, they were invited to Boston. By no means were they the first Finns to run there. Finns had placed in the top three a dozen times before Dave (Taavi) Komonen—an emigrant living in Canada—won the race in 1934. Hietanen finished second to Korean Yun Bok Suh, and Muinonen was ninth in the 1947 event.

Muinonen did not make the London Olympic team, but a year later he

ran 2:36:23 at age 51. (His personal best of 2:33:03 had come when he was "only" 48.) Hietanen was one of the favorites before London but had a bad day. An inflamed achilles tendon forced him to drop out. Four years later, he ran his best-ever time of 2:30:24.4, but finished only 17th at Helsinki. He continued running until the late 1960s, breaking three hours as late as age 56.

Finland's top marathoner of the 1950s was Veikko Karvonen (born 1926). His record: Olympic bronze medalist in Melbourne, European champion in 1954, Boston winner in '54, and seconds in '53 and '57. But Karvonen was not alone. Suddenly, marathon men began popping up from nowhere.

In 1956, Antti Viskari won Boston in the staggering time of 2:14:14 over a course later found to be short. The Melbourne Olympic trials were a fantastic display of Finnish marathon strength. Four runners broke 2:20, while Viskari could place only sixth. Finland could afford to leave the Boston winner off the team, as happened again 16 years later to Olavi Suomalainen. In Melbourne, Finland won the unofficial "team title" as Karvonen ran third, Eino Oksanen 10th and Paavo Kotila 13th.

Kotila won Boston in 1960, but never really fulfilled his enormous potential. He was a terrific trainer whose mileages were massive. It is said he used to warm up for an hour before a marathon race. Maybe that was too much.

Oksanen is well remembered in the US. The stocky detective, who hardly had the build of the ideal marathoner, won the Boston classic three times (1956, '61, '62). Only Oksanen and fellow marathoners Kotila and Paavo Pystynen (second at Boston in '62) were doing much for Finland's sagging running fortunes in the painful early 1960s.

# HITTING THE BOTTOM

Compared with their fine ancestors, Finnish track runners of the 1950s were only mediocre. In the early 1960s, the situation seemed hopeless. But the Finnish top almost completely lost contact with the rest of the world. Magnificent trackmen came and went: Herb Elliott, Peter Snell, Billy Mills, Ron Clarke, Gaston Roelants, Michel Jazy, Kip Keino, Jim Rynn... And the Finnish distance runners were grimly again fighting to break the 30-minute "barrier" for 10,000 meters.

The worst thing was that nobody seemed to care. In 1962, Pentti Nikula pole vaulted a new world record. Pauli Nevala and Jorma Kinnunen became two of the best javelin throwers of all-time. The result was the attitude that "only madmen run long distances. But jumps and throws, they are something." That was the situation in tiny Finland 10 years ago. Newspapermen were criticizing national team runners so hard that it is a wonder some of them had the guts to continue. In 1964, there was a picture of Jouko Kuha kneeling on the grass after an international meeting, vomiting. He had been last. The words under the photo were: "What's the use, Kuha? You'd be wise to retire..." But they did not know Kuha.

Why were the runners so bad then? In a way, this is not a good question. It would be wiser to ask, "Why are they so good now?" But I will tackle the first problem. The rest of the world simply had caught up the Finns, then passed them. Running had become a science. New endurance limits were established. But Finns still were interval slaves. A whole generation of runners was destroyed unintentionally. They were doing rigorous workouts on icy, slippery mid-winter roads, in spike shoes. The result was a mass of leg and foot injuries. Every spring it could be read in the papers: so-and-so runner must finish his running career. He has run off his legs...

But it was rumored something new was coming. In 1961, Coach Arthur Lydiard of New Zealand paid a short visit to Finland with his track aces, Peter Snell, Murray Halberg and others. He claimed they covered 100 miles a week. How could anybody in the world run that much? It seemed impossible. A new question began emerging: were the Finns simply not training sufficiently and correctly? It took almost 10 years to solve this problem.

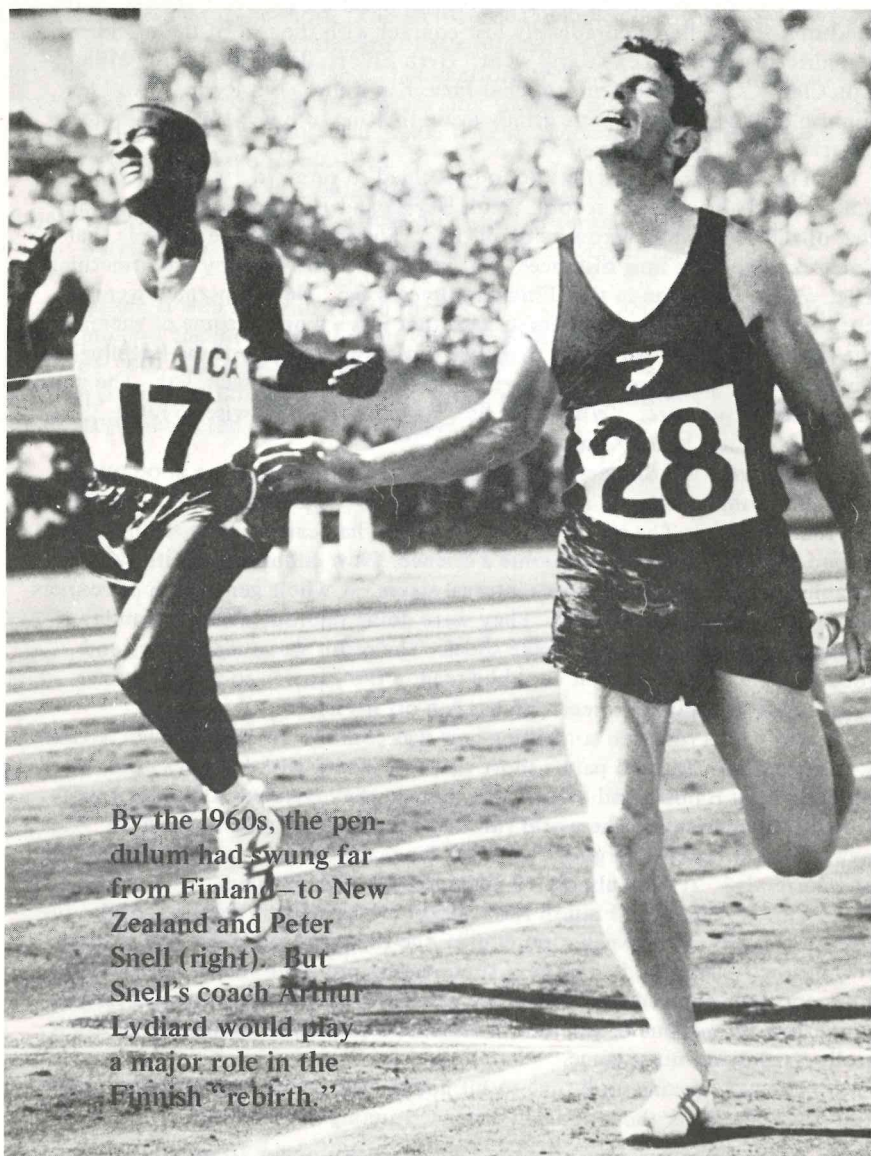
Late in 1962, the Finnish Association invited Mihaly Igloi to coach Finnish runners for a few weeks. Of course the time was too short and nothing revolutionary happened. The next summer was not a bit better, nor the next one. But Igloi showed the personality of a great coach. He must live for running. And he was one of the first to teach to Finns that running to the top is really hard work, not a game.

The new lessons took time to hit home. Meanwhile, the depression continued. Some facts about Finnish distance running in the 1960s:

- For three years no Finn ran 10,000 meters under 30 minutes.

- The Finnish 1500m record of 1957 lasted for 14 years.
- In four Olympic Games—Melbourne, Rome, Tokyo and Mexico City, no Finn reached the finals (except for 10,000 meters, where there were no heats).
- In 1965, when Kip Keino ran 5000 meters in 13:24.2, no Finn bettered 14:12.

Looking back now, it seems unbelievable that it was only seven years before Munich. What happened?

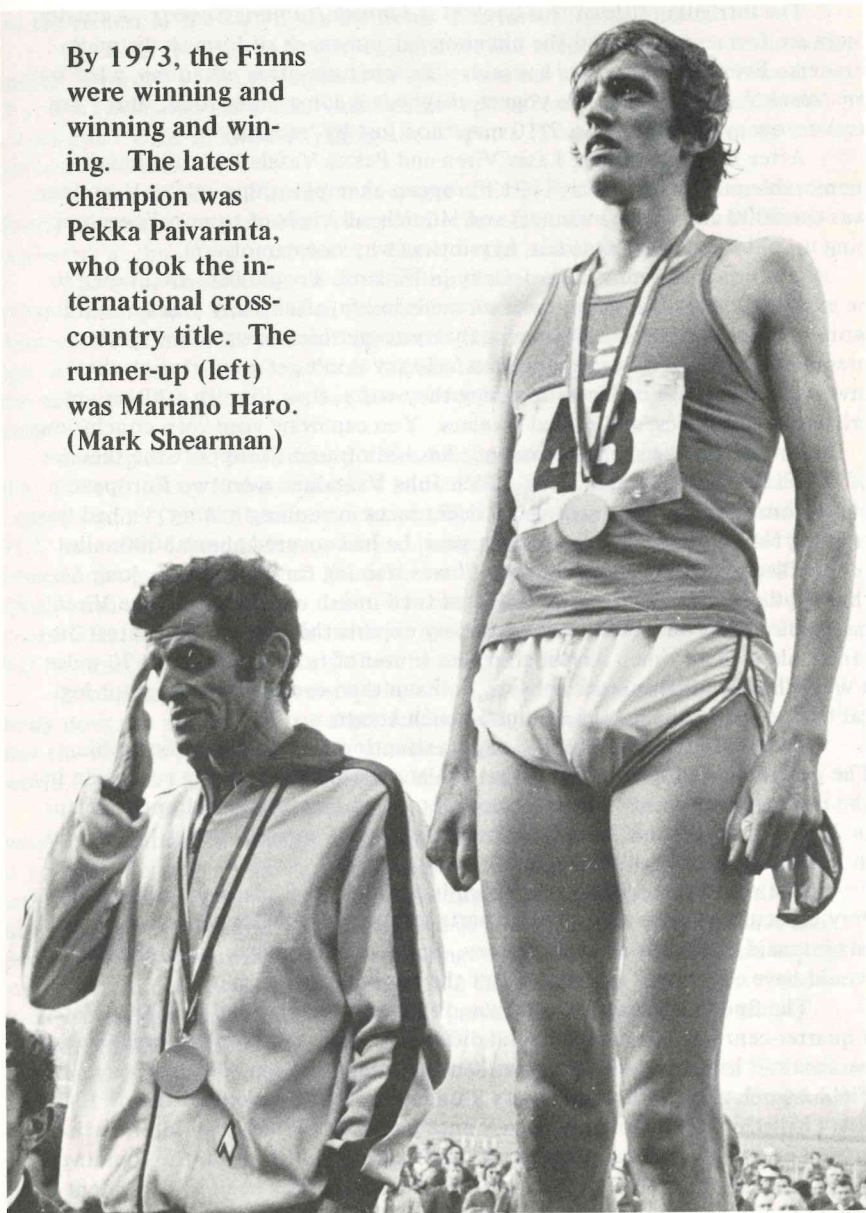


By the 1960s, the pendulum had swung far from Finland—to New Zealand and Peter Snell (right). But Snell's coach Arthur Lydiard would play a major role in the Finnish "rebirth."

## Chapter III

# THE REBIRTH

By 1973, the Finns were winning and winning and winning. The latest champion was Pekka Paivarinta, who took the international cross-country title. The runner-up (left) was Mariano Haro. (Mark Shearman)



# SEEDS OF REVOLUTION

The intriguing title of this booklet is *Finnish Running Secrets*. Actually, there are few secrets behind the phenomenal comeback of Finnish distance runners. Even Frank Shorter has said: "People have often asked me, what is my 'secret.' Well, maybe it is yogurt, maybe it is some other food. But I can assure you: you don't run a 2:10 marathon just by 'secrets.'"

After Juha Vaatainen, Lasse Viren and Pekka Vasala had run their memorable races in Helsinki (1971 European championships, where Vaatainen was the 5000 and 10,000 winner) and Munich, all kinds of rumors began popping up. Blood doping, steroids, hypnotics (why not narcotics?)...

One could expect this, especially in Finland. People here are known to be extremely envious. If someone succeeds in life, after many years of hard work and sacrifices, others immediately try to put him down. The "yellow press" in Finland is like a flock of rats. If they don't get good stories, they invent them. If you believe everything they write, then Finnish athletes are criminals, alcoholics, and sexual maniacs. You can draw your own conclusions.

So far, not the slightest evidence has been found to support the theories of the Finns using illegal devices. When Juha Vaatainen won two European championships after the most magnificent races in running history, he had been training for 12 years. During the last year, he had covered about 8000 miles. Is that illegal? Pekka Vasala's "secret" was training for seven years along Arthur Lydiard's lines, somewhat adjusted for Finnish conditions. Lasse Viren's background was only five years, but many experts think he is the greatest distance talent of all-time. At 20, after one winter of running about 60-70 miles a week, he ran 5000 meters in 13:55.0. Even then everybody thought it logical that some day he would do much, much better.

Ten years ago, the Finnish running situation was simply catastrophic. The generally approved idea was that Finland would never play a role again in the international scene. A good example: when Ron Clarke galloped 25 laps in 27:39.4, the Finnish record was one minute 41.6 seconds slower! This was in 1965.

The revolution which culminated in Munich took place so fast that it is very difficult even for real sports experts to say clearly what happened. Fatalists just said, "It is the cycle of history. Some day, sooner or later, the Finns would have come back anyway." But the truth is not this simple.

The Sports Association of Finland (SVUL) was founded in 1906. For a quarter-century it included several different sports, but then the organization became too heavy and sub-divisions had to be created. The Finnish Track and Field Association (SUL), which was founded in 1931, was one of them. Its first chairman was Urho Kekkonen, himself a 10.9 100-meter sprinter, national high jump champion and holder of unofficial world record in the standing triple jump in the 1920s. For almost two decades he has been the President of Finland.

The club system has always been the skeleton of Finnish track and field. During the decades, thousands of unpaid workers have put their body and soul into it. This is one of the traditions of Finnish running, too. It was only a few years ago that more full-time employees were taken by the SUL. It was a question of money. The yearly dual match against Sweden has always been the main financial source of the SUL. Every two years, the meet is held in Helsinki before some 40,000 spectators per day (the match takes two days). The 1971 European championships in Helsinki were a big success. Today, the SUL is by far the richest of the SVUL sub-divisions. The future looks bright.

Unlike in the United States, universities and schools have little to do with sports. Over the years, the amount of sports lessons per week has decreased. Today, it is two hours per week. Coaches and sports leaders say that Finnish educators don't want to know anything about sports. So now clubs are more important than ever.

University life in Finland encourages athletes in no way. Among students, runners are regarded as "crazy." Fortunately, things seem to be changing better at the moment, thanks to Lasse, Pekka and Juha.

The army has nothing to do with top track in Finland. True, Tapio Kantanen is a sergeant. But he is an exception. To most young sportsmen, military service at about 20 years of age means the end of a career. About 10 ago, so-called sports garrisons were founded to help sportsmen. They remain the subject of hot discussion, but have never gone much beyond the talking stage.

During the last few years, politics has gradually crept into Finnish sports. It is difficult to say if this is good or bad. SVUL is not the only major athletic organization. The Workers' Association (TUL) has existed for many decades. TUL has never denied being a political institution. It has strong ties with the Communist party. SVUL, on the other hand, always insisted that it is not political until the last few years, when its conservative tone has become more evident. Great efforts have been made to unite these and other lesser associations, but it seems unlikely that this will ever be accomplished.

Finnish sports life has always been full of storms and earthquakes. Everybody does not approve of top athletics, because "it takes too much money." But the Finnish public, generally considered the most knowledgeable in the world, wants it. Our country remains the Mecca of track and field.

Just like in the United States, a phenomenon called the "jogging madness" has occurred in Finland during the last five years or so. Ten years ago, if you saw a man (or a woman, still worse!) running half-naked along the city streets—or even in the forest—he was thought to be out of his mind. But now, look at any street or road. They are so full of people, of both sexes and every age, that it is difficult to find running room. Earlier, running was viewed solely as a competitive sport; now, fun and fitness running is popular. In some mass races, there have been thousands of participants—most of them simply wanting to test their fitness.

The renaissance began in 1967, when Arthur Lydiard arrived in Finland.

# LYDIARD'S INFLUENCE

The events of the 1950s and 1960s had proved that Finnish running finally had lost contact. We knew nothing about anything. Something radical had to be done. It was shameful, but Finland had to ask help from others.

Mihaly Igloi's short visit in 1962 did not help much, except he showed there is only one key to success: hard work. Then came Ron Clarke. He raced many times in Finland, lapping native runners. He was considered a once-in-a-century phenomenon (which he, to some extent, was). The Finnish inferiority complex was deeper than ever.

Late in 1966, the SUL made a big move. Arthur Lydiard, the New Zealand man behind Peter Snell and Murray Halberg, was invited to Finland. Lydiard accepted the offer and arrived at Helsinki in March 1967. "The Lydiard Case" took a lot of money, but today it seems it was not in vain. It is not an exaggeration to say that Lydiard was the last hope of the SUL.

As curious as it may sound after Munich, Lydiard's deeds are not given full credit in Finland today. Some people, especially Finnish coaches, admit Lydiard did everything. Others claim he destroyed a handful of terrific prospects and was just a showman. The truth may be somewhere between these statements.

Sinewy and fast-talking Arthur was given two main tasks: to guarantee Finnish success in Mexico City and to create a new generation of Finnish coaches—to give them knowledge. In the first case, he failed completely. In the second, he did even more than expected. The 19 months before Mexico City were simply too short a time. But in this kind of thing Finns usually are too eager. They had expected miracles.

Sometimes Arthur may have promised too much, but on the other hand this may have been for self-confidence. And, of course, the Finnish press exaggerated his words. This became a burden.

From many volunteers, Lydiard chose about 10 runners for special attention. They included several Finnish champions and young prospects. The cold truth is that none of these have reached the absolute top. Mikko Ala-Leppilampi was fifth in the European Games steeple in 1971 and has run 8:29.0 plus flat times of 3:40.3 (1500m), 7:57.0 (3000m) and 13:40.2 (5000m), but he has followed his own systems since 1969. He and Paavo Hyvonen, an erratic 2:16 marathon man, are the only ones still active from Lydiard's group.

The main factor that increased Lydiard's difficulties was that Jouko Kuha (who surprised the track world by steeppling a new world record of 8:24.2 in 1968) and Juha Vaatainen (who those days was a 3:43 1500 man) flatly stated they wanted to keep away from Lydiard. Still today, they insist Lydiard did not do much for Finnish running.

In 1968, Finnish distance men did so badly that only Kuha, Pekka Vasala and marathoner Pentti Rummakko—none of them Lydiard's close pupils—



were sent to Mexico. Kuha became ill and withdrew. Rummakko dropped out of the marathon, and 20-year-old Vasala ran a pitiful last in his 1500 heat in 4:08. Lydiard's fame in Finland did not increase.

Arthur Lydiard stayed in Finland until late 1969. When he left, he was considered a complete failure. Newspapers said the SUL had thrown its money into a well. Before leaving, Arthur wrote an article in which he said, "Finnish runners are very talented—maybe the best in the world—but they are difficult to handle. It is too difficult to get them out and train... Results were expected too soon from me. I am sorry to notice that I was given very little help, but was needlessly criticized. Some people did as I wanted, and I wish them good luck in the future."

But the SUL did not agree with those newspapers. "Just wait and see what happens," officials said. And it did happen. Kari Sinkkonen, Pekka Vasala's and Pekka Paivarinta's coach, says he owes much to Lydiard. Lasse Viren's coach Rolf Haikkola shares this view. Viren's program is a cocktail of Lydiard and Finnish ingredients. Since 1968, Finnish records have been broken like eggs.

Did Arthur Lydiard cause all this? Directly—no. Indirectly—yes. Lydiard had a strong affect on the men who listened to him in SUL meetings and who now coach these young, immensely diligent and ambitious Finnish runners. It became evident Finland had been too much of an "interval slave." Runners did not peak at the right time; they lost their shape too soon. But now mileage at a comfortable pace became a decisive factor—initially, even too much. Even quarter-milers trained like marathon men. Through trial and error, however, right systems were found in Arthur Lydiard's book (*Run to the Top*), which was published in Finland and which, for a time, was a kind of Bible for many runners (they obeyed his model schedules so strictly that they ran literally every yard according to the book), changed to a guide which included good advice but was not the only way to success.

Like everything new in Finland, "The Lydiard Case" caused big waves. Gradually, the discussion calmed down. In spite of many difficulties, Arthur Lydiard did much for Finnish running. Most importantly, he started the jogging mania here. Age or ability was no factor in fun running. Today many people who were almost in the grave five years ago thank Arthur Lydiard for their returned health. He did his job.

# THE RETURN TO RECORDS

Jouko Kuha, who in 1968 shocked the running world by breaking Gaston Roelants' steeplechase world record in Stockholm, does not look very much like a top distance runner. He is short (5'7"), but looks heavier than his weight (130 pounds). His short and quick stride does not scare anyone. But Kuha is a prime example of a runner who had guts to continue in spite of sometimes unbearable difficulties. Against all odds, he succeeded in his world record chase. After many meager years, Kuha brought Finland back to the world running map, but he had to sacrifice more than most runners. He was the first Finn to train abroad in winter time.

This quiet and modest bachelor ("who wants to marry this kind of crazy bum?") was born in Ranua—near the Polar Circle, at the southern border of Lapland—Sept. 30, 1939. In the early 1950s, the family moved to Kokkola, where Jouko like thousands of other Finnish children ran and jumped in "back-yard Olympics." In 1968, Kuha told Finnish journalist Risto Taimi how he had run his first 10,000-meter race at age 11. This run had taken about two hours.

In 1954, Kuha got a running spark which has not disappeared even now. He was 15 then and shared a lot with Paavo Nurmi. Both of them took running extremely seriously—no late nights, no girls. Like Nurmi, Kuha trained alone, secretly, because, "I did not want anybody to know about my plans." With one training winter behind him, he was not satisfied with his lonely time-trials and did not race in the summer, just trained.

Kuha has always been slow. He has never broken 53 seconds for one lap. But after several years of running, he acquired such massive endurance that he was able to sprint the last lap of a 10,000 in 55 seconds. After his world record steeple, in the match against Sweden, Kuha showed that even a slow man can kick. When he dashed the last 200 in 25 seconds, his rivals looked like joggers. He cannot run faster even for a single 200! "It's a matter of stamina," Kuha says. "My firm opinion is that good sprinting speed does not guarantee good kick. You must have endurance."

When 23-year-old Kuha reached Finnish top class in 1962, he was living his own life, without family or study responsibilities. Everything was going fine. He enjoyed running immensely. About this time, Kuha found his own training methods. He was one of the first middle-distance men in Finland to reduce the amount of intervals drastically. Almost all his training is steady—sometimes slow, other times fast.

Kuha is a "mental runner." He has said, "I always train and race as I feel. I never plan mileages beforehand. Sometimes, when I see I have covered 150 miles the previous week, I think, 'Good grief! If I had decided to run that much, I shouldn't have been able to do it.' I always try to peak once a year. Racing means terrific mental pressure for me. Ninety percent of running is men-

tal. But once each year, when I know I am peaking, I can run myself to standstill."

As late as 1963, Kuha had not decided yet about his main event and was running all distances. Progress was steady, but not exceptional. In early 1964, he ran the steeple in 8:43.4 and said, "Now I know. It's the steeple. My target is Mexico City." He almost made the Tokyo team, but failed badly in the last trials (he had been ill).

Kuha's health has never been good—not even satisfactory. Prone to colds and rheumatism, he regularly missed parts of each season. He had arrived at a cross-roads; he could either train in freezing Finnish winter and never reach his true potential, or he could try something that was quite new in Finland—get some money and travel south during the winter months. Because he does not like compromises, he chose the latter course.

Now difficulties began to emerge. He was not so young any more, and he had never accomplished anything special. It was not easy to convince people of the soundness of his idea. The first winter, he had to sell everything he owned to get the money required. When he returned from Spain with his suntan, he was literally penniless. But he managed a breakthrough. In 1965, he raced reliably, without bad patches. His fastest steeplechase was 8:37.6, a new national record.

"At home, I was working only part-time," Kuha said. "When training abroad, I was living with my own savings. I have counted that running costs me at least 7000 marks (\$1700) a year." Because he was doing well, Kuha began getting help from the Finnish Association, so his task became a bit easier. Jouko continued his lonely way towards world class.

At the 1966 European championships in Budapest, Kuha was in the best shape of his life, and he peaked 100% right. In his steeplechase heat, he ran a new Finnish record of 8:36.2—but was only fifth and did not reach the final. Kuha naturally was bitter: "What's the use? I have put all my soul and money into running, and now I am out of the final."

For a while, he was depressed. But he felt there was still something inside him. Kuha did not give up. And after one more training winter (in Spain and Brazil), he took a big step forward. In the traditional Swedish match, he left top rival Bengt Persson far behind and ran a splendid new national record of 8:29.8. He was seventh on the world all-time list now. Two weeks later, he won the World University championship in Tokyo. Full of running, he was eager to see how he would manage in the "pre-Olympics" in Mexico City. It became a severe blow for him. Kuha could not handle the thin air at all. He felt completely out of shape, finishing 15th in 9:30.0.

Kuha immediately realized that Mexico City would be a big farce. He would have nothing to do there, really. The International Olympic Committee had made the Games meaningless, at least for distance runners. One year before Mexico City, the Games were over for Jouko Kuha. He developed a new goal: the world steeplechase record.

Arthur Lydiard had been working for several months in Finland. But even from the beginning, he did not see much of Kuha. It was rumored that they did not really like each other. On the other hand, they were not enemies. Kuha told newspapermen, "I have nothing against Lydiard. He knows much about running. But I do not like his winter training methods. They are too

rigid. I want to enjoy my running—and that's no obstacle to good results. Every single year Finnish runners have said they have run more than ever. But where are their results?"

The truth is that in 1968 Kuha was a head taller than other Finnish distance men. He began the season by winning the 12-kilometer race in the national cross-country championships and running a good 12th at six kilometers only two hours later. (Many other Finns, notably Seppo Tuominen and Esko Lipsonen, have doubled even better, but in summer they have been just shadows of themselves. Kuha did not burn himself.) He was still thinking about Mexico, half-seriously, and wanted to peak late in the season. But the Finnish press, as always, got impatient and carried headlines, "Kuha Loses Again," "Kuha Out of Shape," etc. He was running slower than the previous season.

This angered Jouko. He said, "Well, if they want it, they'll get it." In early July he ran 8:33.4, but still better results were to come. On July 17, Kuha really let himself go. Later he said, "I knew the moment had arrived. I felt immensely fit. I was peaking now. It was a world record attack." Kuha passed 1500 meters in a modest 4:17, but then the tiny, light-stepping Finn astonished the crowd. He went off like a miler, covering the second half in 4:07 and the last kilometer in 2:41 (over hurdles and water-jumps!). Although he did not get any help from his rivals, Kuha had reached his once-so-distant goal: the world record was now 8:24.2. Jubilant Kuha was running a lap of honor, with a bunch of flowers in his hand, smiling happily. "I felt the happiest man in the world," he recalls. At that moment, Jouko Kuha became the hero of Finland.

This record run sparked all kinds of unusual incidents. Finnish papers reported former world record holder Gaston Roelant's comment had been: "I don't believe Kuha is capable of 8:24. There must have been something illegal..." This was never affirmed, however. Then, surprisingly, the IAAF announced it could not approve Kuha's record because he had run with a chest number carrying an advertisement for a famous Swedish oil company. This only increased Kuha's fame. He became a martyr. Later, however, the IAAF changed its rules and the record was written into the books. All the uproar calmed down.

The very next day, Kuha was the pacer in a class 5000-meter field. He faded slightly towards the finish, but broke the nine-year-old national record with 13:47.8. (Ron Clarke won in 13:30.4). Later in the season, Kuha swept the Finnish record lists. In Helsinki, there was a great 3000-meter race. Kuha won in 7:56.6 from Mikko Ala-Leppilampi (7:58.6) and half-miler Juha Vaatainen (who reduced his personal best by 52 seconds—from 8:53 to 8:01). Kuha then ran 10,000 meters in 29:07.0, another record. The new Finnish chase after world heights had begun.

It was a fine summer, but it did not end well. Mexico City was a great disaster. Kuha had already peaked. Once again he was ill. It was a very bad cold, which plagued him for weeks. In September he ran only 8:50 for the steeplechase and said he'd not participate in the Games. He was there, but only as a tourist. No Olympic glory for Jouko Kuha.

Five years after Mexico City, Kuha still has not broken his records. But at 34 he is still running because "I like it and I can't do anything else," he says sarcastically. In 1968, he said he'd retire when he could not improve any

more, but he has not kept the promise. He has not been running badly. Since 1969, he has broken 8:40 every year. But people are watching other runners now. Kuha did not run in the European title meet in 1971 nor in Munich, although he had been training seriously for them. In June 1972, he ran one of his best times—8:32.0. But three other Finns were better. A new era had arrived.

**Jouko Kuha:** born Sept. 30, 1939, in Ranua. 5'7", 130 pounds. Office clerk. Single. Began racing in 1956 at age 16. No coach.

**Racing:** 800—1:54.1 (1966); 1500—3:46.3 (66); 3000—7:56.6 (68); 5000—13:47.8 (68); 10,000—29:07.0 (68); 25,000—1:20:36.6 (73); marathon—2:33:58.6 (67); steeple—8:24.2 (68).

**Training:** Usually twice (sometimes three times) a day, 7 days a week, 12 months a year; anything from 80-170 miles a week. "My mind is my coach. I am constantly examining myself. Unlike Juha Vaatainen, I don't train with crash programs. Most of my speedwork is racing. I always try to 'save' something. Maybe I am training more like Ron Clarke—year-round. Continuity is the key. I never miss a workout on purpose. But sometimes if I don't feel like running, I just jog a few miles and return home. I always do my morning run at the same time. In the evening, I wait until the 'inspiration' comes. Sometimes it has not arrived until 11 p.m.! Once I had just run 20 kilometers and was showering, when my clubmate Esko Siren came and asked me to run with him. Okay. I dressed again and off we went, another 20..."



# THE RETURN TO GOLD

Juha Vaatainen, double European champion of 1971, has been the object of more discussion, rumors and newspaper writing than any other sportsman in Finnish history—with the possible exceptions of Paavo Nurmi and cross-country skier Eero Mantryanta, three-time Olympic gold medalist. In this respect, Vaatainen easily beats out even Lasse Viren and Pekka Vasala. His club owns a newspaper-sized scrapbook of Juha, about five inches thick, which almost exclusively tells about Vaatainen's exploits (and failures as well), on the track and away from it. Almost since his birth in 1941, he has continually done, said or caused something worth mentioning.

Although I have been Juha Vaatainen's clubmate for five years now and have lived in the same part of Finland as him for 20 years, I cannot claim to know him very well. (We were once scheduled to run in the same relay team in the Finnish championships; instead, Juha chose to travel to Italy to a private training camp. It was in 1969, when Juha was beginning to aim higher than national titles.)

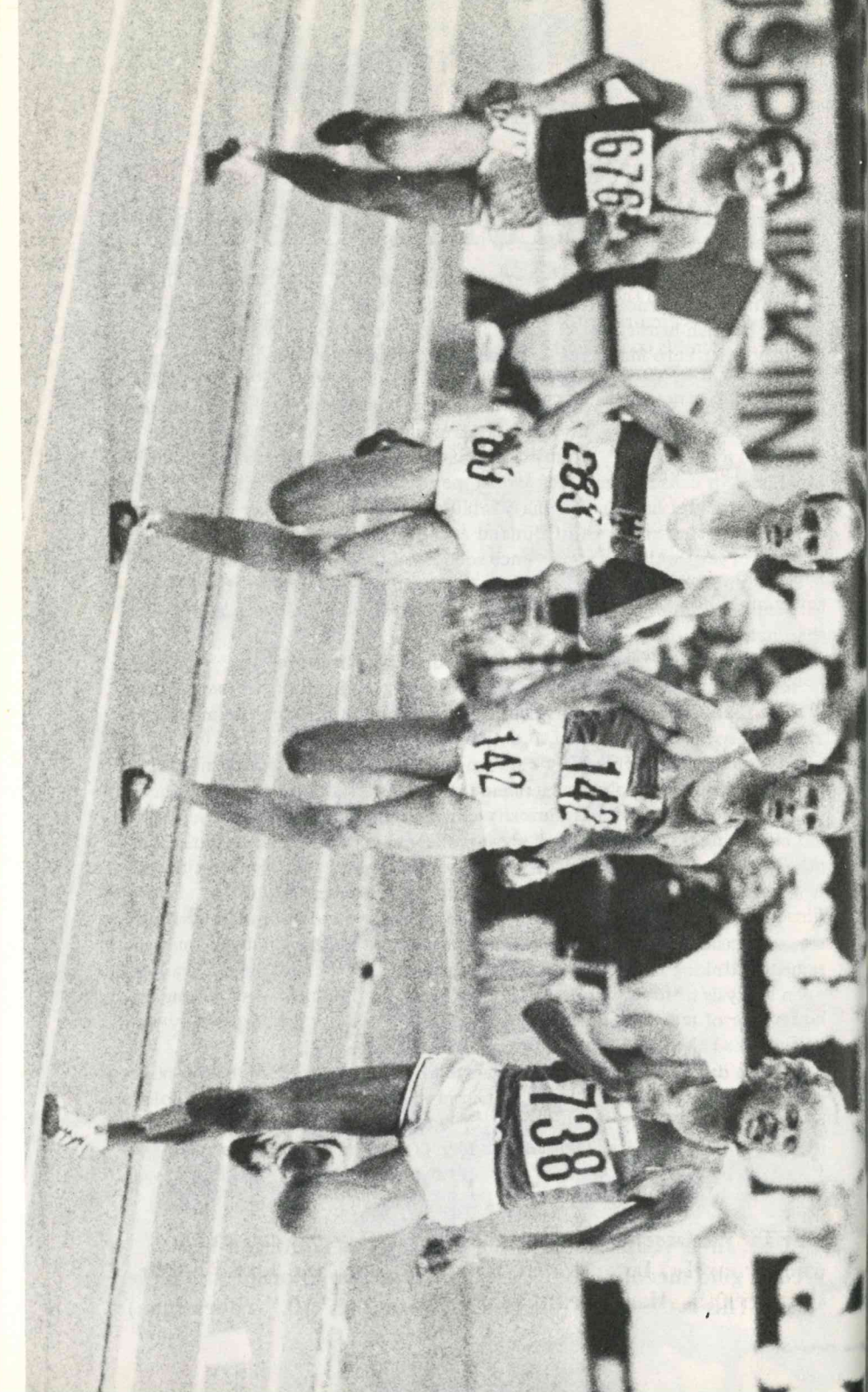
In his active years, Vaatainen was abroad most of the time. And when he returned home, he lived alone, concentrating on big tasks. I really doubt if there is anybody who can truthfully say he "knows" Juha Vaatainen.

Many people have tried to define Vaatainen in a few words, but have always found it impossible. If we say he is a running genius, world man who loved his sport so deeply that he made an art of it and began living exclusively for it, conquering his own inferiority complex and innumerable other difficulties, climaxing his "sprinter-to-marathoner" (almost) career with two of the finest victories of running history, it may sound like a phony collection of worn-out phrases. But it isn't. He is all that, and much more.

In his book *One Lap to Go* (as told to Eeli Aalto, published by Kirjayhtymä), considered "immoral" by many because it includes glimpses of Vaatainen's drinking habits and his women affairs, he gives a straightforward and open analysis of his life course. He tells how, at school, he was a young rascal, horror of teachers, smoking 20-30 cigarettes a day. He desperately wanted to make the school track team, but was not any good.

The day Feb. 1, 1958, Juha changed his life. Since then, he has not smoked a single cigarette. He began running not just to make the school team but to become a really good runner. "I have always been regarded as a mad trainer," he says. "The older, the madder. In winter 1958, I was covering a 12-kilometer course three, then four and five times a week. In those days, it

**LEFT: Juha Vaatainen (center, No. 738) sets out after his second gold medal at the 1971 European championships at Helsinki. This is the 5000. Earlier he'd won the "10." (Shearman)**





was much. I was 17 then, almost. In one year, my 400-meter time improved from 63 to 53 seconds, and 1000 meters from 3:40 to 2:43. I made the school team, and when I won in a match against another school it was the greatest moment of my life—even greater than the European titles. In those school races, I always ran my legs off. There were girls watching and I wanted to impress them. I was foaming and vomiting, but I won.”

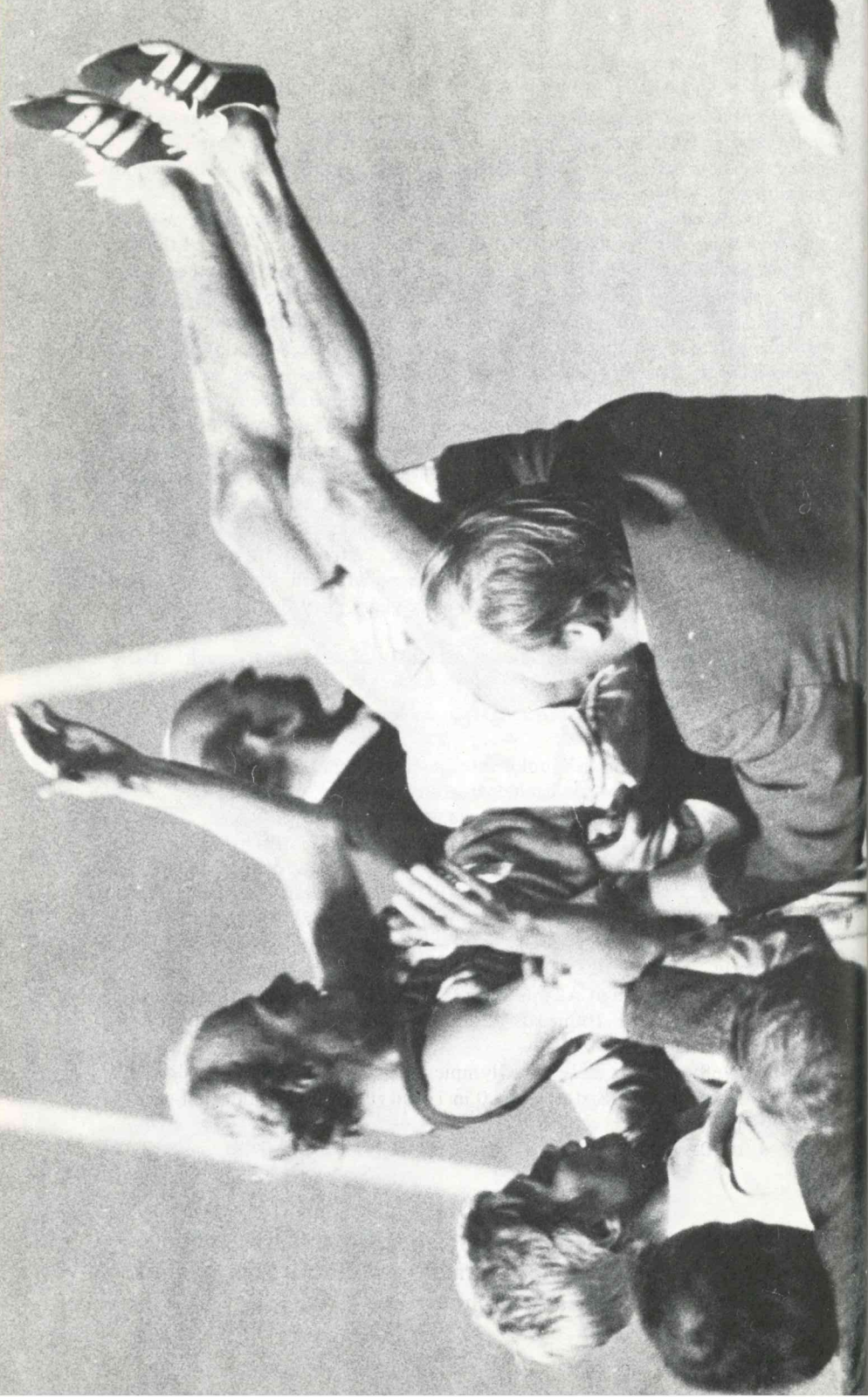
That is typical of Vaatainen. When he wants to do something, he does it as well as he ever can. Influenced by the late Paavo Meskus, one of the greatest-ever coaches in Finland, Juha began training really hard. He wanted eventually to compete with the best in the world and beat them. How many runners have had the difficulties of Vaatainen. He had injuries, illnesses, financial troubles—then his coach died. Juha was advised, “Retire, Vaatainen! You’ll never make it. You can use your time better.” This may sound harsh, but that was the general idea of people at the time. Runners were regarded as something weird, crazy. Only top athletes counted. If you were not a gold medalist, then why run? But Juha said these obstacles just made him harder.

In 1961, Vaatainen went through military service and began his studies at Oulu University to become an elementary school teacher, but running was his life. He had continual tussles with teachers, because he did not show up for lectures. He was out running. He said later, “After my European titles, I received congratulations from my old teachers, who had not liked me. These telegrams made me kind of soft. After many years, they finally understood me.”

To give an idea of what is sometimes takes of a runner to reach certain heights, this is Vaatainen year by year.

- 1959: broke his leg in a tractor accident while working on a farm; missed the season completely.
- 1960: won Finnish junior intermediate hurdles title in 56.2.
- 1961: injured knee ligaments in a hurdle race; no progress.
- 1962: military service, no races whatsoever.
- 1963: sixth in Finnish championships at 800 meters (1:52.3).
- 1964: injured achilles tendon (spiked in a race); operation required.
- 1965: training more than any Finnish long distance runner, but won Finnish and Nordic 800-meter titles (1:49.7) in this breakthrough summer.
- 1966: training hard, but “something was wrong,” did not improve significantly.
- 1967: studied at Adams State College in Colorado, and returned home faster than ever: 100m 10.9, 200m 22.1; was by for the best Finnish half-miler of the season.
- 1968: did not make the Olympic team, but ran 3000 in 8:01.0.
- 1969: ran his first-ever 5000 in 14:06 (later 13:50) and first-ever 10,000 in 28:53.0.
- 1970: ran 10,000 in 28:19.6.

**LEFT: Vaatainen’s 53-second last lap at Helsinki carries him away from (l-r) Dane Korica, Harald Norpoth and Jean Wadoux in the 5000. (Mark Shearman photo)**



- 1971: double European distance champion—5,000 and 10,000.
- 1972: ran his best-ever 3000 and 5000, but a sudden attack of rheumatism (he has been troubled by it and various other illnesses throughout his career) paralyzed him to 13th place in Munich 5000 meters final. Retired.

Aug. 10, 1971, became the greatest day of Juha Vaatainen's 15-year career (in spite of what he says about school matches!). He had been racing well in his rare meets (28:12.6 10,000 meters in Finnish title meet), but his victory over Jurgen Haase after a 53-second last lap was a major shock. The whole of Finland was in a state of delirium, until another bomb followed four days later in the 5000 meters. After running over 8000 miles in one year, Vaatainen had reached his target. He became "Best Finnish Sportsman of 1971," "The Most Popular Finn," "The Most Unlikeable Finn," plus everything possible and impossible.

Then the focus switched to Munich. At first, Vaatainen announced he would run 5000, 10,000 and the marathon. Later, because of timetable difficulties, he decided to forget the marathon. (Eventually, because of a knee injury, he ran only 5000). He trained in Kenya, Brazil, Spain and France, returning home in June. All kinds of mad rumors began popping up (maybe 1% of them true). They said he had run a 13:10 5000-meter time trial, in the middle of the night, witnessed only by Finnish Association men. They said he was so ill that he would not live beyond a couple of weeks. But he did not race.

Finally, he appeared in the Finnish championships. He won a tactical 5000 race in mediocre time: 14:03.2. The weather was lousy, he did not run nearly flat-out. He remained a mystery.

In the Munich 5000 heat, he ran superbly. His time of 13:32.8 was his second-best. That was after the Israel incident, which had a deep effect on Vaatainen. Do we run or don't we? The program was moved one day forward. After the tragedy, Juha was not the same man as before, but his failure was caused by other problems. His body simply did not hold together on the day. If he had taken his (legal) medicines against rheumatism, he would probably have done much better. But he did not take them. There were already too many examples of senseless disqualifications after doping samples. What a sensation it would have been: "Vaatainen Won Doped!" In the evening after the fiasco, he went for a drink with Steve Prefontaine and Dave Bedford...three "failures."

Late into September, Vaatainen competed frequently, "enjoying racing more than ever before." The mental pressure was gone. He ran 3000 in 7:53.4 at Malmo, losing to Emiel Putemans but beating Lasse Viren. In Rome, he was beaten by surprising Gianni del Buono and "Pre" but reduced his 5000 meters best to 13:28.4.

Then, on Oct. 1 in Helsinki, he was pacing Lasse Viren in the world record try. The weather was freezing cold, and after a few laps Vaatainen dropped out. There was a picture of him in a magazine, standing beside the track, shadowing his eyes with his hand, looking after the younger runners. The text: "There they go...good-bye boys." Viren did not set the record, and Vaatainen's

**LEFT: Finland's first real track hero since World War II, Juha Vaatainen, is carried away by ecstatic countrymen after his European championships double. (Mark Shearman photo)**

retirement was not spectacular. But he wanted it that way.

Juha Vaatainen says he has enjoyed every step of his career, although "sometimes it has hurt." He has traveled more than 99% of all Finns; he has seen the world. He remembers what it is like to break the thread in Helsinki Olympic Stadium, with 50,000 people roaring madly. He remembers what it was like to run 50 kilometers a day in the heat of Brazil, with terribly sore legs, almost crying. No, it had not been a holiday as some people imagined. In Paris, he had run out of money and had fasted for three days until the check from home arrived. The loneliness of a long distance runner...

Now he has a well-paid job in the Finnish Association. He still runs about 10 miles a day, and could probably race well, although his weight has increased.

"I was a showman on the track," Vaatainen says. "When young, I always lacked self-confidence. I tried to compensate for it by behaving in my own way, and consequently I was generally regarded as cocky. Maybe I was. I was not myself on the track. I was acting, and I liked it immensely. I know that I won many of my races even before the start because nobody knew me well. They were always afraid of me."

In his book *Juha*, ironically, ponders about his failure in Munich: "Came Sept. 10. I am not very superstitious, but it was Sept. 9 two years ago, when my friend Dr. Kvist operated on my achilles tendon. 'It will stand for two years, and you'll stand for two years,' he said. This race took place Sept. 10, one day too late. It was not my day of victory. I knew it five hours before the race. Rheumatism."

**Juha Vaatainen:** (born July 12, 1941, in Oulu). 5'7", 135 pounds. Formerly elementary school teacher, now working as a "jogging coach" in the Finnish Association. Announced his marriage in late 1973. Began racing at age 16, in 1957. Coached formerly by Paavo Meskus (who died in 1968), then self-coached. Nickname: "Juha the Cruel."

**Racing:** 100-10.9 (1967); 200-22.1 (67); 400-48.9 (67); 800-1:48.4 (67); 1500-3:43.7 (68); 3000-7:53.4 (72); 5000-13:28.4 (72); 10,000-27:52.8 (71); 25,000-1:19:42.0 (71); 400 hurdles-56.2 (60).

**Training:** two to three times a day, seven days a week, 12 months a year, sometimes as much as 220 miles a week. When preparing for the European meet in 1971, Vaatainen probably trained harder than any runner ever did. He was running three times a day, at a very fast speed. In his hardest months, he logged more than 1300 kilometers (800 miles). So his training included both quality and quantity.

Vaatainen always had the rare ability to preserve his enormous sprinting speed in spite of that massive mileage training. This is (a) because he is a former sprinter and "naturally" fast; (b) because he always paid great attention to speed sessions, like accelerations of 150 meters, and 1200-meter fast-slow runs (50 meters flat-out, 50 meters slow). He says he never walked during practice. A typical example of rhythm training was 40 x 200 meters in 32 seconds, jogging back.

He never liked frequent racing. In 1971, he said he had intended not to race at all before the European meet, but it was impossible because he had to break the qualifying standard of the Finnish Association.

He never trained two years in a row in the same way, because "a runner changes continually." He was not an Arthur Lydiard fan because "he tried to use New Zealand systems in Finland, which is completely wrong. Each country is a different case; in Finland, we need a Finnish system."

Vaatainen was one of the first runners in Finland to use the so-called carbohydrate-protein diet for big races, and found it helped him tremendously.

He has said, "Top results are reached only through pain. But eventually you like this pain. You'll find that the more difficulties you have on your way, the more you will enjoy your success."

## Chapter IV

# LASSE VIREN



Lasse Viren closes in on his Munich double as Steve Prefontaine, Mohamed Gammoudi, Ian Stewart and Emiel Puttemans line up behind him in the 5000. (Shearman)

# TWO DAYS IN MUNICH

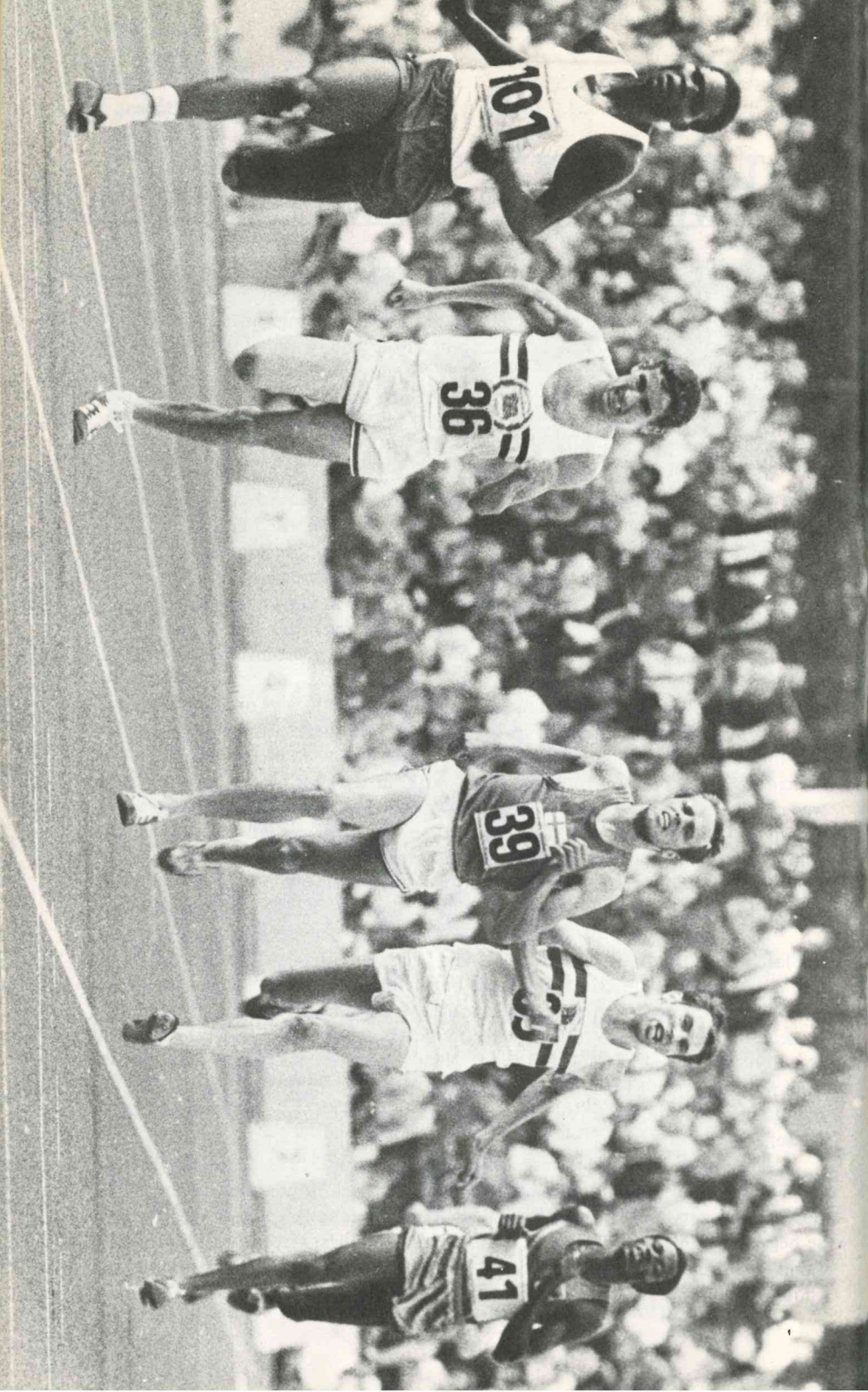
Myrskylä is a small village of about 3000 inhabitants, 50 miles northeast of Helsinki. It is a quiet countryside place, living an ordinary everyday life. Your car speeds through it in maybe two minutes. Nothing special can be seen...unless you have luck and come upon a lithe young man, clad in blue tracksuit, running along the country road. Would you believe he has won two Olympic gold medals? You see the lettering on his back: "Myrskylän Myrsky." It sounds funny. But in Finland it has about the same aura as "Florida Track Club" in the States.

Tradition is one of the weapons of Finnish running—also in Myrskylä. After World War II, Rolf Haikkola was one of the best Finnish distance men. He was national junior champion in cross-country skiing, then he switched to running and represented Finland at the European championships in 1954. He ran the 5000 in 14:14.2 at his best. In the 1960s, Pertti Sariomaa suddenly emerged as a top runner. A typical late-comer, he was almost 30 when he began ambitious running, which carried him to a 29:25.2 "10." Then this running tradition in Myrskylä was carried on by immensely promising Lasse Viren. And he is coached by Rolf Haikkola.

When Viren arrived at Munich last year, he already was one of the favorites. Two weeks earlier, he had smashed the best runners in the world in a two-mile race at Stockholm, in a world record time of 8:14.0. Before that, he had run a solo 10,000 in 27:52.4 and 5000 in 13:19.0. Everybody knew he was moving well. But on Sept. 3, the world whole at once realized Lasse Viren's uniqueness. In the fastest 10,000-meter race in history, he fell—but won the gold medal, reducing Ron Clarke's ancient world standard by one second. A week later, in the tactical tussle at 5000 meters, Viren gave no chance for others. All the world focused its eyes on this modest 24-year-old policeman.

It was Sept. 1, 1949, when Viljo Heino ran his last 10,000-meter record, the last Finn for 24 years to set this mark. That day, Lasse Viren was 40 days old. Lasse's father Ilmari did not race, but he liked to run. At 50, he still runs a short cross-country course near his house, wearing boots and long trousers. Lasse's uncle once broke four minutes for 1500 meters. Lasse has three brothers, all of whom enjoy track and field. Nisse still competes occasionally, mostly in road races, and Erkki triple jumped around 47 feet in 1972. Until a couple of years ago, Nisse Viren was the main advisor of his younger brother Lasse.

Training in Myrskylä is not easy. The streets and road were not lighted until a few years ago, and in winter it was rather hazardous to run in the darkness. In January, daylight in Finland lasts only four to five hours. When Lasse began running, he did most of it in the late evenings, after working in the family trucking business. Sometimes his father let him run in the daylight, although Lasse was much needed on the job. In 1964, the year of the Tokyo





Games, Viren turned 15. Running was only sporadic. In September, in one of his rare meets, he ran 1000 meters in 2:57.2. Two Olympiads to Munich.

How did Viren train? "I had no ideas of running whatsoever. Except for Nisse, nobody gave me advice... That was the time of 'interval fever.' All runners in Finland were doing mad interval sessions. Fortunately, I did not know of that. I was doing only steady runs, 10-15 kilometers, maybe twice or three times a week. That was all. Maybe it was my instinct. But I also liked to run that way. I want to point out: I had no targets then. I just ran whenever I had time and because I enjoyed it."

He continued, "In 1965, I was only 13th in the county cross-country run, in the youth class. In the summer, I ran 3000 meters in 9:33.8 and improved my 1000-meter best to 2:49.2. In September, I watched the Finland-Sweden dual match in TV. Pertti Sariomaa from Myrskylä was running there. The Finns did not do very well, and I began thinking about it. Somehow or another, I finally got the training impetus I had been lacking. I wanted to see if it was possible for a Finn to run *well*."

Lasse progressed solidly in 1966, "the black year" of Finnish track and field. He ran 3000 meters in 9:17.0. It was good enough for 13th place in the Finnish youth statistics of the year. The Finnish Association invited him to training courses. He began getting sound advice. Fortunately, interval madness had already passed.

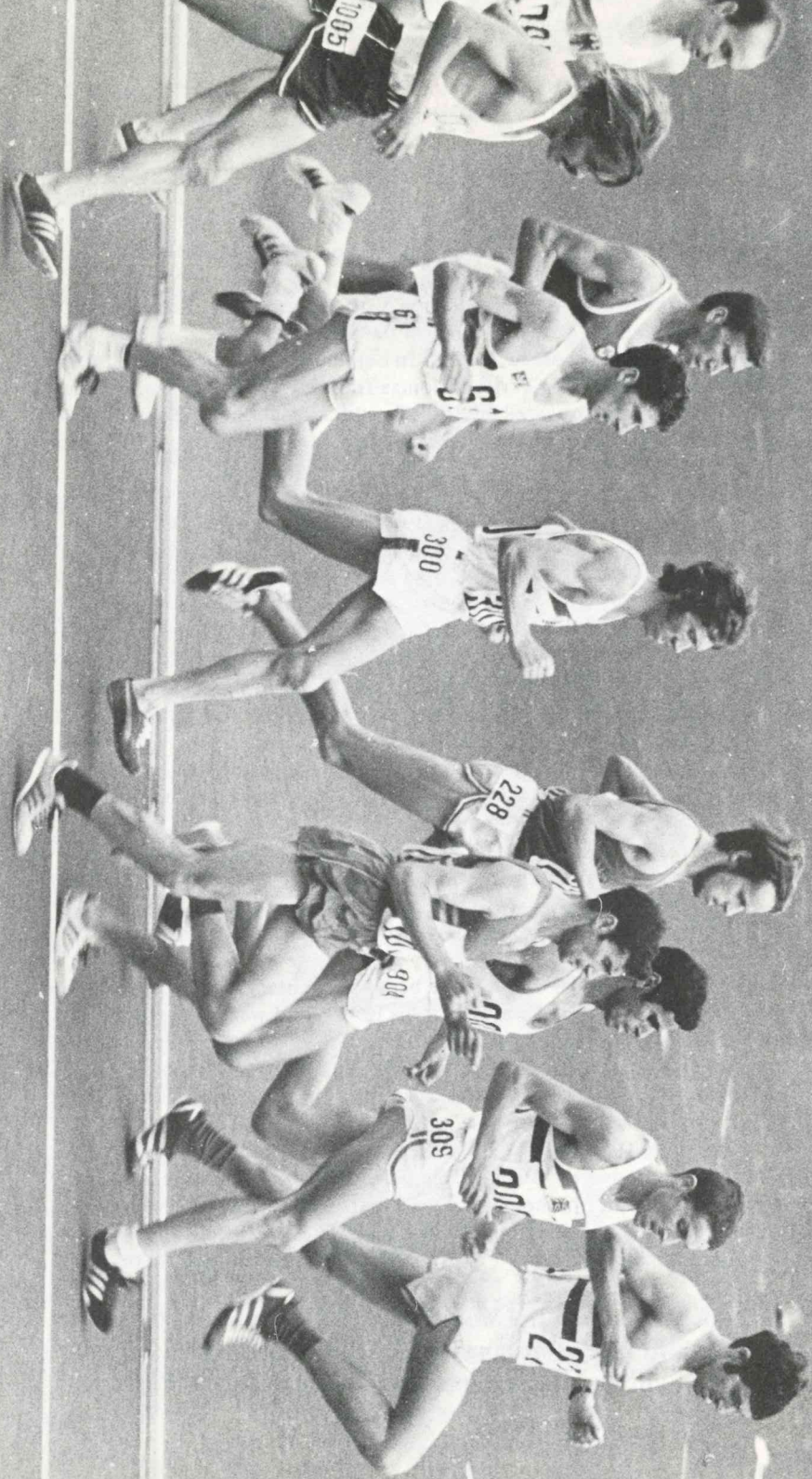
In early 1967, Lasse began keeping a training diary. He covered less than 2000 kilometers that year. That small amount of running was enough to carry him to the national junior records. In the Finnish cross-country championships, he made his first big breakthrough. The weather was extremely hot, and thick dust was hovering all around the place. Aulis Viitala, a great prospect who never really "made it," won the youth class with almost-18-year-old Lasse second and Tapio Kantanen third. "I was very surprised," Viren says, "I had not been training so much."

Lasse really began moving in September when his 3000-meter time of 8:32.8 set a new Finnish record for age 18. Later, he attacked his first 5000. New record again: 14:59.4. No 18-year-old Finn had broken 15 minutes previously. A habit was forming: Lasse nearly always has reached his peak in the late season.

Two weeks after his 5000, Lasse began his military service at a so-called sports garrison. He was not sure about his future, and wanted to ponder it. . . In this case, the army was a good solution. In a way, life there was easy. During these 11 months, Lasse did not run well. But he matured a lot. He decided to become a policeman in Myrskylä, his own little village. It is not a hard job. Myrskylä is not the same as Chicago.

Army year 1968 was the first time Lasse was training really hard. The result: he was completely out of shape. His background increased massively, but he was stiff as an iron horse. He made personal best only at seldom-run distances (800m 2:02.8, 1500m 4:06.8, 10,000m 32:18.8). In the most important race of the season, the Finnish junior 5000, he was only 11th. He

**LEFT: A year before the Munich Games, Viren found the going there much tougher, finishing behind Ben Jipcho (101) and Ian Stewart (36) in the pre-Olympic 5000. (Mark Shearman photo)**



1005

701

61

300

228

901

305

291

closed the season by finishing 293rd in the traditional 30-kilometer in Helsinki, which usually attracts more than 2000 competitors. Those 292 are lucky; they can truthfully say they have beaten Lasse Viren.

Then came 1969—the year when Finnish distance men finally began waking up. Juha Vaatainen ran his first successful “five” and “10,” Pekka Vasala was doing well the whole season and Lasse Viren, still a junior, showed his true potential.

In brief, this was Viren’s 1969 summer:

- Won national junior cross-country title from Esko Lipsonen. Both got the same time.
- June 9: improved 3000m personal best by 19 seconds. The time of 8:13.8 was a new junior record.
- June 11: 5000m in 14:37.6 (personal best by 21.8 seconds).
- June 17: 1500m in 3:58.3 (personal best).
- June 21: 800m in 1:54.3 (still his best).
- July 3: 5000m in 14:23.2 (junior record).
- July 27: 1500m in 3:52.9 (personal best).
- Aug. 3: Won Finnish Junior 5000 meters title in 14:17.0—national junior record.
- Aug. 10: won 5000 meters in 14:09.4 (record) in junior match against Sweden and Norway.
- Aug. 17: won Finnish Senior 5000m title in 14:10.2. Vaatainen did not run.
- Aug. 28: first senior dual match, against Norway. Arne Kvalheim won in 14:03; Lasse’s time of 14:08.0 was another national junior record.
- Sept. 1: fantastic 5000m race: (1) Juha Vaatainen 13:50.0; (2) Lasse Viren 13:55.0 (Nordic Junior record even today).
- Sept. 6: won 5000m in the match against Sweden in 14:04.2 from Bengt Najde, Pekka Vasala and Juha Vaatainen, who was ill.
- Sept. 10: ran 3000m in 8:06.8 (junior record).
- Sept. 24: finished seventh in a hard 3000m in Berlin, won by Emiel Puttemans in 7:54.2; Viren 8:05.2—new record again!
- Oct. 7: ran 5000m in London. Lost to Alan Blinston and Mike Baxter narrowly, but time was 14:10.8.

Brigham Young University in Utah has lately been a very popular place for Finnish trackmen. In the late 1960s it was “in” to travel to the United States. Some of the Finns studied, some of them ran, jumped or threw—some of them did both. All of them did not do well in meets.

In January 1970, Lasse Viren and Pekka Vasala began their long flight to the west, where vaulter Altti Alarotu, triple jumper Pertti Pousi and hurdler Jaakko Tuominen were already waiting for them. “I did not speak many words of English. I was a complete newcomer in this kind of business,” Viren recalls.

**LEFT: A calm Viren (228) is content to wait for the kick in the Olympic 5000. It has worked for him once, and will again. Dave Bedford, Ian Stewart, Mohamed Gammoudi and Javier Alvarez lead Viren at this early stage. (Mark Shearman photo)**

But he was curious. What would it be like to train in the States, to see new people?

In his book *Golden Seconds* (as told to Pentti Vuorio, published by Weilin & Goos), Viren tells, "Training in Provo was along old interval lines. I did not really like it. On the other hand, it was not easy to do long runs. Well, winter was not hard that year; if there was some snow in the morning, it was gone by afternoon. But the roads were solely of asphalt and concrete. Yes, there were golf courses, fine like a dream, in the neighborhood, where it would have been a pleasure to run. Unfortunately, it was forbidden to run there. They were owned by private people. University students had to keep far away from them."

Viren became a victim of the "American system." He had to race indoors frequently, quite a new experience to him (of course, he admits he knew this when he went to Provo; he had promised to represent BYU). His legs became terribly sore. Pekka Vasala had to be operated on, but Viren was luckier—he only got scared. On returning home, after the long and demanding university season, Viren was in lousy shape. But it had not been a complete failure: "I learned many things; my English became better. After Provo, I have been ready to travel anywhere in the world—even alone." Young Viren was becoming a world man.

Early that summer, Viren ran 5000 meters in Helsinki. It was a shock for Finnish fans: he was 12th in 14:53.6. The next few weeks were as bad. "Provo Destroyed Viren," the newspapers reported. But Lasse had no hurry. His legs were getting better. Just wait... And a memorable occasion took place. Viren went to Rolf Haikkola and asked if Haikkola could coach him. After reading Viren's training diary and thinking about the matter, Haikkola agreed.

In August at the so-called "American Games" in Helsinki (12 Americans were competing), Lasse Viren came back better than ever. Mikko Ala-Leppilampi had one of his good moments. He won the 4000 in a new national record time of 13:40.2, and Viren ran a magnificent 13:43.0. Third was a new star named Frank Shorter (13:45.0). Viren proved that he had not been lazing around in Utah. Later, he won the "five" against old rival Sweden, showing a surprising finishing kick. In Prague, Viren ran his second 10,000 meters, reducing his best by over three minutes to 29:15.8, although "it was one of my easiest races that year."

Winter 1971 was a turning-point in Lasse Viren's life. He was studying in the Helsinki Police School so he was able to contact Rolf Haikkola almost daily. Training was progressing extremely well. There was not a slightest sign of "burning out." Viren's mileage was now almost three times as great as three years earlier. He underwent a minor nose operation (he had a deformed cartilage), got a recovery leave from the school and took advantage of it. He went to train in the Canary Islands.

He could afford this, for he was one of the trackmen the Finnish Association had given a significant amount of money to cover training expenses. The European Championships in Helsinki were approaching, and Finland, naturally, wanted to do well. Note that these trackmen (Viren, Vaatainen, Tuominen, Vasala, the javelin throwers) never actually *saw* the money. It was given only against receipts (massage, food, equipment, travel expenses, etc.), usually di-

rectly to people concerned—masseurs and so on. A new era in Finnish track and field had begun: that of total coaching.

The news from Rome, at the end of May, was a major bomb. New British distance marvel Dave Bedford had won a 5000-meter race in 13:28.0, with Yugoslavian Dane Korica second and Lasse Viren third in 13:35.2—a new Finnish record in his first track race of the year! The weather had been quite hot, but Viren was not disturbed. In fact, he is one of the few Finnish distance runners who enjoy the heat.

Viren's development in the 10,000 meters had been out of this world: 1968—32:18.8; 1970—29:15.8. He chopped off another minute July 1 in the Helsinki World Games. Korica won the tight finish in 28:16.6, Viren ran 28:17.4, only two-tenths from the national record. It was only Lasse's fifth "10."

A month to go to the main target of 1971—the European meet. In the Finnish championships, Viren surprisingly lost to Rune Holmen, who ran the race of his life (13:43.6) and got onto the team as well. The previous day, Juha Vaatainen, in spitting rain and stormy wind, had loped through 10 kilos in 28:12.8, another new record and the leading world time that moment. The Finns were ready.

Those memorable August days of the European Games in Helsinki became the culmination point of Juha Vaatainen's long career. He won two European titles. But Lasse Viren was still learning. In the 10,000 he did not run badly (28:33.2), but he was only 17th in this unbelievable race. Somehow, he felt a bit sluggish. The 5000, four days later, went much better, but Lasse had no luck. With the bell ringing and about 10 runners in a tight clump beginning an all-out dash, Viren was pushed, lost his rhythm completely and almost fell. "That incident probably cost me a bronze medal." Lasse said. He was seventh in 13:38.6.

Only a week afterwards, Viren covered 5000 meters in 13:29.8, moving Vaatainen's name off the Finnish record list. That race proved Viren's shape was okay. He only lacked experience. Soon he'd get it.

It was evident now that Viren would be one of the best Finns in Munich, only a year away. The Finnish Association knew this, and sacrificed 10,000 marks (\$2200) for Viren, who now was able to leave his work and travel south to continue his training.

Viren speculates, "Why train in Spain or Brazil? Isn't Finland good enough? Well, Pekka Paivarinta never has been abroad for more than a couple of weeks in a row, but he became world cross-country champion. He likes to train at home, because he has a family to support, and I understand him very well. Personally, I don't think it is a must to train abroad, but it is a lot easier. The last two or three Finnish winters have been exceptionally warm, but you can never be sure. For me, it is depressing to run in the October morning rain, or in January evening frost. It is always dark, and you must stand this for months. And how can you run fast, for instance 65-second quarters, if you have three track suits on? I chose the south because I was given the opportunity and I was curious. Yes, it might have been the ambition, too. I wanted to have 100% conditions for my Munich preparations."

It was a hot winter for Lasse Viren. Interrupted by short visits back home at Christmas and in February, the would-be Olympic winner logged

mileage in three continents: South Africa, Brazil and Spain were some of his stops. He even had some mid-winter races, "just for fun," and he did not do especially well in them. In strange climates and on slow tracks, he did not break 15 minutes for 5000 meters in Capetown and in Rio de Janeiro. Nine months later, he would run almost two minutes better. Training with Seppo Tuominen, Jouko Kuha, Juha Vaatainen and others, he was averaging 30-35 kilos a day, usually in three sessions. Sometimes he did 50. But he seldom ran more than 20 kilometers in one session (his longest ever has been 35).

Track season began with some difficulties. Viren had no kick whatsoever. He lost repeatedly—in a Helsinki 5000, for instance, by 11 seconds to Harald Norpoth. As late as July 3, Viren looked like a novice behind quick and short Ethiopian Miruts Yifter. Lasse was everything else but an Olympic hope that moment. Although all training had been pointed for early September, the Finnish press and public once again showed its impatience. Also Pekka Vasala was not in shape yet, and the general idea was that Vaatainen, who was training in complete secrecy, would be the only Finnish distance runner in Munich.

Even the Finnish Association let Viren understand that he would have to show something quickly if he wanted to run in the Games. After Munich, Rolf Haikkola said, "We had to change Lasse's program. If we had been trusted completely, Lasse would have run even better in the Olympics. Because of these circumstances, he peaked too early."

"Okay, let's show them," Viren and Haikkola said. For nine days before the match against Great Britain and Spain, which was one of the decisive trials for Munich, Viren only jogged. Mentally and physically, he was like a shell about to explode.

Spanish team leaders had announced Javier Alvarez Salgado "would run a new world record." Well, he did not do it, but Viren almost did. The initial pace was comfortable, but then Viren got wings on his back. He dashed the last 2000 meters in 5:09 (better than the Finnish record) and finished in an astonishing 13:19.0—third in the all-time world list behind Ron Clarke and Dave Bedford. Only two days later, Viren sped 3000 meters in 7:43.2, improving his own national record by 10.8 seconds.

Were the people satisfied now? Viren did not believe his eyes when reading the papers the next day: "Viren Peaking Too Early," "Will Viren's Shape Last Until Munich," "Six More Weeks to the Games." The Finns are unique individuals.

Originally, Viren's only target in Munich had been the 5000, but the evening of Aug. 3 in Oslo changed the plans completely. In a virtual solo race, Viren ran 10,000 meters in a national record time of 27:52.4. It had felt fairly easy, and after a long discussion with coach Haikkola a new decision emerged: both distances. Lasse Viren was getting better every day.

Stockholm, Aug. 14: In a slight drizzle on a wet track, Viren won a classy two miles in a new world record time of 8:14.0. Behind him came Puttemans (8:17.2), Garderud, Stewart, Quax and Dave Bedford. It was more of a mental than physical win for Lasse. In a way, this race made him the Munich double champion.

Lasse Viren is a phenomenon, there is no doubt about that. Physically he is a perfect distance man, whose aerobic capacity is fantastic. Mentally,



Even the best have to rest, and Viren had slowed considerably when he raced indoors in the US in 1973. (Stan Pantovic)

there are not many harder guys. He likes, no, he loves racing. Before the Munich finals, he was not a bit nervous. He was a complete poker-face. Nothing interrupted his concentration—not even the Israel tragedy. Of course, he felt depressed and sorry for the people concerned. Viren is a human being, too. But he had planned all his life, every single moment of it for many years, for these Games. At this stage, sport is not a game. It is hard work. The best distance runners in the world were trying to scalp him. He had to fight back. This is the spirit of track and field, and of all sports activities, and in Munich Lasse Viren had it more than many others.

In his book, Viren tells about the famous fall in the 10,000 meters: “Even today, I am unable to explain why I fell. It is also needless to question what I thought when it happened. Consciously, at least, nothing more than ‘chase them, quickly.’ But I lost my nerve for a moment. I caught them too soon, then I went to the lead. I suppose I had such a great amount of adrenalin in my blood that I got that aggressive sub-consciously. Some have said that Shorter pushed me and it is rumored some Americans even have apologized for



**What a difference a year makes: In 1971, Viren had been a distant seventh in the European 5000, while Vaatainen won. At Munich (pictured here), their roles were reversed. (Mark Shearman photo)**



it. But I did not feel anything like that, and there is no proof in the films taken. I had luck because I did not injure myself."

So much has been written about the Munich 10,000- and 5000-meter finals that it is needless to repeat it. Suffice it to say that for many Lasse Viren became the greatest runner in history. The restoration of Finnish running, which had begun five years or so earlier, culminated on Sunday afternoon of Sept. 10, 1972. An hour after Viren's second gold medal, Pekka Vasala stepped to the highest step of the Olympic 1500-meter victory rostrum. At last, I suppose, Finland was satisfied.

**Lasse Viren:** (born July 22, 1949, in Myrskylä). 5'11", 135 pounds. Police constable. Single. Began racing in 1965 at age 16. Coached formerly by Nisse Viren, from 1970 on by Rolf Haikkola.

**Racing:** 800—1:54.3 (1969); 1500—3:44.2 (72); 3000—7:43.2 (72); 5000—13:16.4 (72); 10,000—27:38.4 (72); 25,000 (road)—1:16:23.6 (71).

**Training:** Two to three times a day, seven days a week, 12 months a year. His sharpening-up for a big race begins about four weeks before the meet. "Rolf Haikkola's methods are a cocktail of Nurmi, Igloi, Lydiard and Cerutti, the best from all these. It is important to have a solid background, so that you can ease up drastically before a big race and gather mental energy. When one is training as hard as I am, rest between sessions is essential. Not sleeping, necessarily, but not hurrying around, either.

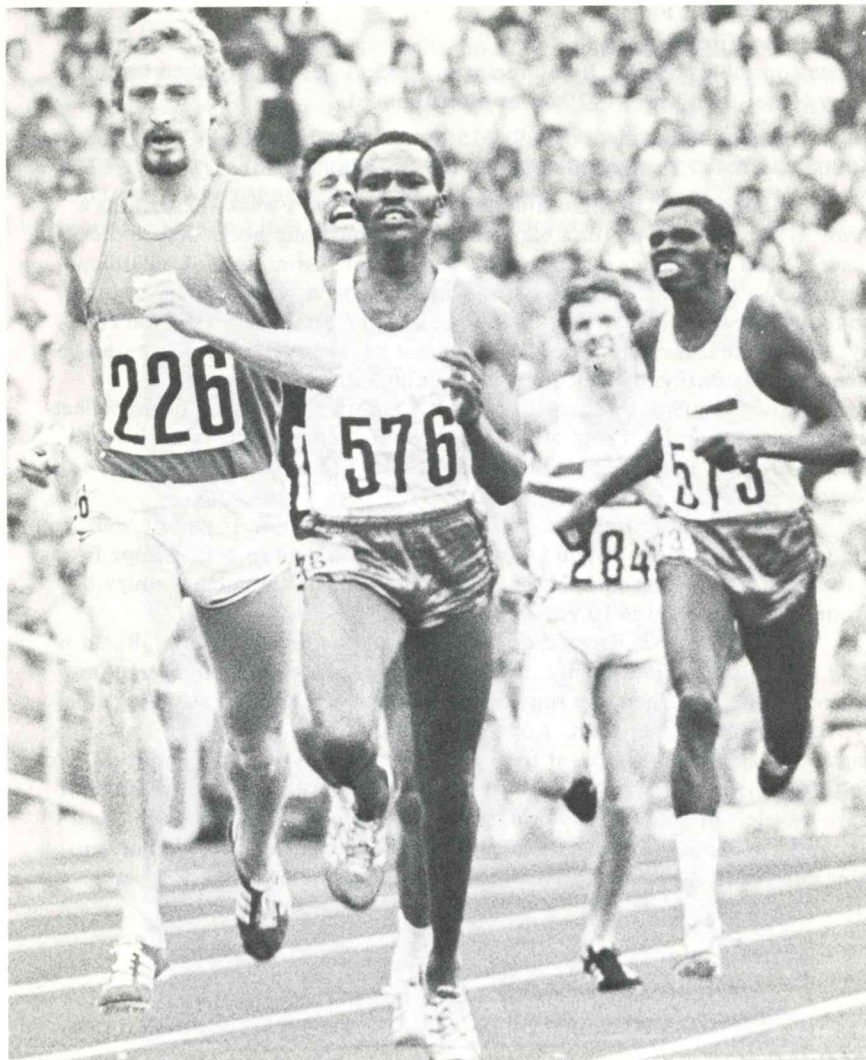
"I can keep my top shape for about a month, then I must begin collecting the mileage again. I race often, but most of them, especially in the early season, are just 'time trials.' I don't care whether I am first or last. Only big meets count.

"It is hazardous to be the top sportsman in Finland. If you do well, you are treated like a king. If you fail, people wish you'd go to hell. I hope I haven't changed much since Munich. I think I still am the same country boy from Myrskylä as I was 10 years ago.

"Why do I run? Because of curiosity and ambition, I think. But it is very difficult to define exactly. I want to see what my limits are. A runner is never satisfied. When you run a record, first you feel great. Then, gradually, you set new targets again. I own two Olympic gold medals, but I am aiming at Montreal. There, I want to do even better. Maybe this is ambition. To fulfill it, one must train. But a runner's life does not mean only sacrifices. I have traveled all around the world, seen interesting people and places. And I am only 24. So far, I don't regret anything I have done... I know that running and racing is not everything in life. One must have the correct perspective."

## Chapter V

# PEKKA VASALA



That Munich 1500 finish: Pekka Vasala first, ahead of Kip Keino, Rod Dixon, Mike Boit and Brendan Foster. (Tony Duffy photo)

# A PROMISE FULFILLED

An Olympic gold medal is rarely won through talent alone. Running history knows some cases of shooting stars, who suddenly emerged from nowhere, stayed at the top of the world for a moment, and then disappeared into obscurity again. But there have not been many of them. The longer the distance, the more sweat, toil and perseverance is hidden behind the victory.

In one respect, at least, Pekka Vasala has more in common with Juha Vaatainen than with Lasse Viren. Viren's road to gold medals and world records was quick and even. From 1968 to '72, he improved every year. But Vasala and Vaatainen, especially the latter because he was older, had to fight against and conquer heavy mental and physical problems before they reached their goals. Many years of ambitious training seemed to have gone in vain. Something was wrong. Their results did not improve—until they found the reason, which was almost too simple to comprehend: they had not been training enough. It was the cold truth. Olympic glory requires much more than they had ever thought. So they doubled their effort—and succeeded.

Pekka Vasala has never been the subject of sensational stories in magazines and newspapers. Sometimes the readers may have feasted on stories (mostly false) about Juha and Lasse, but not about Vasala. He is simply too likeable a character for that. I cannot remember a single occasion when somebody said something negative of him. If Vaatainen is labelled "controversial" and Viren "modest," then Vasala is "steady." He can get excited when discussing an interesting topic, but he is never angry—with one possible exception: on the track.

In 1965, when Pekka was 17 and won the Finnish youth 1000-meter title, he was regarded as "a loner." He already knew running would be important thing in his future. A fellow competitor recalls those days: "We knew that Vasala would do something great someday. He took his running extremely seriously. He was different from us other young runners." Seven years later, this prophecy came true.

Like several other Finnish trackmen, Pekka Vasala was born into a sports-minded family. His father was a useful club runner in his youth. Older brother Hannu has been competing in road and cross-country races for many years, and was one of Pekka's first advisors.

In May 1964, the world's best runners were preparing for the Tokyo Olympics. Pekka Vasala, who had just turned 16, ran in the Finnish cross-country championships with but one easy training winter behind him. This blond, long-legged newcomer did quite well: he was fifth in the youth three kilometers race, 15 seconds behind Olavi Hedman (later a 3:45 1500 man) and five seconds behind Olavi Suomalainen, the bronze medalist. Eight years later, Suomalainen was to win the Boston marathon and Vasala would run the 800 in 1:44.5. That summer, Pekka covered 1000 meters in 2:40.8, which

put him in 15th place in the national youth statistics. "My training was mostly interval type," Vasala says. "I began training in April or May, and did very hard repetitions on track. I reached my peak quickly, then lost it as quickly. I had no background then."

In 1965, Vasala was again fifth in the cross-country title meet. But in the summer he proved that he was by far the best Finn in his age group. His 1000 time of 2:32.7 led the yearly list, and he won his first national title in the same distance.

As he progressed and running became an increasingly important part of his life, Vasala took on a new coach and a new style of training. Pekka says, "Coached by Kari Sinkkonen, I began doing longer runs. Those 50 kilometers a week I was covering then were much in the 1960s. I was a lot fitter than before, and my good shape stayed the whole season, for the first time."

In 1967, Vasala was the top junior in Finland at 800 meters and was showing great promise in the 1500. In early 1968, he said in an interview with *Yleishureilu* magazine, "I really like those long runs now. The more I do them, the more enjoyable they are... My running and studying mix extremely well. When I have rested for an hour after running, my brains act much better than before it... But in May I shall have my final exams. Then I must ease up my training—I don't think it will cause any bigger harm." Remember, this was the Olympic year.

Vasala ran fourth in the cross-country championships (junior class), then concentrated on his exams. He lost some of his fitness, but in August his form began picking up. He could not get up a kick in the 800, but he ran a new Finnish junior record in the 1500: 3:47.0, and then took third in the Finnish senior title meet (3:47.1). It seemed the obligatory rest in May had been good for him.

In September, Vasalas really began moving. He won the trials for the match against Norway, and in his first senior national team race, Vasala astonished the running fans all over Finland. Norway's idol Arne Kvalheim won in 3:40.8, but Vasala kept following him until the last few yards. His time was a terrific 3:41.8. He had improved his junior record by 5.2 seconds. An unbelievable thing happened which Pekka had not even dreamed of: he was sent to the Mexico City Olympics.

Sending Vasala to Mexico was a controversial decision. He had run only one really good race, and many experts thought he'd have no chance there. Generally, it was considered as a kind of "prize trip" for young Vasala. And so it happened—after becoming one of the several victims of "turista" (unbearable stomach trouble), Vasala plodded his 1500 heat in 4:08.5—dead last.

This poor showing changed Vasala's whole approach to racing. In his article in *Urheilulehti* (this revealing self-analysis, one of the best sports stories ever written in Finland, was published in the Christmas 1972 issue) Vasala says, "In a way, it all began in the opening ceremony of the 1968 Olympics in Mexico." I was looking at the Olympic flag, and, being a sensitive person, I realized the importance of the occasion. It was then that I swore in my mind: some day, somewhere, I'll accomplish something great.

"After only one good race, I was sent to Mexico. I knew precisely that I'd not have any chances in the Games, but because I was elected, I made the trip. I had not asked for an election, so I think I was criticized too hard after-

wards... I think I should have made the semifinals if I had not become ill. I was so ill that, although I was last, I was completely spent. In the final straight, I did not see that finish line, my steps were about two feet long.

"For six hours after the race, I was resting in the sanitary room underneath the stadium, listening to music, before I was able to walk to the Olympic Village. But I felt a commitment now: I had not been worth the trip. I owed something to the Finnish Olympic Committee."

It took a whole Olympiad before Vasala was able to fulfill his promise. At one stage, after the failure in the 1971 European title meet, he almost gave up. But he was ashamed of himself, thought about the matter and returned better than ever, one of the greatest milers ever, able to beat Kip Keino in a punishing fight.

Vasala did not run badly in 1969, considering he was doing his military service. At home and in international dual matches, he was practically unbeatable, but he still lacked experience and fitness. In the European title meet in Athens, he was ninth. But that race was only an intermediate stop. He was thinking about Helsinki 1971.

A new decade began, and the 1970 season was a solid one for Vasala. He should have broken 3:40 clearly by now, but his progress was only fractional. His seasonal best of 3:41.0 showed only 0.8 seconds improvement in two years. Vasala tried to assure himself that his junior success had not been a fluke. One reason why Vasala was not developing was that he was without a worthy opponent at home. It was not always possible to travel abroad for hard races.

On July 1, 1971, Vasala had his first track race of the European championships season. And it was a shock. The occasion was the traditional World Games in Helsinki, and there Pekka Vasala finally erased the 14-year-old 1500-meter national record of Olavi Salsola and Olavi Salonen. He won the race superbly in 3:38.6, and among his victims were Kipchoke Keino, Peter Stewart, Tom Von Ruden, John Mason, Anders Garderud, Ian Stewart... Vasala had prepared for weeks for this meet, and at the starting line he was almost dancing with eagerness. He was bursting with fighting spirit. He says, "There was no way those runners could have beaten me that day... I had decided to win."

But that splendid achievement took off some of Vasala's mental energy, which was needed six weeks later in the continental title meet. Those European championships in Helsinki became Vasala's blackest moment. "I was running in a kind of trance," he says. "I could not make decisions (and was) just running with the others. For some reason or another, I was mentally spent before the race. I had been aiming for this since Mexico, and everything drained into sand..." Vasala was only ninth again, more than three seconds behind the smiling victor Arese.

But, as Juha Vaatainen said, "difficulties only make you harder." This complete failure put Vasala into a tight situation. Now, looking back, it is easy to see: there were only two possibilities. Either he would retire or he would return better than ever. And in Munich, he finally showed the results of his enormous determination.

At Mexico City, he had thought, "I was looking at the Olympic flag and being a sensitive person I realized the importance of the occasion..." Four years later, when Vasala received his gold medal and was listening to the Finnish

national anthem, he could not help crying. "When I walked into the dressing room after the race and sat down on a bench—I think I was smiling widely—I realized in a second I had won. Somehow I had not fully understood it on the track. All became misty and I was crying uncontrollably. I had completely lost control of myself. I was still confused on the victory stand. It was not until I put the gold medal into my pocket and grabbed it in my fingers that I finally woke up."

**Pekka Vasala:** born April 17, 1948, in Riihimäki. 6'1", 145 pounds. Occupation: commerce. Married since early 1973. Began racing in 1964 at age 16. Coached by Kari Sinkkonen.

**Racing:** 400—49.6 (1971); 800—1:44.5 (72); 1500—3:36.6 (72); mile—3:57.2 (72); 3000—7:50.8 (72); 5000—13:45.8 (72); 10,000—29:09.6 (72). (Vasala's 400 best is not indicative of his actual speed. He did not race the 400 in 1972, but would probably have broken 48.)

**Training:** for the 1972 season, twice a day, seven days a week, 12 months a year, 130 miles a week (maximum). Pekka Vasala's and Pekka Paivarinta's coach Kari Sinkkonen says he owes much to Arthur Lydiard. In winter, Vasala stresses endurance during a six-month period. Then follows the period of hill running (for about six weeks). He doesn't begin track training until late June or early July, stressing speed and "loosening up."

In May 1972, Vasala ran his first-ever 10,000 ("an easy race") in 29:09.6; 12 weeks later he became the European 800-meter record holder by his 1:44.5. Asked if he would have won the Olympic two laps as well, he said, "It is very hard to say. I lack experience in the 800 meters, especially in tightly-bunched races. I ran my European record leading from 400 meters on. Next summer (1974), in Rome (European Championships), I shall try the double."

Vasala says "the secret" of his improved 800-meter speed (more than four seconds in a year) was doing hill running through the summer. "I became stronger, my stride longer." Three times during the Olympic season, Vasala did an extremely strenuous hill running session (in sand), where he runs himself to absolute exhaustion. But he says that it took seven years of hard training before he was able to accomplish this. "It is suicidal for other runners to copy my hill sessions without adequate background."

# VASALA ON TRAINING

BY PEKKA VASALA

Vasala's comments here come from an interview with Tapio Pekola, editor of the Finnish running magazine Juoksija.

I was a "tourist" at the Mexico City Games, but decided to do better four years later. After our European championships in 1971, I had bad self-doubts, but on checking the cold statistics of my training diary with my coach, Kari Sinkkonen, we understood I could not have done much better with such a poor background.

So I gave it all I could for a year, and in Munich I was very confident. Now I knew I had done everything I could. There was not anything I could have done better in the way of preparation.

People have asked what the main difference between my training in 1972 and before. It is easy to explain. In 1971, I had done 2200 kilometers in training before the start of the track season. In 1972, this amount was 4600 kilometers. It was over 100% more. Before the European championships, I ran an average of 77 kilometers a week. Before Munich my average was 144 kilometers.

From January through March, I trained in Spain. The rest of my preparation was done at Lohja, near Helsinki—except on weekends when I trained at Valkeakoski, at the summer cottage of my fiancée. (She is Pekka's wife now. Her father, Kalle Matilainen, was an Olympic bronze medalist in the steeplechase.) There was no high altitude training in my program, although foreign sources repeatedly insisted there was.

I did very hard and long training runs—sometimes totaling 180-210 kilometers a week. The pace was 3:20-4:00 per kilometer (5:25-6:25 per mile). The longest single run was 37 kilometers, which I did twice. Throughout June, I did hill training as per the orthodox Arthur Lydiard method.

I ran long races during the spring (3000, 5000 and 10,000). There were to be long runs in my program in any case, so I suggested to my coach that I do some races instead of ordinary training runs. I just took them for conditioning (3000 in 7:58, 5000 in 13:45, 10,000 in 29:09). In the mornings, I did my usual workouts.

In Sweden, for instance, I ran 20 kilometers in the morning and raced the 3000 in the evening. (Pekka won it in 7:58, ahead of Kerry O'Brien). Until the end of July, all races were just part of training. On July 17, I expected to get under the Olympic qualification standard at 1500 meters without much effort. I eased around the last bend, but the time was 3:36.8.

On August 2 I would have run 3:36 (instead of 3:38.2) if I had not intentionally "walked" the final stretch after a kick of 200 meters. The following day, I ran with Kauko Lumiaho (3:39.2 1500 runner). We did about 30

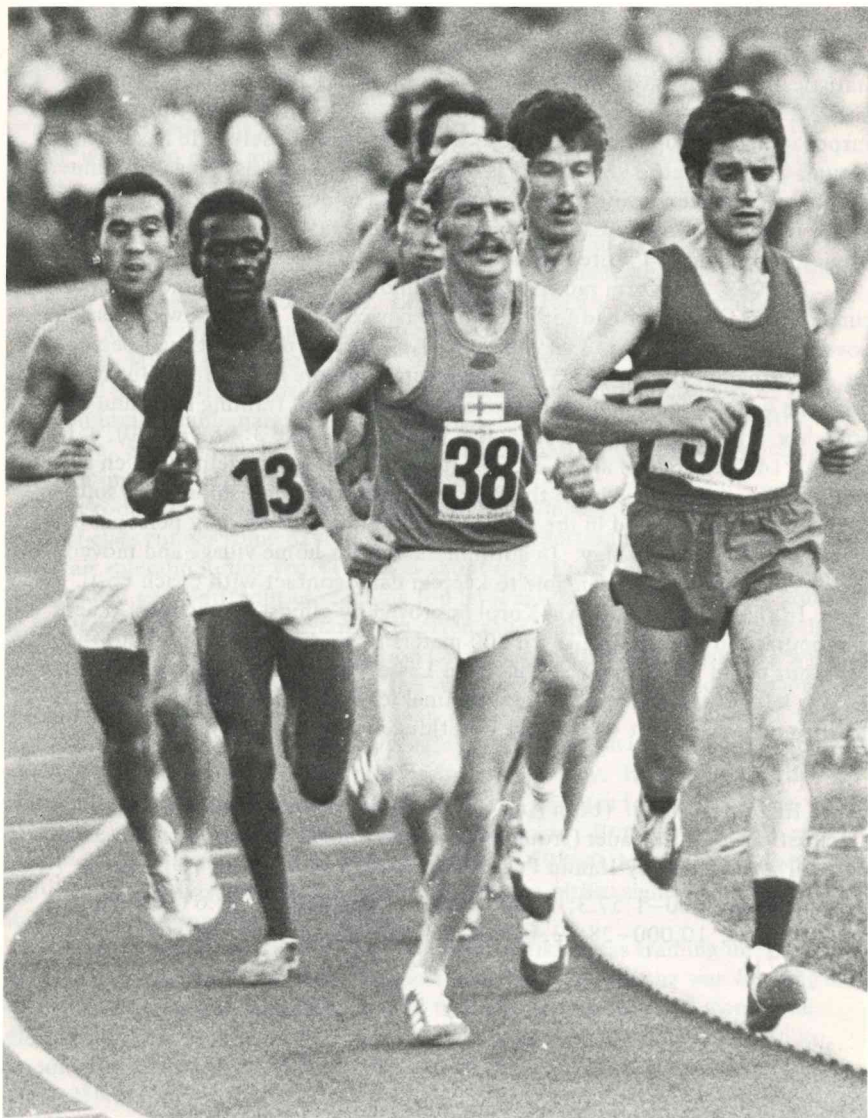
kilometers very hard. At 25, Kauko dropped. The last five kilometers were uphill and I took spurts. When I returned from the run, I did diagonals (across the infield of the track) with Francesco Arese. Arese seemed a little astonished. He had seen us starting our training and how Kauko was exhausted on the grass afterwards. But I felt good and had no difficulty running with Arese.

My hardest workouts were on sandhills, because the aim of this training is to get myself as tired as possible. A really fit runner cannot get himself tired enough on the track. On Sept. 3, the day Lasse Viren won the 10,000, I did a heavy training session—to the exhaustion point—in the sand. It did no good for my concentration to watch Lasse's win, so I drove to the sand. I decided I would not watch any races at Munich. I wanted to concentrate on my own event.



## Chapter VI

# TRACKMEN



Finnish track power runs deeper than Viren and Vasala. Seppo Tuominen (38) is a world class 10,000 man in his own right. (Mark Shearman photo)

# RISTO ALA-KORPI

Who is Risto Ala-Korpi? If you begin searching his name in old Finnish statistics, you will have some trouble. His 5000-meter best before 1973 was 14:12.2. Then in one year, he improved to 13:29.8! Ala-Korpi's progress has surprised many people, but not those who know him closely. He has been around since the late 1960s, and has been training like an aspiring top runner should. It is most obvious that, barring injuries or any other problems, Ala-Korpi is ready to follow Lasse Viren's path. In a way, he is the most exciting runner in Finland as I write this book in mid-1973.

In 1968, Ala-Korpi ran fifth in the junior title meet 3000 meters. His time of 8:51.2 was not bad for a complete newcomer. The following year, he covered 5000 in 15:10.8. In 1970: 14:41.8. He had done nothing spectacular, just progressed steadily. There were better juniors in Finland. But in 1971, when he was doing his military service in Helsinki and training in Hannu Posti's guidance, Ala-Korpi came through. He posted bests like 3:49.3 (1500), 8:10.4 (3000), 14:12.2 (5000) and a 29:50.6 in his 10,000-meter debut (which carried him to a bronze medal in the World Military championships). His solid performances continued in the Olympic year, although the only personal best was a 29:19.2 "10" in May. In autumn, he left his home village and moved to Helsinki, where he has been able to keep in daily contact with coach Posti.

In that 13:29.8 race Ala-Korpi improved by almost 20 seconds. There was courage in his running. With 300 meters to go, he went boldly into the lead, but could not keep Dick Quax and Lasse Viren behind—this time. When he was left off the European Cup semi-final team (Pekka Paivarinta ran), Ala-Korpi's only comment was, "That is nothing. I have no hurry. Let's wait for Montreal..."

**Risto Ala-Korpi:** (born Aug. 17, 1950, in Ullava). 5'10", 145 pounds. Occupation: youth leader (from Sept., 1973). Single. Began racing in 1968, at age 18. Coached by Hannu Posti.

**Racing:** 800—1:57.3; 1500—3:49.3 (71); 3000—8:01.6 (73); 5000—13:29.8 (73); 10,000—28:43.4 (73); 25,000—1:23:05.8 (72); steeplechase—8:58.0 (71).

# MIKKO ALA-LEPPILAMPI

When Mikko Ala-Leppilampi began racing 15 years ago, Finnish distance running was just getting into its most miserable period. Many things have happened since then. Finns have made their comeback, and most of Mikko's early rivals have retired. But Mikko is still around, ready to travel anywhere in the world, willing to meet anyone, at any distance. Actually, Ala-Leppilampi is a unique case in Finnish running; if we say he is the Finnish "Gaston Roelants," it is not an exaggeration.

In 1960, 17-year-old Mikko (it is easier to call him by his Christian name; his surname sounds difficult even for a Finn) made his debut in national youth title meet at 1000 meters. Little Mikko, Jouko Kuha's childhood neighbor and training compatriot, was sixth. A colorful career had started. Since then Mikko has never stopped. In sheer number of races run, he might even hold an unofficial world record—in spite of Ron Clarke and others. He has won innumerable national titles indoors, outdoors, track, cross-country, anywhere. Since 1969, his main event has been the steeplechase, in which he ran fifth in the 1971 European championships.

It took a long time before Mikko could convince people that he could be a world-class runner some day; now it seems he is getting better each season. After his splendid junior years (he won about everything to be won), Ala-Leppilampi had some difficulties reaching top level as a senior. Anyhow, he gradually became a favorite of track fans. He often ran barefoot, even the steeplechase, and he had a funny "bent-back" action (Ala-Leppilampi has a chronic back trouble from his childhood). From the very beginning, he was known as an irresistible kicker.

In 1966, Mikko moved to Kaipola, when the Finnish long-distance center, to work in a paper mill. He was progressing enormously. He was by far the best in Finland, the fourth Finn ever to break 14 minutes for 5000 meters, and almost beat the ancient 10,000-meter national record. But he still had to stand severe disappointments. In the European Games 10,000, he was lapped shamefully. Completely spent, he dropped out. It was a pitiful sight, symbolizing the state of Finnish running in the 1960s.

Few people knew the difficult conditions Mikko was training in. He was married at 19, he had a family to support, and for two years he was working and studying in an evening high school—and training twice a day. No wonder he did not progress significantly. When Arthur Lydiard came to Finland, Mikko became one of his most eager pupils, in spite of Jouko Kuha's warnings. In 1967, Mikko ran his first national record (3000 meters in 8:01.1) and said, "This race meant much for me. Now I know I am going in the right direction."

Under Lydiard, Mikko tried something new: he experimented with the marathon, and eventually posted a useful 2:21:51 in East Germany. But he was only a disappointed 19th in the speedy contest, and it was his last try to

this day. He did not get onto the Mexico team, and returned to his old training methods. He did not run those monotonous 30- and 40-kilometers jogs any more. He did two sessions a day, about 10 kilometers each.

In the 1970s, Mikko has become a most trustworthy competitor, especially in the steeplechase. He ran a respectable fifth in the 1971 European title meet in Helsinki, and has a best of 8:29.0. Mikko has won three national cross-country titles (6 kilometers) in a row from more than 100 rivals—a rare achievement. But there has been unbelievably bad luck as well. In September 1971, probably in his best-ever shape, Mikko three times chased the steeplechase world record, but each time fell in the last water jump.

Shortly before Munich, he had run a personal best 1500 of 3:40.3 and said: "I am ready to fight for the gold medal..." But, before the most important moment of his life, in the dressing room, he hit his head on a peg in the wall. It was bleeding badly. Mikko ran the final, a few minutes later, with his head bandaged. He was feeling a bit confused, understandably, but was doing well until three laps to go, when his foot caught on a barrier. He fell heavily—breaking his arm. He continued, and a 10th place in 8:41 was a heroic deed in these circumstances.

**Mikko Ala-Leppilampi:** (born July 24, 1943, in Kannus). 5'9", 140 pounds. Occupation: commerce. Married. Began racing in 1958 at age 15. Currently advised by Kari Sinkkonen.

**Racing:** 800—1:52.7 (1966); 1500—3:40.3 (72); 3000—7:57.0 (71); 5000—13:40.2 (70); 10,000—28:53.0 (73); 25,000 road—1:17:50.0 (68); marathon—2:21:51.8 (68); steeplechase—8:29.0 (71, 72).

**Training:** Mikko's training does not differ much from that of other Finnish distance men, but he stresses quality more than quantity. The result is that his endurance, which he acquired from Lydiard systems, still is there, whereas he has gained much more speed in the last few years. In January 1971 however, he covered about 1000 kilometers. For the last three years, Mikko has received the yearly stipend from the Finnish Association and has lived for months in Spain with his family. He is the most prolific racer of the Finnish distance runners.

# TAPIO KANTANEN

Olympic year 1972 was an "almost" for steeplechaser Tapio Kantanen. Before Munich, the world record was Kerry O'Brien's 8:22.0. In lazy 90% efforts ("I don't want to make myself the favorite"), Kantanen ran 8:24.0 in July and 8:23.0 in late August. Anyway, everybody could see he was the favorite for Munich, although the few seconds between 8:22 and 8:28 were crowded with wet steplers. However, one outsider remained: Kip Keino.

Some experts have claimed Kantanen made a tactical error in the final, making his decision to move too near the finish. I believe, however, that Kantanen could not have beaten Keino through any tactics. Keino was simply better on the day, although a virtual newcomer in the barrier event. That Kantanen let Ben Jipcho pass him at the very end was a mistake. His first reaction was, "I was giving all I had." But he has changed his opinion later. Subconsciously, realizing Keino's win, he began slowing down. Then, seeing Jipcho coming wildly, he accelerated, but it was too late. Kantanen almost took silver. Then in rainy and miserable conditions at Helsinki Stadium, the long-striding sergeant *almost* ran a world record. Kantanen was leading Anders Garderud of Sweden (a complete failure in Munich) by 30 yards at the bell, chasing the world standard desperately. Last water jump, Kantanen very, very tired... and Garderud coming from behind. The big stadium clock showed the chances for a record were dying. Kantanen had no kick. His legs felt paralyzed. Zoom! Garderud sprinted like an intermediate hurdler over the last barrier and caught the weary Kantanen at the finish line. Garderud 8:20.8 (world record); Kantanen 8:21.0. "Almost" again...

A bronze medal in the Olympic Games is by no means a bad achievement. Many a man would finish his career satisfied, but Tapio Kantanen, who was only 23 at Munich, is already looking forward to Montreal. He is a good example of the new breed of ambitious Finnish distance men.

Like his predecessor Jouko Kuha, Kantanen used to be an endurance-type runner. He did not break four minutes for the 1500 until 1969, when he was 20. But during the last few years his best weapon became a fearful kick. Remember what Kuha said: "It's a matter of stamina."

I remember seeing Tapio Kantanen for the first time in 1970, in the Finland-France match. Jean-Paul Villain, future European titlist, won as he liked, running magnificently. Kantanen was fourth in his first senior match. He ran with those enormously long, low strides, leaning forward almost horizontally. It was an odd sight, but there was strength in his running. And what a fighter he was! After the race, he leaned on a barrier and remained there for a long time, recovering. Since then, his style has been sharpened a lot, but that immense power still remains.

His steeplechase time progressed by 20 seconds that season. He ran 8:41.8. That winter, Kantanen trained in Spain with other Finns. He was

covering more kilometers than ever, sometimes 200 a week. No illnesses, no injuries. On June 30, in the Helsinki World Games, he finally smashed through. He won the steeplechase in world-class time of 8:31.8. In the Finnish title meet, Pekka Paivarinta beat Kantanen by inches, both in 8:34.0. Mikko Ala-Leppilampi, enjoying his best season at 28, was third. Finland had a good steeple trio for the European championships.

That meet, however, was a fiasco for inexperienced Kantanen. "I was in far better shape than ever before," he says. "I was peaking 100% right. But for the week before the meet, when we lived in the Games village, I ate too much. The food was so good I could not help it. I know some others made the same mistake. I had been eating so much that during my heat I was feeling very bad. I got stitches and my stomach was out of order." Kantanen finished fifth in his heat; only four qualified. But again he had learned something.

The Olympic season was a great success for Kantanen, in spite of that "almost." He increased his training quantity by about 30%, running as much as 230 kilometers a week. He spent two months in Spain. He ran fourth in the International cross-country championships, and he won his first national title.

In early June, Kantanen lost to Anders Garderud. But Tapio ran 8:26.4, a personal best, although he was logging 200 kilos a week with no speed or track sessions whatsoever. Kantanen recalls Munich:

"In my heat, I had no trouble at all. It felt unbelievably easy. I had rested well, for the first time during the season. I wanted the gold, of course. But I hoped somebody would have been a 'rabbit' in the final. Fast pace suits me much better than the waiting game, although I have some kick, too. The whole final was a big throng—arms and legs everywhere. Mikko (Ala-Leppilampi) fell on a hurdle and broke his arm. The last lap was pretty quick and I was moving well, but I could not catch Keino... Well, it is futile to try speculating if I could have won by some other tactics. It is three years to Montreal, and only one to Rome (European title meet). There we'll see..."

**Tapio Kantanen:** (born May 31, 1949, in Heinola). 6'0", 160 pounds. Army sergeant. Single. Began racing in 1966 at age 17. Coached from 1969 on by Hannu Posti.

**Racing:** 1500—3:50.6 (1972); 3000—7:58.0 (73); 5000—13:42.0 (72); 10,000—28:40.0 (73); 25,000 on road—1:19 (71); steeplechase—8:21.0 (72).

**Training:** Two or three times a day, seven days a week, 12 months a year, 100-250 kilometers a week, depending on the season. "There are no secrets or tricks in my training. I just train much, regularly and hard. I have been doing that for four years now. My mileages are large, but it is quality training, really. It is not jogging. Most of my steady runs are 3:15-3:30 pace per kilometer (5:15-5:35 per mile), sometimes even faster. I have been lucky to have had no major injuries or other setbacks. I have good training circumstances, so I should progress in the future as well.

"Racing is the best way of sharpening up, but early season races are just training runs. Of course, I do a lot of track sessions, too, like 400s and 600s. It is a must."

# PEKKA PAIVARINTA

Pekka Paivarinta got disgusted with the hazardous water jump event and decided to make an all-out effort on flat distances in 1973—and became the hottest Finnish runner of the post-Olympic season. Third place in the famous New Year's race in Sao Paulo, Brazil, another bronze medal in the European Indoor Games 3000 meters, and the somewhat surprising (not to Pekka himself) world cross-country title were his winter feats. April 1 he negotiated the second marathon of his life in 2:17:18. June 6 he won a 5000 in 13:29.6. June 28, in the greatest mass race of 1500 history, he sped 3:37.2.

No other runner in the world can show this kind of versatility. Mile or marathon, track or cross-country, indoors or out, Paivarinta is always there, grimacing wildly, with his red and white cap (the present one), bounding at the top of a deadly thin, long-legged frame.

Since Juha Vaatainen has finished racing, Pekka Vasala is enjoying a well-deserved off year, and Lasse Viren and Tapio Kantanen are still looking for their super form, Paivarinta has matured into the new track idol of Finnish boys and girls. He even looks like a world-class runner. And when in action, there is not the slightest doubt about it.

In many ways, Paivarinta is a unique individual among Finnish distance speedsters. Unlike many others, he is married, living a most happy family life with his blonde wife and two small children. Pekka does not like at all those months-long escapes from the Finnish winter to sunny Spain or Brazil. "I prefer training at home," he says. "Running is not everything in my life; my family is my inspiration. I have a nice job here, suitable to drive away thoughts of running and racing, at least for a while every day. If I were training abroad like some others, I'd know what it would be like: in the evening, sitting in a bar, sipping a drink and waiting nervously for the next day and another session."

Yes, we know. Juha Vaatainen tells in his book how he was spending weeks in a lonely bungalow in the middle of Brazil, without seeing any other human being but his own picture in a still pond. He admits freely that his only hobbies there were reading and drinking. But Pekka Paivarinta has a home.

Early in the morning, when his family still is asleep, Pekka dons his shoes and disappears into the morning mist to do his first session of the day. Late in the evening, children again sleeping, it is time to run the second time—or the third, if he has managed to sandwich another session in at midday. Winter freeze does not scare Paivarinta. He likes to run on asphalt roads, which are kept free from snow year-round in Finland.

Orienteering—running through the woods and over the country with a compass as a guide—is a most popular sports event in Finland. It is a true amateur sport, attracting even more competitors here than running. Paivarinta's oldest memories about sport are connected with the map-and-compass event. Sometimes he ran cross-country. In winter, it was skiing. At about 15, he

almost lost all enthusiasm in sports. Three years went like this—very seldom he raced in an orienteering meet. Then late in 1967, a relay man was needed in the 4 x 1500 meter team of a local club. Pekka did surprisingly well. Many people who saw him running said he was a talent.

Paivarinta was lucky to live in the neighborhood of competent coach Kari Sinkkonen (himself a national junior relay champion and a 50-second quarter-miler). Since 1968, together with Pekka Vasala, this trio had done much for Finnish running.

In 1969, at the Finnish cross-country title meet, Lasse Viren won the junior race, Tapio Kantanen was fourth and Paivarinta sixth—24 seconds behind Viren. In summer, Paivarinta really began getting loose and conquered the national junior title in the 2000-meter steeplechase. It was already then that he became known as a mad kicker. Sometimes it was only a 100-yard dash, but he could make up 20 yards by it.

Pekka's breakthrough came in 1971. He had been training for 3½ years, not a very long period, but together with his obvious talent it was enough to carry him forward. He ran a surprising 2:19:42.8 marathon in Turku. It was snowing, and the few spectators there became still colder when they saw Paivarinta lope along the road in summer gear. ("I always try a spring marathon as a kind of test," he says, "but if my legs get too stiff, I break (drop) out. Marathons are not that important.") In 1972 he dropped out.)

Paivarinta qualified to his first international dual match in early June. It was against Rumania and Estland in Helsinki, and there "Pekka with the Cap" finally ran into fame. His kick in the steeplechase was something fantastic. The tall and slim young man dashed the final straight uninhibitedly, leaving Kantanen and others far behind. He had improved by 20 seconds from the previous year. His time: 8:32.8.

The European championships became a turning-point in Paivarinta's career. He had big plans, naturally, and ran excellently in his heat. He finished an easy second, sandwiched between Dusan Moravcik and Jean-Paul Vallain, who were to be second and first in the final two days later. But what happened to Pekka there: "At the very first water jump I mislaid my foot and fell head-long into the water, hurting myself badly. I lost at least 10 meters and that was it..."

I witnessed the race, and I remember how disappointed Paivarinta looked when he emerged from the water, wet like a dog. He was shaking his arms in complete disgust, and began chasing the others. But it was in vain, he was a distant 11th and last in 8:55.4.

Paivarinta says, "When falling, I had torn a muscle in my stomach, which was troubling me the rest of the season to the extent that in autumn I had to be operated on. That race was practically the end of my steeplechase career. I got a kind of mental trauma, and simply began to be afraid of water jumps and barriers. Having been somewhat tense before races even earlier, this became almost unbearable after the accident. I am not a bit ashamed to admit I failed in the Munich final (he was eighth) because of this fear. All my concentration was drained by it..." So, Paivarinta will run no more steeplechases.

Pekka did not rest after the Olympic season like some others, but increased his training. Through December and January, he, every now and then, shocked the fans by good indoor "time trials." In the European Indoor Games, he could not follow the Belgian tandem of Puttemans-Polleunis, but his bronze medal time



of 7:53.0 was excellent considering he had been running over 200 kilometers a week. Then, a week later, Pekka became a world cross-country champion.

It is a curious thing Paivarinta specialized for 1500 meters in 1973. He is not basically very fast, although he can kick. Last year, shortly before Munich, he surprised by reducing his best to 3:39.3. In the Games, he ran the 1500 as well, but was eliminated in the heats. Pekka has great difficulties to break 1:50 for 800 meters, but he runs his 1500s on his enormous stamina. In 1973, he ran 3:37.2—only nine-tenths from Vasala's national record.

Kari Sinkkonen plans the training and racing of his ambitious pupil with a long view: the 5000 meters final in Montreal 1976 is the target. Paivarinta will run the 5000 and 10,000 as well in coming years, but these hard 1500s will give him the speed and strength needed.

**Pekka Paivarinta:** the most versatile runner in the world. He is the marathoner with the most speed, the miler with the greatest stamina, and he is the world's best cross-country runner.

**Pekka Paivarinta:** (born May 4, 1949, in Aura). 6'1", 150 pounds. House caretaker. Married, wife Merja (has won some local races), two children. Began racing in 1968 at age 19. Coached by Kari Sinkkonen. Nickname: "Latsa" ("Cap").

**Racing:** 800—1:52.6 (1970); 1500—3:37.2 (73); 3000—7:53.0 (indoors, 73); 5000—13:29.6 (73); 10,000—28:28.6 (73); steeplechase—8:25.4 (72); marathon—2:17:18 (73).

**Training:** twice a day, seven days a week, 12 months a year, usually more than 200 kilometers a week. "Last winter I averaged about 30 kilometers a day. My morning run is 10-15 kilometers, on the asphalt roads near my home. In the evening, I run a faster session of 15-25 kilometers, usually on city streets and in the parks.

"My track sessions are hard. Last summer, before Munich, we did 12 x 100 in the Helsinki Olympic Stadium. Pekka (Vasala) was in great shape then, and I tried to follow him. I almost did it—until after the 11th when my legs gave way and I had to throw up. But I did not miss the last one, either.

"I shall race at least until Montreal, maybe even longer. But when I begin getting slow, I'll retire quickly. There is no more pitiful sight than seeing an old champion plodding along, minutes slower than in his youth. But *running* is a different thing. I shall continue it forever.

"Why do I run with my cap? Well, it began as a kind of joke many years ago, but when I saw that people liked it, I kept it. There must be a little show in track and field too. I have had many caps during the years. When I was racing with Dave Wottle this summer, they advertised it in Oulu as "The Fight Between the Caps!"

# SEPPO TUOMINEN

Seppo Tuominen is a late-developed distance runner. He was posting good junior times in the early 1960s, but then he retired for several years. He was doing a hard job—driving a truck from early mornings until late nights and doing no running whatsoever. His comeback started from occasional fitness jogs with his friends. There was no intention to race, but Tuominen found he was in surprisingly good shape. Some local cross-country meets followed. He won. That was in 1967 and Seppo was 24 then. He did some more training, enjoyed it, and closed the season by running a 9:45.8 steeplechase.

Tuominen's rise to the top was meteoric—and it had started by accident. His rivals had been training for years, and now strongly-striding Seppo, whom nobody had ever heard of before, was following them easily—sometimes even passing them in the kick. But primarily he was a front runner, dashing away at the gun like a maniac and scaring other runners out of their wits.

Tuominen has never had any inhibitions. He does what he likes on running tracks. Once he won a 20-kilometer cross-country race in the morning and ran his steeplechase best of 9:11.4 in the evening. Some witnesses will always remember the mad dash he took in the 1971 European championships 10,000 meters with three kilometers to go. He had lost contact it seemed, but suddenly he went crazy and came like a sprinter, passing several men and catching Vaatainen and Haase again. It was not wise, and he tired again to eighth place in 28:18.0—his best achievement so far in big races.

In 1968, Tuominen improved his 5000 best from 15:50 to 14:17 and broke 30 minutes for the "10"—after one year of training. Two years later, he had the Finnish 10,000-meter record for a while and he beat 29 minutes five times during the season. He seemed destined to reach great heights. But, always, his extremely fragile legs have spoiled the well-started summers. He has been known as a "200-mile-a-week man," who runs extremely powerfully, straining his legs needlessly.

In 1973, when he again has been troubled by various leg problems, he had the courage to try the steeplechase and ran 8:50, his personal best.

Maybe Tuominen, who has not been around for more than a few years, simply enjoys his racing too much. In 1969, 1970 and 1971, he won the longer distance in national cross-country title meets (once by more than a minute!) and, on the last occasion, returned two hours later to take silver in the shorter distance. In May 1972, Seppo covered a 25-kilometer park race in Helsinki in 1:15:08.8 (better than Ron Hill's track world record). Arthur Lydiard, who witnessed the race, said, "That man can break the 10,000-meter world record any day." But it did not happen. Tuominen's Olympic season was ended by a heel injury.

Tuominen says the main reason why he runs is "because I like it, but on the other hand you don't go out and train three times a day just for fun." Be-

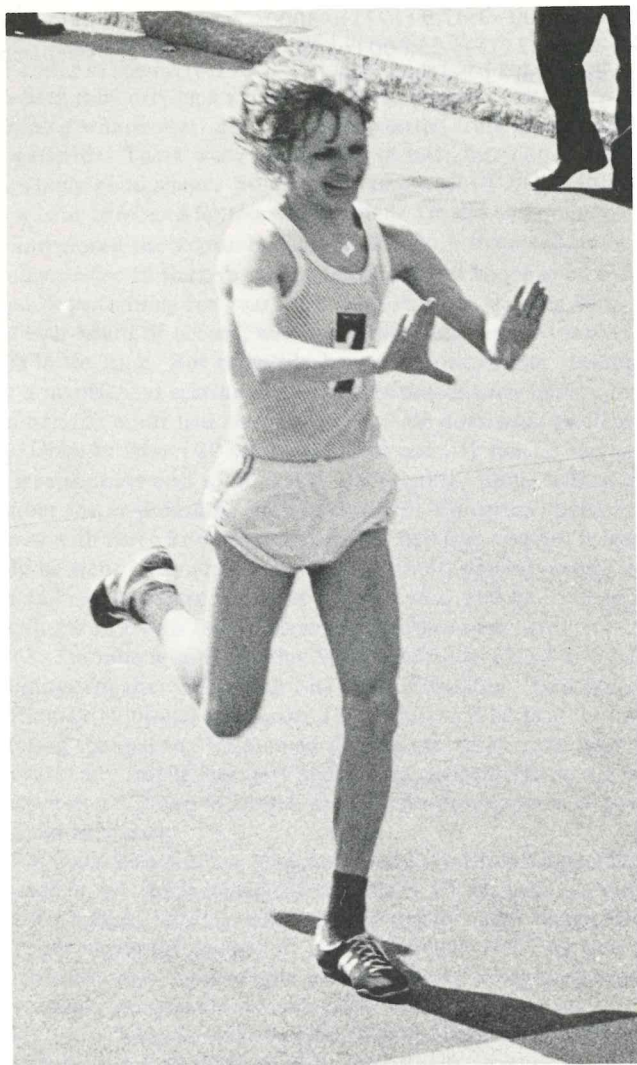
fore the European title meet in 1971, when he was doing "crash training" after an injury layoff, it was reported he sometimes did five sessions a day, of eight kilometers maximum because his legs could not stand more continuous running.

**Seppo Tuominen:** (born July 9, 1943, in Heinola). 5'8", 140 pounds. Storekeeper (former truck driver). Married. Began racing in 1967 at age 24, after a five-year layoff. Coached by Rolf Haikkola.

**Best times:** 1500—3:47.9 (1971); 3000—7:56.6 (71); 5000—13:34.8 (71); 10,000—28:17.2 (71); 25,000 (park)—1:15:08.8 (72); steeplechase—8:50.0 (73); marathon—2:26:42.0 (70).

## Chapter VII

# MARATHONERS



Olavi Suomalainen winning at Boston in 1972.  
(Rick Levy photo)

# SEPPO NIKKARI

Seppo Nikkari, the best Finnish marathon man of the 1970s and a 2:14 performer, is an optimist. Someone said he is like a miniature of Cassius Clay (although he is 6'3" tall), telling uninhibitedly about his plans. There is a lot of showman in him, and he obviously enjoys the astonished reactions of the fans. Each spring he has predicted freely what he will accomplish during the season. So far, Seppo has been a bit short of his targets, but he still is clearly world class. Barring foot troubles, his ever-present opponent, he might even break 2:10 someday.

What did he announce in early 1973? "This season, I am aiming at a sub-13:20 5000 meters." On July 30 in Helsinki, he ran his best of 13:38.6.

Seppo is an extremely hard trainer. Last year he said, "I do not count my kilometers; I run whenever and wherever I can." Coached by Mauri Jormakka, Nikkari showed his enormous potential in March 1971, in his first-ever marathon. On partly snow-covered, slippery roads, with the weather near freezing, he went through 25 kilometers in a great 1:18:14, leading by over a minute. Then tiredness began creeping in. "I felt really bad. It took a hard effort not to drop out." A hot fight took place during the last kilometer. Veteran Pentti Rummakko had run wisely and won narrowly in 2:16:33.6, and Nikkari, somewhat recovered, edged out Markku Salminen by a second in fine 2:16:35.4. This race caused Nikkari a stress fracture, and at Boston he had to drop out (Salminen ran 8th). Nikkari's European championship summer was spoiled, but he ended the year well at Fukuoka: fourth in 2:16:21.4.

Then came the Olympic year. In East Germany, Nikkari cruised 2:14:47. Seppo thought this was enough for Munich selection and began logging miles again. For reasons unknown, the Finnish Association said Nikkari had to show his form at 10,000 meters in the match against Britain. Nikkari, who had been training very hard without any intention to peak so early, ran last in 29:24. He was almost left out of the team. In Munich, after staying pluckily in the leading group (behind Shorter) until 20 miles, finished 11th. Few people noticed (it was the day of two gold medals for Finland) that he was fourth among Europeans.

Later, at Fukuoka, he posted his personal best of 2:14:02.8. Nikkari planned no marathons in 1973. A wise decision. It is a long way to Montreal, and he wants to keep his enthusiasm. "Two marathons a year is my maximum, three is too many and four is madness," he says.

**Seppo Nikkari:** (born Feb. 6, 1948, in Pomarkku). 6'3", 163 pounds. Caretaker. Married. Began racing in 1966, at age 18. Coached by Mauri Jormakka.

**Best times:** 800-1:54.4 (1969); 1500-:50.0 (70); 3000-7:57.2 (71); 5000-13:38.6 (73); 10,000-28:30.2 (73); 25,000 (track)-1:17:22 (71); marathon-2:14:02.8 (72).

# PENTTI RUMMAKKO

On June 16, 1965, in Turku, Finland, Ron Clarke ran one his innumerable world records. He covered 10 kilometers in 28:14.0. His Finnish "rivals" in this race were like joggers. Clarke lapped them several times. One of them was 22-year-old Pentti Rummakko. His time was a poor 31:09.0. Two years earlier, Rummakko had been one of the best Finnish juniors, having run 3000 meters in 8:28.4. But since then, his progress had been only minimal—in spite of hard training sessions. By 1966, he still had not bettered his junior results. Something was wrong. He thought about retiring.

But Rummakko remembered that in 1965 he had run 25 kilometers in 1:21:22. Maybe he simply was too slow for track distances. In early 1967, Pentti became one of the many rags-to-riches cases of marathon running. In East Germany, he sped a 2:20:37 debut, best Finnish marathon of the year. He had found his true event.

Since then he has become "the grand old man" of Finnish marathon running. He won national titles of 1968, 1969 and 1971, two Nordic championships and ran several good races in famous international marathons. In the 1970 Boston classic he was fourth in his best-ever of 2:14:59.

But the Mexico City Olympics and the Athens European title meet (1969) were difficult moments for Rummakko. He became ill both times, and did not finish. It seemed he always lacked something in really big meets. However, in the 1971 European championships Rummakko ran a happy sixth, only 10 seconds behind Gaston Roelants and 10 ahead of Lutz Philipp. Kalle Hakkarainen's ninth place confirmed Finland still had good marathon men.

Rummakko desperately wanted to get onto the Munich team. But it was not easy. Finland suddenly had more than 10 young marathon men capable of 2:15 to 2:18. Rummakko said then, "I am training more than ever before. This will be my last year of racing." But he overdid it. It was told that sometimes he covered two marathons a day in training. His mileages were something unbelievable. But when the trials came, Rummakko had nothing left. He dropped out, completely spent. Seppo Nikkari, Reino Paukkonen and Pekka Tiihonen traveled to Munich.

This complete failure changed Pentti's plans. Although he did not finish a single race in 1972, he began the 1973 season in fine form. In biting wind and rain, he cruised 25,000 meters on the track in 1:17:20—his best-ever. He was again a favorite for the national marathon title.

**Pentti Rummakko:** (born Oct. 12, 1943, in Saarijarvi). 5'10", 145 pounds. Occupation: grinder. Married. Began racing in 1961 at age 18. Coached by Mauri Jormakka.

**Best times:** 100m—12.6; 400—56.0; 800—2:00.1; 1500—4:00.1; 3000—8:21.8 (68); 5000—14:36.6 (68); 10,000—29:40.0 (71); 25,000—1:17:20

(73); marathon—2:14:59 (70). In 1970 Rummakko won the so-called “Super-marathon” (29, 38 and 42 kilometers in three consecutive days). His time for this 109-kilometer ordeal was 6:11:23.

**Training:** In 1971, Rummakko told to Pentti Perttula of *Juoksija* magazine: “I live 15 kilometers from my work, and run this distance daily, to and back, using either the shortest course, or, sometimes running a longer loop. Something like this: Sunday p.m.—40 km.; Monday a.m.—15 km., p.m.—15 km.; Tuesday—the same; Wednesday a.m.—15 km., p.m.—25 km.; Thursday —15 plus 15; Friday—15 plus 20; Saturday—15 plus 15. This makes about 230 kilometers a week. My pace is fastish—about four minutes per kilometer (six minutes per mile) in the morning, a little faster in the evening. Before big races, I add my kilometers to about 260 per week, running faster, for a few weeks. I usually cover my 15-kilometer loop in about 52 to 55 minutes.”

# MARKKU SALMINEN

European steeplechase record holder Anders Garderud began his career in orienteering, and still sometimes competes in the exciting map-and-compass event. Pekka Paivarinta is another orienteer. Orienteering is a very popular sport in Scandinavia, and several more runners have started their careers running with the map along forest paths.

Markku Salminen, who twice has run the Boston marathon, is a special case. He still considers himself an orienteer, and it seems he has finally returned to this first love of his. He was one of the many disappointed Finnish distance men who did not get to Munich.

Salminen's orienteering career had lasted for almost a decade before he was persuaded to try running events. He had won several Finnish titles, taken part in international dual matches, and had been 13th in world orienteering championships. Salminen was always known as a hard trainer, whose running fitness was a class higher than that of his fellow competitors. He was running more than 200 kilometers a week—but not for track or road racing purposes.

Salminen had run some relay legs for his club, but it was not until 1969 that he began considering a running future. He did a 4:00.1 for 1500 meters and a 14:32.0 "five"—not exceptional, but satisfactory. Then, in the 1970 Finnish championships, Salminen cruised a fine 29:25.2 10,000 meters in third place. He had made his decision. From then on, his main event would be the marathon.

In early 1971, behind Rummakko and Nikkari, Salminen was running a fantastic debut. He finished in 2:16:36. What was behind this splendid performance? No secrets, just logging more than 230 kilometers a week through the long, cold and dark Finnish winter. Boston was Alvaro Mejia's feast, but Salminen did well by placing eighth in unfamiliar heat. Then a disaster struck: a serious leg injury. Training became impossible, and the European Games marathon was run without Salminen.

But another target was still there: Munich. Gradually, Salminen crept back to his usual mileages. Again he was sent to Boston and finished 10th. It was again in the heat, which Salminen despises. In the final trials in hot July, he folded.

It was a hard blow. Salminen had kept his promise: to try to qualify into those two big meets. He had failed, and he returned to orienteering. It was a loss for Finnish running. He was, and still is, one of the greatest running talents in our country. Maybe he will return one day?

**Markku Salminen:** (born Sept. 9, 1946, in Kokkola). Occupation: technology student. Married. Began racing in 1968 at age 22, after a 10-year orienteering career. Self-coached (some advice from Kari Sinkkonen).

**Best times:** 1500—4:00.1 (1969); 3000—8:15.8 (71); 5000—14:16.8 (70); 10,000—29:12.8 (72); marathon—2:16:36.0 (71).



# OLAVI SUOMALAINEN

When Olavi Suomalainen won the Boston marathon in 1972, it was a complete surprise even to most Finnish running observers. It was as if the legendary bird Phoenix had arisen from ashes. A fantastic junior promise in the 1960s, "Olli" had disappeared from the scene for several years. New names emerged. Suomalainen was forgotten. But he came back, and it is very likely he'll accomplish many nice feats in the future.

As far back as 1963, Suomalainen ran 3000 meters in 9:22.6. He was only 16 then. He liked orienteering more, and running was only sporadic. But the talent was there. In 1964, Olli ran a surprising third in the youth race of the Finnish cross-country title meet. In the summer, he did even better—silver in track title meet for 3000 meters.

In 1965 Suomalainen showed his ability to concentrate on important races. He had been quiet during the early season, but in the junior championship 5000 he outkicked all opponents in 15:11.6, although some of them were two years older than him. In 1966, he added another cross-country title to his merits, but a persistent leg injury forced him to sit out the track season. In 1967, he won the national junior 5000 meters in record time of 14:40.6. It was the best result of the meet, and a bright running future was predicted for Olavi. He was the best junior runner in Finnish history.

That year, Suomalainen began his studies in the Institute of Technology, and when people heard about that, the general reaction was: "His running career is over. Academic studies and running just don't mix." Partly, this was true. Dozens of prospects have disappeared into the classrooms of universities. In Finland, this is almost a rule. Young Suomalainen did win the 1968 Finnish senior cross-country title. But that race was generally considered his swan song. Because of his studies—he had to work in mines in summertime—training became almost impossible. Then came the military service, then studies again. In 1969, he did not race at all. In 1970, there was only an 8:31.4 3000 meters and a 14:59.6 5000. Not very encouraging, really...

But if anybody had written Suomalainen off, he was wrong. Olli's comeback began in 1971. Who else was coaching him now but Kari Sinkkonen. Autumn came, then winter, and Olli was training like never before. He was married now, his studies were almost over—the mental approach was good.

In February 1972, Suomalainen ran a terrific 3000 meters in Sweden: 7:58.0. Few men had ever run faster indoors, but he was aiming at the marathon, covering more than 250 kilometers a week. After many years of inactivity, he was more eager than ever. In Boston, there was no way of holding him. His first marathon took only 2:15:39.

The summer did not proceed well for Olli. He says, "I kept training 250 kilometers a week during the summer, aiming for the national marathon title which was the final Munich trial. The summer was very hot, and I was

losing too much in weight. I was getting tired." In the championship marathon, the heat conquered him. He was third in 2:22:45, but it was not enough for the selectors. Pekka Tiihonen took his place. It had been an all-out effort but no Munich trip.

**Olavi Suomalainen:** (born March 27, 1947, in Saaminki). 5'8", 133 pounds. Occupation: technology student. Married. Began racing in 1962 at age 15. Coached since 1971 by Kari Sinkkonen.

**Best times:** 1500—3:54:5 (1971); 3000—8:15.6 (71); 7:58.0 (indoors, 72); 5000—14:11.4 (72); 10,000—29:17.4 (72); marathon—2:15:39 (72).

# PEKKA TIIHONEN

It is always dangerous to label a runner (or any man) with one single word, but Pekka Tiihonen, a 2:15 marathoner, is generally considered "enigmatic." So far, he has shone only occasionally. But when he does, he is absolute world-class. Tiihonen usually races extremely badly, or super-well. He knows no compromises.

In the mid-1960s Pekka Tiihonen, then a farmer in his home village of Nilsia, was a promising junior miler. In 1966, at age 19, he ran the 1500 in 4:04.3. The next year, he took the junior cross-country silver, beating future Boston hero Olavi Suomalainen by half a second. In the summer, he improved to 3:56.2 and ran 3000 meters in 8:36.2. He still considered himself primarily a miler and never thought about the marathon.

Then came a temporary stop. Because of the military service and a troublesome leg injury, Tiihonen missed the 1969 season almost completely. Healthy again, he boldly doubled his training quantity, and suddenly he joined the Finnish top grades. In March 1970, Tiihonen ran his first-ever marathon in 2:23:14.2. Four weeks later he was a good fourth in the cross-country championships. Then he won a tactical 5000 race from a classy field in 14:12, and was sent to Iceland for the European Cup heats. There he jogged in a hopeless 32:44 "10" after a sudden illness. It became evident that he was an erratic type of runner: in Finnish championships he sped his second 10,000 in 29:22.4 and took the silver.

In 1971, Tiihonen continued his up-and-down performances. Several times he did not finish races, and he was generally considered "pluckless." But it was just his attitude towards racing. He did not like mediocrity. When he was feeling bad, he dropped out. Tiihonen was aiming high; he sold almost everything he owned and made a training trip of several months to Spain. (He was not among the stipend men of the Finnish AA.) Under the southern sun, he was logging enormous mileages, and another Finnish top runner training with him said, "If that man doesn't run a 2:15 marathon, then nobody does."

Tiihonen was averaging 250 kilometers a week. He said, "My target? The Olympic gold medal, of course. This is not fun for me, training three or four times a day. If not in Munich, then in Montreal." Tiihonen is not cocky or boasting. He knows his talent.

The traditional Arthur Lydiard marathon was run in Turku in early April. Tiihonen went like a machine and won in 2:15:15. The predictions of his friend had come true! This race practically confirmed his election to Munich. But Pekka made an error. Between high-mileage training sessions, he popped in some track races and did not do well. Had he lost his shape? People began getting worried. Many men were aiming at Munich, and it was most important to know who were the best.

But Tiihonen had one more surprise in his pocket. On July 6 he ran a magnificent 25-kilometer race. Since 1965, the world record has been Ron Hill's 1:15:22.6. In sweltering weather, Tiihonen started with five other runners, all of whom dropped out. After 20 kilometers, he was running alone. It was an unofficial Munich trial, and in this race Boston winner Olavi Suomalainen and Esko Lipsonen practically destroyed their chances. Tiihonen's time of 1:15:40.0 was the third-best ever.

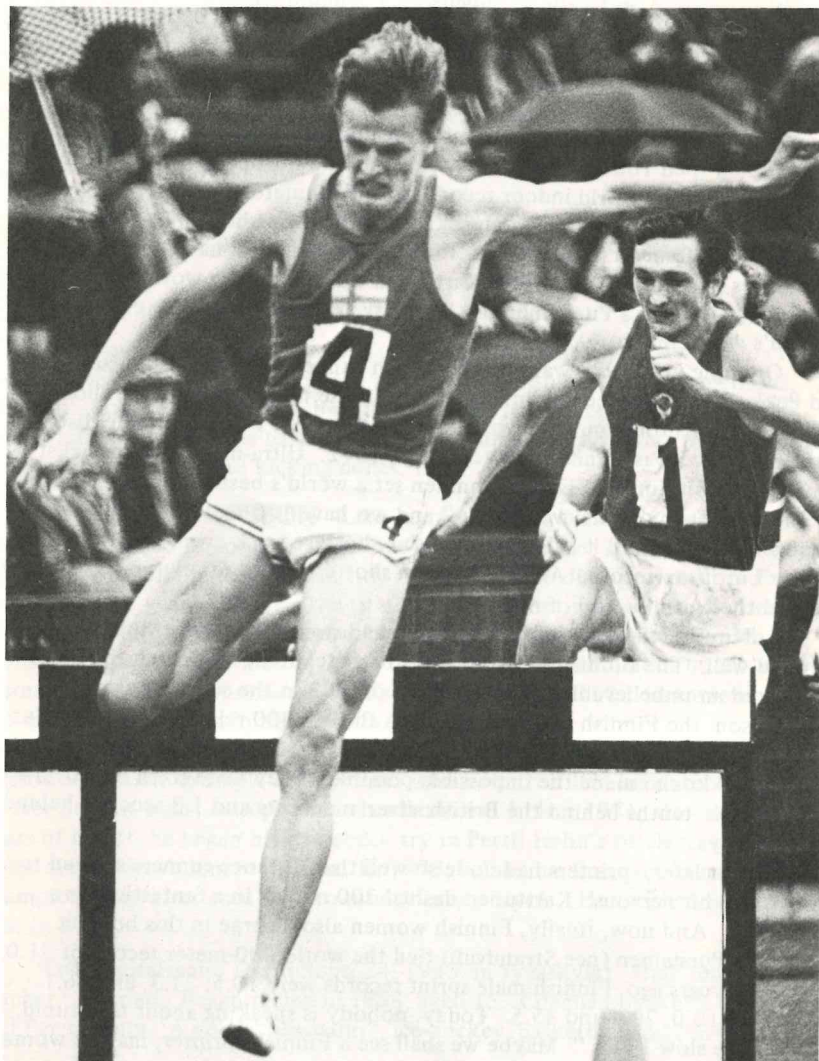
Tiihonen does not like recalling his Munich story. He went there two weeks before the race. He was feeling excellent, until a few days before the big moment he got the flu, together with fever and stomach pains. Tiihonen dropped out after 35 kilometers.

**Pekka Tiihonen:** (born June 29, 1947, in Nilsia). 5'6", 135 pounds. Occupation: caretaker. Married. Began racing in 1964 at age 17. Self-coached (some advice from Juha Vaatainen).

**Best times:** 800—1:56.2 (1968); 1500—3:49.0 (72); 3000—8:07.0 (73); 5000—13:50.8 (72); 10,000—28:51.2 (73); 25,000 (track)—1:15:40.0 (72); marathon—2:15:15.0.

## Chapter VIII

# AND MORE



Though Finland is best known for its distance men, such as steeplechaser Tapio Kantanen (4), the sprinters and women are reaching lofty heights as well. (Tony Duffy photo)

# NOT SO SLOW AFTER ALL

During the decades, this has been the most hard-dying delusion of Finnish sports: "We are born slow. It is impossible to become a top-class sprinter in Finland. We are stiff, slow, even dull. If you want to run, try 10,000 or marathon."

It took more than 50 years to convince us that this is wrong. In 1972, Raimo Vilen sped 100 meters in 10.0, equaling the European record. Erik Gustafsson tied the world indoor record for the 60 meters. Our relay men ran 39.3 and 3:01.1 in Munich. Markku Kukkoaho finished an honorable sixth in the 400 meters (second-best European). Ari Salin has run intermediate hurdles in 49.5. In 1973, Ossi Karttunen was one of the world's best 200 men. And Mona-Lisa Pursiainen ran her marvelous 400 meters to equal the women's world record.

Olympic year 1972 was one of Finnish runners. Of course, Lasse Viren's and Pekka Vasala's three gold medals received the most publicity. Millions of TV viewers throughout the world saw the return of Finnish middle-distance men. But there was something else, too, in 1972. Ultra-marathon specialist (a new breed in Finland) Ensio Tanninen set a world's best time for the 100 kilometers. Take off the word "kilo" and we have 100 meters. Raimo Vilen (change one letter and it is Viren) sped this shortest track event in 10.0, equaling the European record. And in the even shorter indoor 60 meters, Gustafsson equaled the world record of 6.4.

In Munich, these sprinters were overshadowed by distance runners, but they did well. The Finnish 4 x 100-meter relay team did not reach the final but posted an unbelievable national record of 39.3 in the semis. Before the 1972 season, the Finnish national record in the 4 x 400 relay was 3:07.1. But in the Olympic record landslide, Stig Lonngqvist, Ari Salin, Ossi Karttunen and Markku Kukkoaho made the impossible possible. They were sixth in 3:01.1—just a tiny six-tenths behind the British silver medalists and 1.3 seconds behind winner Kenya.

A year later, sprinters had done so well that distance runners seemed to be getting a bit nervous. Karttunen dashed 200 meters in a fantastic (for a Finn) 20.4. And now, finally, Finnish women also emerge in this booklet. Mona-Lisa Pursiainen (nee Strandvall) tied the world 400-meter record of 51.0.

Five years ago, Finnish male sprint records were 10.5, 21.3, and 46.1. And now: 10.0, 20.4 and 45.5. Today, nobody is speaking about the stupid idea of "the slow Finns." Maybe we shall see a Finnish sprinter, man or woman, at the victory rostrum in Montreal? How is this possible? No secrets even here. Just hard work, improved financial resources, good coaches and more self-confidence. Finnish sprinters and hurdlers deserve a brief introduction.

**RAIMO VILEN**—July 25, 1972, Raimo Vilen won the 100 meters in 10.1 against Great Britain and Spain. The next day, he was narrowly beaten

by powerful David Jenkins in the 200 meters, but he equaled the Finnish record of 20.8. During the following night, Vilen became a happy father. He did not sleep a wink. It would be logical to think that he was a bit tired. But the very next evening, on the hyper-fast Vuosaari bitumen track in Helsinki, he equaled the 100-meter European record of 10.0 in legal conditions.

Although Vilen was almost 27 then, he had not been a sprinter for more than four years. In the late 1960s, he was a competent "pesapallo" player—one of the best in Finland, actually. ("Pesapallo" is the rough equivalent of American baseball.) Occasionally, Vilen ran 11-second 100s to test his speed. Then he met coach Pertti Helin. Since 1968, Vilen's progress has been steady, although he has always been most susceptible to injuries—one of which destroyed his Munich hopes in the 100-meter heats. In 1971, he ran 10.2 twice, but had to sit out the European Games because of a muscle pull. Bad luck has always followed him.

**Raimo Vilen:** (born Aug. 10, 1945, in Artjärvi). 5'11", 167 pounds. High school sports teacher. Married. Began racing in 1966 at age 21. Coached by Pertti Helin.

**Racing:** 100m—10.0 (1972); 200m—20.8 (71, 72).

**Training:** once a day, six days a week, 11 months a year, two hours or more per session. "My program is a mixture of Polish and Russian methods. The main target is to develop absolute speed, at 30 meters or so, but once a week I run 200s and 300s to exhaustion. On Sunday, I just walk in the woods, enjoying the scenery and kicking cones."

**ERIK GUSTAFSSON**—Like marathon man Olavi Suomalainen, Erik Gustafsson is used to coming back. But he is a 100-meter specialist. Ten years ago, he was second in the Finnish title meet. Then he disappeared from the tracks for four years. He won the title in 1967 and retired again. Another five years went by. Then came the shocking news from the Finnish indoor championships in 1972. Gustafsson, 29, had equaled the world indoor 60-meter record of 6.4. In the summer, Gustafsson improved his 100 best by several tenths to 10.3, and ran in the Munich 39.3 relay team.

An almost unbelievable story. What is hiding behind it? Injuries. Gustafsson is a classic example of a sprinter who never fulfilled his potential due to ever-present pulls, cramps and other troubles. In late 1971, after several years of layoff, he began his comeback try in Pertti Helin's tutelage, but injuries did not leave him even then. In 1973, he had his first race in national championships, after another two-month injury layoff. He finished last in his heat in 11.2.

**Erik Gustafsson:** (born Sept. 24, 1943, in Jyväskylä). High school sports teacher. Married. Began racing in 1958, aged 15. Coached by Antti Lanamaki and Pertti Helin. A good "pesapallo", ice-hockey, basketball and football player.

**Best times:** 60m (indoors)—6.4 (1972); 100—10.3 (72); 200—21.5 (72).

**MARKKU KUKKOAHO**—The development of this tall, blond police constable from Oulu from a promising decathlete to Olympic 400-meter finalist was quick. In 1969, at age 23, he was mostly doing the long jump (over 23

feet) and high hurdles, but could run 100 meters in 10.9 and threw some discs, too. The 400 meters took about 52 seconds those days.

But then, in the Sweden-Finland match in 1969, an injury hit a Finnish 4 x 400-meter relayist just before the race. Kukkoaho, who had run a 21.6 200 earlier in the season and was sipping lemonade in the stands, was taken as a reserve. He rounded his leg in 48 seconds—without proper warmup. By accident, he had found his own event, and closed the season in October with an open 48.3.

In 1970, Kukkoaho already was a head taller than other Finnish one-lappers, beating 47 seconds six times, and equaling the ancient national record of 46.1. The meteoric progress continued in the European championships the next season. In the continental title meet Kukkoaho ran a surprising fourth in 45.7, losing only narrowly to Dave Jenkins, Marcello Fiasconaro and Jan Werner. Kukkoaho won the pre-Olympic 400 in Munich.

Although Kukkoaho has never been known as a hard trainer, injuries began chasing him after the 1971 season. His winter training did not go well. But in Munich he showed his enormous fighting spirit and ability to concentrate on big tasks. After three punishing heats (46.1, 46.1, 46.0) Kukkoaho ran the race of his life in the final.

**Markku Kukkoaho:** (born Nov. 11, 1946, in Puolanka). 6'2½", 182 pounds. Police constable. Single. Began racing in 1964 at age 18. Coached since 1968 by Eino Laaksonen (himself a 14.5 national team high hurdler in the 1960s).

**Racing:** 100—10.5 (1973); 200—20.8 (71, 72); 400—45.5 (72).

**Training:** Kukkoaho is a natural talent who is known to train less than the best Finnish female sprinter Pursiainen. "Olympic winter, I spent a few weeks in Spain training with other Finns. It was a bit boring there. I have been used to training only once a day, but these distance men, they were going out three or four times, just training all the day. It is a mystery to me how they can handle it. I like to train in Finland, after work. They don't disturb each other. Mental energy is important for a sprinter. You lose it by training for hours every day."

Although Kukkoaho probably would be an excellent half-miler, he says he despises that distance. (Last September, when Vasala ran 1:44.6 in Helsinki, Kukkoaho was pacing him until 600 meters.) But he still may try intermediate hurdles seriously. He is tall, fast and extremely strong—an ideal hurdler type.

**ARI SALIN**—Hard-training technology student Ari Salin was a couple years ago one of the hottest names in Finnish track. In 1970, he defeated Wayne Collett in the 400-meter hurdles at Helsinki in 50.1, and later was the first Finn to break the 50-second barrier. He ran 49.9. Being a good technician (110 hurdles in 13.8) and reasonably fast (400 flat in 47.1), he was predicted a good future. But then something seemed to have gone wrong. One of the favorites before the European title meet, he lapsed to sixth in the final. Before Munich, he did not survive the heats. In the relay, on the other hand, he ran a sub-46 leg.

In 1973, Salin made some 800-meter tries, but his hurdling became still more erratic. One reason for Salin's decline may have been his studies in the Institute of Technology, where he was doing extremely well. He is not old yet, and it is interesting to see if he can return to his sub-50s when the studies



are over. His wife Riitta (nee Hagman) is one of the best Finnish female sprinters (400m 54.8).

**Ari Salin:** (born Jan. 20, 1947 in Lohja). 6'1", 165 pounds. Technology student. Married. Began racing in 1964 at age 17. Coached by Tapani Ilkka.

**Best times:** 100m—11.1 (1968); 200—21.6 (73); 400—47.1 (72); 800—1:51.9 (73); 110m hurdles—13.8 (70); 400m hurdles—49.5 (72).

**Training:** Salin's program is not known in detail, but contrary to Kukkoaho, whose sessions are speed-stressed, Salin's training is more of the endurance type at the moment. In winter, he has been doing some 10-mile runs. He may eventually move up to 800 meters.

**OSSI KARTTUNEN**—When Karttunen, who is called "sphinx" because it is most difficult to get him to say anything, was just 17, he ran 100 meters in 10.7—very unusual in Finland. The next summer, he was the Finnish senior 200 champion, and he won this title five times in a row. Way back in 1969, he ran the 200 in 20.9, but then he seemed to be declining. In 1972, Ossi, now coached by former national team hurdler Tapani Ilkka, began training for the 400 meters. He began the season well but then an accident took place. He suffered carbon monoxide poisoning in his work. After hours of unconsciousness, it was a miracle he survived. In Munich, he had his shape again and ran a 45.4 relay leg.

In 1973, Karttunen finally redeemed his fantastic junior promise. He ran a 20.4 for 200 meters in July (national record) and has given Kukkoaho a good challenge at 400, posting a best of 45.8. With his improved speed, he should soon join the small "sub-45" club in the 400.

**Ossi Karttunen:** (born March 17, 1948, in Imatra). Tinsmith. Single. Began racing in 1964, aged 16. Coached by Tapani Ilkka.

**Racing:** 100m—10.4 (1970); 200—20.4 (73); 400—45.8 (73).

**Training:** "There are two reasons for my improved results: (a) training much more and better than previously; (b) I had some faults in my running action, which have now been corrected. I used to 'sit' too much when running. Now I have learned to push onto the tips of the toes, so my stride is much longer. Besides, I have become a lot stronger through weight lifting. I like 200 more than 400, because it is easier to run—and to recover—but one lap will eventually be my distance. With the training I am doing, you can run both distances equally."

**MONA-LISA PURSIAINEN**—At the moment, Mona-Lisa is by far the best Finnish sportswoman, all events considered. When a woman dashes 100 meters in 11.2; 200 meters in 22.7, a time bettered by only five runners (three of them East Germans) and 400 in 51.0, it is bound to cause some hubbub. But not in Finland, Unfortunately, female sports here have not yet received the publicity they deserve. This attitude seems to be changing gradually, however.

Mona-Lisa lives for track, and she enjoys it immensely. Her father-in-law, Borje Strandvall, ran 400 in the Los Angeles Olympics in 1932, and Bertel Storskrubb, the European intermediate hurdle champion of 1946, is her relative as well. And she is married to Pauli Pursiainen, at the moment the

quickest high hurdler in Finland (14.1). They train together, travel to meets together—a modern, young, fast, likeable married couple.

As far back as 10 years ago, Mona-Lisa was starting her successful track career. From the very beginning, she won all the possible national junior titles and has progressed continually since then. In 1969, it was thought she had already gone over the hill (she was 18 then!), but she came to Helsinki to study in the Sports Teacher Institute, and started a scientifically programmed training program with the creator of several top Finnish sprinters, Pertti Helin.

Mona-Lisa trains hard, harder in fact than any Finnish male sprinter.

**Mona-Lisa Pursiainen (nee Strandvall):** (born June 21, 1951, in Krunnupyy). 5'7", 123 pounds. Sports student. Married. Began racing in 1963 at age 12. Coached by Pertti Helin.

**Racing:** 100m—11.2 (1973); 200m—22.7 (73); 400m—51.0 (73); 800m—2:16.0 (71).

**Training:** Two to three hours per session, six days a week, 11-12 months a year. "I lift small weights—many repetitions—three times a week in winter, once a week in summer. Sometimes I use heavy-soled shoes in special training. My stride is much longer than it used to be. Now it measures about seven feet. I must thank Pertti Helin for everything. He makes me train. I am always a bit tense before a race, and to get rid of it my coach said, 'Get married to Pauli (we had been engaged for a long time).' So we did, and have run much faster since then..."

# LATE-STARTING WOMEN

The days have passed when a Finnish woman running on the roads (even fully clothed) was considered an escapee from a mental hospital. Now there are thousands of them—of all ages, shapes and levels of fitness. Top girl runners are finally getting the support and encouragement they need. And “fun runners,” “social joggers” and “weight-losers” (maybe the largest group—women are women) are swarming everywhere.

What was keeping them inside previously? Generally, it must have been a typical feature of the Finnish character: shyness. Unfortunately, I do not know who started this women’s running hysteria, but he or she should be given a life-saving medal for that. Viren, Vasala, Vaatainen—there is no reason to underestimate them even in this respect. They have done much for Finnish female running. But don’t forget our young girl racers. They have been doing comparatively well lately. So far, no Finnish woman is known to have finished a marathon. But I am absolutely certain we shall see a Finnish girl running it under three hours soon, smiling nicely and tempting others to join “the club.”

Finnish women have been among the world’s best cross-country skiers for many decades. But the running sport was, until the last few years, 99% men’s property. Eight hundred meters for women was first run in Finland as late as 1946. No wonder it became a horror for a long time. Without training or knowledge of correct pace, young girls were finishing vomiting because of the enormous oxygen debt. Nobody ever thought they might handle longer distances better.

The 1500 became a championship event in Finland in 1968 and 3000 meters in 1972. In fact, there were no Finnish female distance runners before the late 1950s. Eila Mikola (nee Helin) was near European class, posting a useful 2:10.4 800 meters in 1959. Ewa-Liisa Kalliolahti was one of the greatest-ever talents in Finland, but leg problems ended her career prematurely. While only 18, she won the European Junior Games silver in 1966 (800 in 2:08.1), five seconds behind one Vera Nikolic. Eeva Haim improved the record to 2:05.9 (where it still stands) and ran in Mexico City.

While the Finnish long distance girls are not yet in the same class with their sprinter colleagues, they are improving. In 1970, when Aila Virkberg was just 16, she ran a magnificent 4:28.4 1500 meters. Nina Holmen (nee Warn) wife of 13:43 5000-meter performer Rune Holmen, holds the Finnish 3000 record of 9:29.2 and has run 1500 in 4:17.6. Pirjo Vihonen is a “veteran runner” who has been around since the 1960s. She was the first female runner here to train abroad in winter, and does especially well in the national championships. But the best Finnish distance running woman is none of these.

**SINIKKA TYYNELA**—Kari Sinkkonen does not coach only men. He has made Pekka Vasala and Pekka Paivarinta what they are, but he has time to tutor Sinikka Tyynela too. In 1972, she ran the 1500 meters in

4:14.5, which for a time was an European best for 18-year-olds. Sinikka, who sometimes trains more than 120 kilometers a week, has been progressing solidly since 1969: 4:59.6, 4:36.3; 4:22.0, 4:14.5.

**Sinikka Tyynela:** (Born March 17, 1954, in Laitila). 5'6", 130 pounds. Student. Single. Began racing in 1968, aged 14. Coached by Kari Sinkkonen.

**Racing:** 400-59.0 (1970); 800-2:07.8 (70); 1500-4:14.5 (72); 3000-9:46.2 (73).

**Training:** once or twice a day, seven days a week, 12 months a year, in winter 100-120 kilometers a week, less in the summer. Sinkkonen coaches Tyynela along those Arthur Lydiard lines, which made Pekka Vasala an Olympic winner. Quality and quantity are, naturally, proportionate with her age and sex.

The magnificent performance of Finnish girls in the world cross-country championships in Waregem was overshadowed by Pekka Paivarinta's victory. But experts all over the world had to admit that from now on ladies from Finland must be reckoned with. In team competition, Finland was a most surprising second, between England and the United States. In the individual races, Sinikka Tyynela, Irja Pettinen, Nina Holmen and Aila Koivistoinen finished respectively 5-8-10-50. Yes, Finnish girls are coming!

# COACHING OF CHAMPIONS

The Berlin Olympics of 1936 were a medal-winning orgy for Finnish distance runners. They literally smashed the rest of the world under their feet, winning three gold medals, three silver and one bronze.

Thirty-six is a magic number for Kari Sinkkonen. He was born that same year, 1936. Thirty-six years later, when he was 36-years-old, Finnish runners returned from their exile. And again, it happened in Germany.

Together with Lasse Viren's coach Rolf Haikkola, Kari Sinkkonen is the most respected running authority at the moment in Finland. He has several (almost too many to handle, he says) well-known pupils: Pekka Vasala, Pekka Paivarinta, Boston winner Olavi Suomalainen, young girl talent Sinikka Tyynela. Mikko Ala-Leppilampi has just begun taking advice from Sinkkonen. Lisa Veijalainen is a world champion in the orienteering relay. Aarno Ristimäki covered 10,000 meters in 28:33.6 in 1973. And don't forget that 1500-meter European champion Francesco Arese is currently coached by Sinkkonen.

All top Finnish coaches have been active runners themselves: Haikkola ran 5000 meters in the European title meet. Mauri Jormakka was a 1:51 half-miler in the 1950s. Hannu Posti—Olympic 10,000-meter fourth placer. Pentti Karvonen—steeplechase world recordholder 20 years ago. Sprinters too: Pertti Helin was the Finnish junior decathlon champion, dashing 100 meters in 10.9 and Eino Laaksonen sped the high hurdles in 14.5. Kari Sinkkonen can show "only" a 50.2 400 meters, but he is a national relay titlist and was progressing mightily when an injury stopped his career. These men know all about track, inside and out.

There have always been competent coaches in Finland. In the beginning of the century competitive running was a new thing, and experimenting was a must (to some extent, this is true even now). Hannes Kolehmainen was advised by his elder brother, who lived in America. Paavo Nurmi was reading Alfie Shrubbs's books—and although he was self-coached, he eventually became a coach himself, carrying Finns to their great success in Berlin. Nurmi was a pioneer of modern training—and although he made some severe mistakes (walking was one of them), there still is much to learn from him.

After the war, there were Paavo Karikko and Olli Virho. It was during the interval training era when they created some world record runners—the last ones in Finland before Jouko Kuha. These two men were the examples for Kari Sinkkonen when he began his coaching career. Sinkkonen says, "Those days, I thought I knew everything about coaching. But now I am much more uncertain." Originally, he was doing it only part-time, but since 1966 he has been working for the Finnish Track and Field Association.

Like Finnish runners, Finnish coaches also carry forward a tradition. Each coach has pupils who take the knowledge, try to improve it, and when their time is over, pass the baton to the next one. Good example, in Oulu, Paavo

Meskus was, and still is, a legendary figure. He was like a father to Juha Vaatainen, and although Meskus died in 1968, Vaatainen says he would never have won those European titles without him. Now, Jussi Saarela, Meskus's closest pupil, is getting the same legendary aura as his great predecessor in northern Finland. It is the tradition.

During one period, Finland was so much behind the rest of the world that our own knowledge was not enough help. Mihaly Igloi, then Arthur Lydiard had to be asked for help, and they gave the starting impetus needed. Now the biggest nations in the world try to copy Finnish systems and to find out possible "secrets." But such "espionage" is in vain. There are no tricks, no secrets. Finnish runners were just given the opportunity to reach top levels. They did it, and now the problem is to stay there. It requires still more hard work, but Finnish coaches enjoy it.

There are no different "schools" in Finnish running, really. Nobody is preaching for pure interval training any more. Of course all of them use it, but only after adequate background work. The common thing is: Finnish runners run much, and the more years they have behind them, the faster they try to cover their training kilometers. It is that simple. It is not always the method that is most important. It may be the personality of a coach, his encouraging words before an important race.

The concept of "total training" arrived in Finland in the late 1960s. It does not mean professionalism, necessarily, but helping a runner's personal conditions so that he can give a full effort in his event. The Finnish stipend system is just this. Runners never actually see the money, but it covers their expenses: food, equipment, medical care, training camps, travel, etc.

The plans must not be short-sighted. At the moment, Kari Sinkkonen is coaching some runners with a four-year target, some of them even longer. The fruits should ripen in 1976 and 1980 Olympics. There are, however, some big meets every year, where an athlete should give everything he has. It is most difficult to tune up a runner to the day so that he really can use all the resources he has acquired during his winter training and track sessions.

In the post-Olympic season, the "Flying Finns" (with the exception of Paivarinta and a few others) have taken it easy. Even Kari Sinkkonen admits that after Munich he was mentally weary. The excitement before and during the Games, seeing Pekka Vasala fulfill their boldest dreams, was physically and mentally so demanding that Sinkkonen was completely spent. Then, gradually, he was able to look forward again.

As I write, the European title meet in Rome is only a year away. Lasse Viren and Pekka Vasala will be back by then. At least that is what they and their coaches say. Then two more years until Montreal, where new running history will be written. Will the winners be Finns again? Impossible to say. Some pessimists claim Munich cannot ever be repeated. But on the other hand, running is just now becoming a terrific mass movement in Finland. Running is "in" and the future looms bright.

**RIGHT: The first Finnish Olympic victory in 36 years—Lasse Viren's 10,000 win over Emiel Puttemans and Miruts Yifter. (Mark Shearman photo)**



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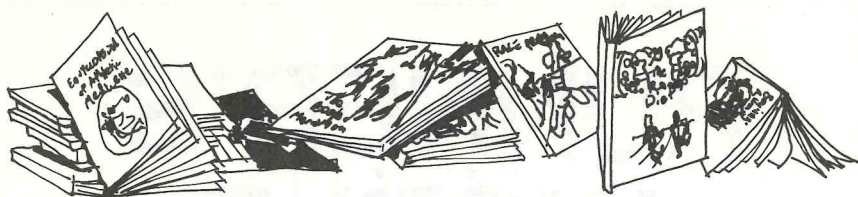
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## FINNISH RUNNING SECRETS

“... In the six Olympics before Munich, the Finns had won nothing. But a spark of ‘sisu’ still smoldered in the country. Sisu is a concept that defies translation into English. Roughly, it is a combination of pride, stubbornness and guts, and it is a national characteristic of the Finns. The Finns are proud of their distance heritage, and stubborn and gummy enough not to let it die without a fight.”

**FRONT COVER:**  
1973 international cross-country champion Pekka Paivarinta (right). (Mark Shearman photo)

**PHOTO LEFT:**  
1972 Boston marathon winner Olavi Suomalainen. (Rick Levy photo)