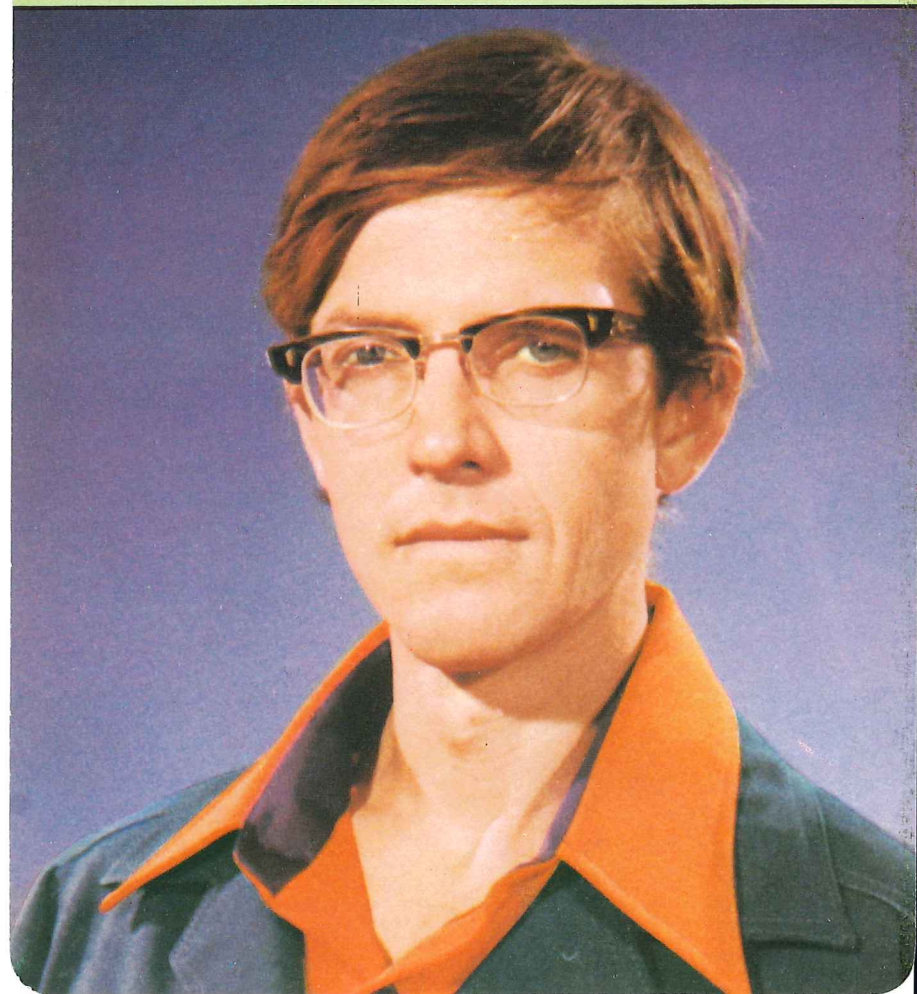


# Track and Field



*Walking*  
*(Ron Laird, Larry Young)*



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## *Walking* *(Ron Laird, Larry Young)*



### *A Different Step*

The event is called walking, and though it is an Olympic track and field event, it has not attracted much attention in North America. It had not, that is until two young men—Ronald Laird and Roland Zinn—who had learned the technique in Eastern colleges surprised everyone at the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo by showing the world America could produce international competitors of high caliber. Laird had originally achieved some distinction as a member of the U.S. Olympic and Pan American teams, as he won more than 50 national championships at distances ranging from one mile to 30 km. He even wrote a book on the subject called *Competitive Race Walking*.

The key to walking races is in establishing a synchronized motion, coordinating leg stride, hip movement and elbow motion so that balance can be maintained and speed achieved while observing the basic rule of walking by making a progression of steps so taken that unbroken contact with the ground is maintained. For example, the advancing foot must make contact with the ground before the rear foot leaves the ground. During the period of each step

in which a foot is on the ground, the leg must be straightened, that is, not bent at the knee, at least for a moment. There are judges stationed around the course to make sure no one breaks stride or begins to run.

Though they did not win any medals at Tokyo, Zinn and, to a greater extent, Laird were major influences on other walkers, including Larry Young of Sib-ley, Mo., who won the first U.S. medal in a walking event by finishing 3rd in the 50 km competition at Mexico City in 1968. Young duplicated that success four years later with another 3rd place finish and bronze medal performance at Munich. After that, however, the number of Olympic walking events was cut in half, and only the shorter 20 km walk was contested at Montreal in 1976.

Meanwhile, Laird, who was born in 1938 and at an age when most other track and field athletes have either hung up their spikes or moved up to "masters" competition for older contestants, is still participating and winning shorter walking races in meets like the AAU indoor and outdoor championships.

*Laird probably inspired more American walkers than any other man*