

# Track and Field



*Walking and  
the Olympic Games*



# Track and Field



## *Walking and the Olympic Games*



### *A Surprising Discontinuation*

Walking events were not introduced into the Olympic Games program until 1908, when the Games were held in London. An Englishman, George Larner, took the two gold medals. In Paris (1924), an increasing number of competitors were disqualified for breaking the walking rules. These were at that time ambiguous and decisions were often left to the discretion of judges who were ignorant of this discipline, so the International Athletics Federation decided to remove walking from the Olympic program altogether. It was Emile Anthoine, a Frenchman, who managed to reinstate it in 1932, organizing a 50-km race in Los Angeles in which the first winner was again an Englishman, Thomas Green. At the age of 39, the new Olympic champion had enabled walking to make a triumphant come-back to the Olympics. The 50-km race, from that historic date (3 August 1932) onwards, was to figure regularly in the program of the Games. It was not to be ousted until 1976 by the IAAF.

The existence of the 10-km walk was much more ephemeral. It was held at five

Olympic Games from 1912 to 1952. The experiment was not, however, pursued, and from 1956 at Melbourne onwards, the shortest Olympic distance was changed from 10 to 20 km. There has been no modification of this since. In Rome, Tokyo, Mexico and Munich, the 20 km and the 50 km were disputed jointly, allowing the crowning of the most remarkable walkers of the modern epoch, like the Russian Vladimir Golubnichi, the Italian Abdon Pamich, the East German Christoph Hoehne and the West German Bernhard Kannenberg.

It is obvious that the 50 km conforms more to the general conception of a walking race than the 20 km. It was, however, the walking marathon which lost its place in the program of the Olympic Games in 1976, which greatly surprised all the experts. A World Championship was, however, immediately organized to fill the gap left by the reduction of the Olympic program. The first title, in 1976, went to the Russian Veniamin Soldatenko.

*Vladimir Golubnichi (831): one of the great walkers of the modern age*