

AMERICA'S MARATHON/CHICAGO—OCTOBER 21, 1984

A WHOLE NEW BALLGAME

On our cover you see him breaking the tape, cutting eight seconds off the world record. He is completing his first marathon. He has run through a good deal of wind and rain.

He is no big name. He is Steve Jones, a trackman from Wales who got eighth in the Olympic 10,000 meters race this summer.

There you see him, in Chicago, giving the running world a healthy jolt.

"It's unbelievable," Jones himself admitted.

It *is* unbelievable in the sense that what he did goes against several long-standing beliefs about marathon racing. What Steve Jones and this year's America's Marathon/Chicago did, in fact, was put to rest, once and for all, the old rulebook on marathoning.

The marathoning world has been turned on its ear. The expert commentator has stuck his foot in his mouth. The race director has had to rethink his operation. The top-dog runner has been humbled. The rules have changed. World-class marathoning is up for grabs.

RULE: You can't run a world record in bad weather.

It is 9:00 a.m. Sunday morning in Daley Plaza. It is 49 degrees. A north wind blows at twenty miles an hour. A cold rain whips at the masses of waiting marathoners. For late October, fairly typical Chicago weather.

But this is not good weather for a fast marathon time. The crowds won't show up to cheer you on, the wind hits you in the face and slows you down, the rain soaks your shoes and distracts you. Frank Shorter hated racing in the rain.

The gun goes off, and the huge pack bolts up Clark Street into the rain and wind. Around the Historical Society and down LaSalle, Michigan, and Lake Shore Drive, Kenyans Gabriel Kamau and Joe Nzau lead the group, a dozen and a half, trying to avoid the puddles.

They lead at a very respectable pace—43:40 for nine miles—close to a 2:07 marathon pace. One starts to think . . . maybe this could still be a fast race. Rod Dixon ran fast last year at New York in the rain. Carlos Lopes ran pretty fast in L.A. in the appalling heat.

But surely the pace will slow once they turn north again into the wind. And it does. The tenth mile and then the next two miles slip over five minutes. Rob deCastella and Geoff Smith exchange leads.

But then, as the group passes through Chinatown and Pilsen, the rain is stopping and the wind lessens. The pack has dwindled to eleven. The runners eye each other seriously. The thirteenth mile is 4:54, and the pace will stay there for most of the rest of the race.

RULE CHANGE: Even in bad weather, you can run pretty darn fast.

RULE: Before you can run a successful 26.2 miles, you need experience racing at this distance.

It is tricky, the marathon. It's not like a track race. The distance is a killer. You have to do an apprenticeship. It takes time to build the endurance and time to learn the patience required for a marathon.

This idea was shaken this past summer in the men's Olympic Marathon when the gold, silver, and bronze medalists had only completed three prior marathons between them. Carlos Lopes, John Treacy, and Charlie Spedding beat the best in the world, and they were relative novices at the distance.

And now here is Steve Jones coming over the bridge onto Wells Street at 15 miles, and he's looking very easy. He felt so easy at ten miles, in fact, that he asked deCastella if the clock was correct.

Jones has never finished a marathon. In last year's America's Marathon, the only other time he tried the distance, he dropped out after stepping in a pothole and aggravating an already-sore leg.

Jones has had little interest in the marathon. He considers himself a trackman. Even later he would insist, "I am not a marathoner."

So now, past the midway point in this race, Jones is in foreign territory. He's happy to be keeping up with the front pack. He's going from mile to mile, whistling in the dark.

"I had second doubts from 6 miles on. I was pleased to still be with them halfway. I was hoping to stick with them to twenty."

But the heavy favorites, Lopes and deCastella, weren't surprised to see Steve Jones still there. deCastella: "There's not too much difference between a 10K runner who runs well and a marathon runner who runs well. The marathon is further, but not so different from other races."

Lopes had been asked before the race about Jones's chances, and his answer was "What he doesn't know about marathoning won't hurt him." And Lopes should know, having proved it in the Olympics.

RULE CHANGE: What you don't know in the marathon won't hurt you. In fact, it may help you.

RULE: In a highly competitive marathon, you don't make your move early. You wait to the end. You let the impatient and inexperienced movers wear each other out first.

This rule had also been dented in this summer's Olympic Marathon. Despite grave misgivings by TV commentators Bill Rodgers and Marty Liquori, little Joan Benoit scooted out from the pack of women marathoners only fourteen minutes into the race, and no one saw her again. She was surprised that no one followed, but she felt like she was jogging and she'd be darned if she were going to run someone else's race.

At eighteen miles Steve Jones is looking around at the other runners. He is feeling ridiculously good. Should I go now? This pace doesn't feel too bad. But it's still pretty early . . .

deCastella has momentarily let off from the 4:54 pace he's been forcing. His drive north up Wells has wasted several fine marathoners. At fourteen miles Joe Nzau, the defending champion, pulled over and vomited. Simeon Kigen, who many had picked as the ringer in this race, tossed his visor aside at fifteen miles and gradually fell off the pace. Kenyan Richard Kaitany and New Yorker Ewald Bonzet are gone by sixteen miles. Only six runners remain: deCastella, Jones, Geoff Smith, Martin Pitayo, Lopes, and Kamau.

Jones looks at them. He'd been cautioned. His friend and Olympic teammate, Charlie Spedding, had advised restraint: "When you feel like making a move, think about it, wait, and then a couple miles later, think about it again."

Jones tries this briefly, but his restraint leaves him at 19.5 miles. Turning onto Racine, Jones takes off. Kamau immediately follows him, but Jones runs the next mile in 4:47, and Kamau is soon ten yards back. deCastella and Lopes watch Jones the same way Nzau and Hugh Jones watched Kigen move away at this point last year, the feeling of frustration of being unable to respond, mixed with the

prudence of holding back and the fervent hope that Jones would soon crash and burn.

deCastella: "I knew I had to cover it (Jones's move), but I couldn't. I thought he might come back to us because he's a novice to the marathon, and I thought that maybe he overran himself."

Lopes: "When I saw him (Jones), I didn't feel strong enough to go with him. I decided to wait until the last few kilometers. I was not surprised it was Jones, but a little surprised he moved so early."

Was it too early?

Down Montrose past Graceland Cemetery, Jones extends his lead to over twenty seconds. Jones charges up the ramp onto Lake Shore Drive looking a lot different than Kigen did last year, who toiled up this ramp.

Out on Lake Shore Drive, deCastella and Lopes need to start cutting into Jones's lead, or they will lose the race. Past twenty-four miles Steve Jones's lead grows to forty seconds. It is clear now—Jones will win.

RULE CHANGE: Make your move as early as you want. If you are the strongest runner that day, you can get away with it.

Now conjecture sweeps through the waiting crowd of reporters, officials, spectators. People begin figuring Jones's splits and the remaining distance. Could he actually get the world record?

Jones simply flies on. He'll end up zinging the last six miles at an awesome 4:45 pace.

"I knew I was going well at the end. With about two kilometers to go, I knew it (the record) was possible." People on the lead truck made that very clear to him.

"When you cross a certain barrier, the race becomes a whole new ballgame."

The final straightaway all eyes are on the clock. Jones is looking too. "I thought I was going to run out of time."

Jones hits the tape at 2:08:05, breaking Salazar's 1981 world record of 2:08:13.

A minute later Lopes and deCastella come down the straightaway, locked in a titanic duel, reminiscent of the Nzau/Jones battle last year. First it is Lopes, but then at the top of the stretch deCastella gains twenty yards. Lopes comes back at him midway and finally beats him 2:09:06 to 2:09:09.

Later at the post-race ceremony, the twenty-nine-year-old Steve Jones, an airplane technician for the Royal Air Force, is awarded \$35,000 for first place. In addition, he will get \$10,000 for breaking the course record, plus approximately \$50,000 more for breaking the world record.

In all, a quarter of a million dollars in prize money is awarded to the top twenty male finishers and the top fifteen female finishers. "These are great athletes," says race executive director Bob Bright. "It's about time they were paid like great athletes in other sports."

Meanwhile, the New York Marathon is coming the following week. Its race director Fred Lebow has cut back on the appearance money to elite runners, gambling that the famous event itself would draw them.

His gamble doesn't work. Rod Dixon and Grete Waitz are the only world class runners at the race.

This dramatizes one more rule change in marathoning, one that has been building for a long time and the America's Marathon has finally clarified.

OLD RULE: The top runners will sign on to a race, if it is a big famous event, because of their pure love of competition.

NEW RULE: Those motives are nice and, if the race is the Olympics, they're enough. But in any other race, money trumps most other considerations. Today money is the thing that brings together top runners.

While these changes were being made in the marathon rulebook this year, two lesser-known principles emerged.

The first has to do with how to pick a winner before a world-class race. There are many factors you can analyze, but foremost, you ought to look for *momentum*. Is the runner "on a roll?" Carlos Lopes, before the Olympics this summer, won the World Cross Country Championships in the spring and then in July ran the second fastest 10,000 meters time ever. He was definitely on a roll. But after the Olympics, after (what he described as) "the parties for a month," he lost his momentum.

Jones had good momentum before the AM/C. On September 23 in the Dayton Corridor Half-Marathon, he ran 1:03:07. A decent time, but it becomes remarkable once you learn that he lost more than a minute when he helped a wheelchair entrant who had fallen down.

The other marathoning principle that has emerged is one which Bob Bright has stuck to over the last three years with the same relentlessness he admires in the runners he brings to town, which is this: Bring in all the best runners you can get. Look for the known quantities, but also look for the lesser-knowns who are hungry and ready to pop a good race. Take away the Olympic pressure. Make the cash incentives good. Put them all together on a fast course. Sit back and watch the best of them get to twenty miles and reach a critical mass. And then some wonderful racing is bound to happen.

And that's what happened.

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