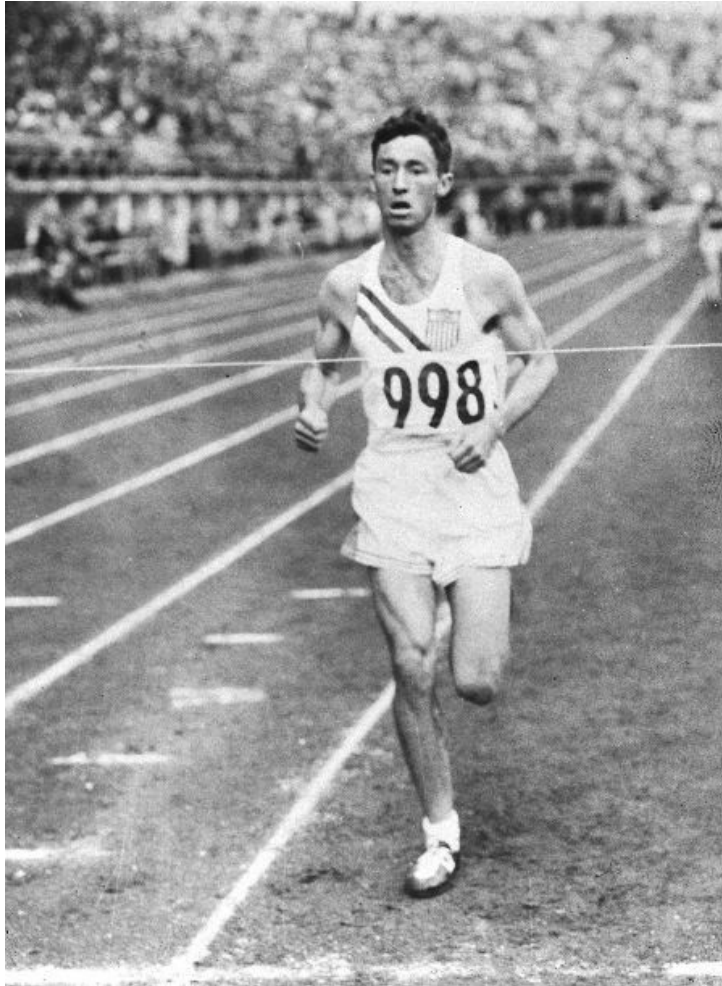


Horace Ashenfelter

by Roger Cranse



I grew up in a leafy New Jersey town, Glen Ridge, in the 1940's and 1950's. No one ran then. True, football players ran up and down the field, basketball player up and down the court, and the track team ran around the track, but that was it. Adults for sure didn't run. My memory of adults back then is that when they weren't working they sat around the living room drinking highballs, watching little black and white TVs, and smoking endless cigarettes.

There was one exception, almost an aberration. I can see him still: a tall, lanky guy who ran up and down Ridgewood Avenue in big loping strides and worked out in Carteret Park. We knew who he was, of course: Horace Ashenfelter. He'd won Gold at the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, Finland, in the 3,000-meter steeplechase.

Ashenfelter was a World War Two veteran and a F.B.I. agent. In Glen Ridge he trained at night and on the weekends. A Russian competitor, Vladimir Kazantsev, was the overwhelming favorite in the steeplechase. For most of the race Ashenfelter ran with the pack, the Russian, far out-front, seemingly uncatchable. Then in the last seven laps

Ashenfelter broke from the pack and chased down Kazantsev. Coming out of the final water hurdle, Ashenfelter passed his Russian competitor and sprinted to an amazing 30-meter victory. And a world record: 8:45.4.

Ashenfelter died at 94 on January 6, 2018. According to his obituary in *The New York Times*, Ashenfelter's victory was "one of the great upsets in Olympic history." There's a Thanksgiving Day race in Glen Ridge, the Ashenfelter 8K Classic, attended by thousands of runners.

This [YouTube video](#) has an interview with Ashenfelter, shots of the race, and then the full race with commentary in Finnish. Even if you don't speak Finnish it's nice to listen to, and the black and white footage of the race is terrific.

After he retired from competitive running in 1957, Ashenfelter continued to run the roads of Glen Ridge, an inspiration to many of us when we gave up cigarettes and started running.

