

## Backtalk

## A Place Where Time Flies but the Runners Do Not

The Hoopla, the Hills and the Hype Inevitably Slow You Down

By MARC BLOOM

The New York City Marathon is the world's greatest marathon by every measure except one. It's slow.

The five-borough course, featuring five bridges and challenging hills, foils attempts at personal bests, particularly because of week-long festivities that leave competitors spent before the race even begins.

You can't run fast at New York. In fact, rank-and-file marathoners must accept a 7 percent time loss because of New York's idiosyncrasies. If your training indicates you're in shape to run 3 hours 20 minutes, expect to see 3:34 when you reach the finish.

As my friend Jimmy Behr of Staten Island, running his 21st straight New York this year, says, "After being absorbed in the marathon all week, spending a full day getting my race number and explaining to people why I'm not going to win even though I run every day, there's no opportunity to relax until race day, when the cannon sounds."

Sean McCann, a sports psychologist with the United States Olympic Training Center, suggests runners not focus on the event until the day it comes. But in New York, that's easier said than done. Here, the event subsumes the run.

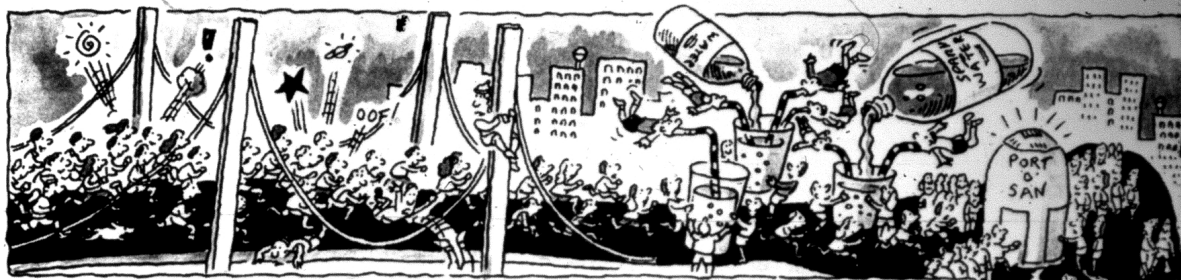
World-class runners and mid-packers suffer alike. Not since the three-year reign of Alberto Salazar in the early 1980's has New York been known for its speed. Salazar, promised fast times, and delivered. In 1981, his mark of 2:08:13 set a world record. He broke 2:10 in each of his victories.

Only 4 of the world's 75 fastest men's marathons have been recorded at New York. Only 5 of the 75 fastest women's times have been run here.

The Boston Marathon, Heartbreak Hill notwithstanding, has produced 13 of the 75 best men's performances and 21 of the women's.

Other than Salazar, only one other winner in New York's 25-year history has produced the world's fastest time of the year. That was Juma Ikangaa of Tanzania, who ran 2:08:01 in 1989.

Last year, Vincent Rousseau of Belgium came to New York with a



2:08 in mind. He had won the Rotterdam Marathon in Holland in 2:07:51 six months before. Rotterdam is cool, flat and quiet. New York is usually warm, hilly and hyped (although the forecast for this year is chilly and damp). In New York in 1994, Rousseau dropped out.

This fall, Rousseau found the path of lesser resistance. He chose the Berlin Marathon over New York. In September, Rousseau ran 2:07:19 at Berlin, placing second.

Don't expect anything close to a 2:07 today. Victory at the New York City Marathon, like victory at the Olympics, is too important for risk-taking. Winning here can make your reputation around the world and, in addition to the announced prize money, is worth much more in sponsor bonuses and future race fees.

Every entrant down to the 12-minute milers feels the importance, the pressure. You must complete the 26 miles 385 yards. You must show

up at work the day after with a finish medal around your neck. Time is irrelevant. New York's finishing rate averages an amazing 95 percent, and that's despite the usually warm weather.

Drinking is critical to success in the heat. However, the immense field of about 28,000 runners causes bottlenecks at the early aid stations. Runners lose time, fight for every ounce of water and may not get enough to drink.

And that's after losing several minutes from the get-go because there simply is no room to run your natural pace in the first couple of miles.

I've run New York six times and typically hit the two-mile mark in over 20 minutes. My comfortable pace should take me to two miles in 15 minutes.

One time, I felt so anxious from the walk-like start I had to duck into a tavern after crossing the Verrazano to use the men's room. More time lost. But really, so what?

Everyone lauds the marvelous crowds at New York. They help get you to the finish, but not quickly. You schpooze along the way.

In Brooklyn, the people along Fourth Avenue call your name and number, demanding recognition and high fives. You accommodate. In Queens, ethnic foods are set out for marathon snacking. You accommodate.

Then, you confront the long hill on the Queensborough Bridge at 15 miles. You think, "Ah, that carpet underfoot really feels good." But it's too narrow to pass anyone. Get stuck

behind a plodder, and it's a long day's journey into Manhattan.

The chic roar of First Avenue provides a second wind. But, at 20 miles, when you're desperate for a third wind, you see the sign announcing, "You Have Reached the Wall."

Thanks. It's nice to be reminded that according to the laws of physiology, you're not supposed to have any energy left.

Right about then, in the unsteady miles through Harlem leading to Central Park, you need something soothing like an old Sinatra tune or maybe a transcendental mantra. You get rag. You try to accommodate. It doesn't work.

Ah, Central Park, only three miles to go. Friends. Cheers. The family reunion area.

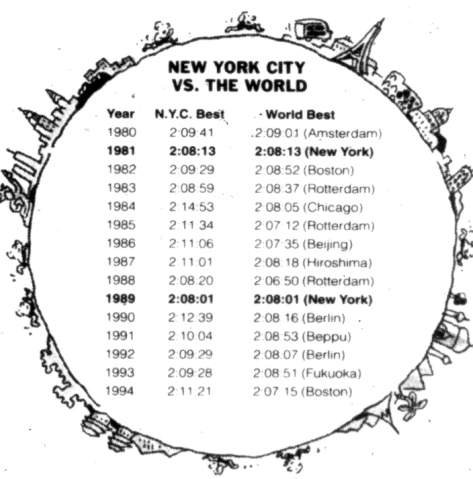
But first, the hill.

The New York course is hillier than courses in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Montreal, London, Rotterdam, Tokyo, anywhere. The hill entering Central Park is the clincher. Just when you think you're entering the womb of the finish, you take one more left hook on the chin.

Oh, I know, stop complaining. It's the New York City Marathon, after all. Enjoy it. That's my point. By all means, enjoy it. Just don't go for personal records.

While you can't run fast at New York, you are entitled to deduct 7 percent from your finish time to determine what your performance is really worth. Unofficially, of course.

Just settle back, get enough to drink and make sure you have that badge of courage around your neck when you go to work tomorrow.



Marc Bloom will be bicycling the marathon today as a spotter for WPIX-TV.

## OUTDOORS/Pete Bodo

## Catch-and-Release Plan Comes to Russian Salmon

When Valentin Luntsevich, vice-governor of Russia's Murmansk Regional Administration, first outlined the plan to institute catch-and-release fishing with barbless hooks on the fabulous Atlantic salmon rivers of the remote Kola peninsula, his big-city ideas were greeted with the rural skepticism that identifies country people from Kola to Provence to the Texas panhandle.

"At first, they thought it was some kind of a trick," Luntsevich said through an interpreter over lunch in Manhattan the other day. "The typical reaction was like this: 'Wait. You mean the fisherman who paid much money to come here catches the fish, then he lets it go, but he doesn't ask to get his money back? How can that be?' The Americans must be lying about this for some special purpose."

Ultimately, Luntsevich convinced his fellow Russians that the only hidden agenda in the proposal was the noble one of conservation, a concept that not only helped to preserve salmon stocks but also represented important economic opportunities for the hard-pressed residents of the Kola. As a result, catch-and-release has been embraced as the official sportfishing policy on the entire peninsula, and the Murmansk administration, which has jurisdiction over the

Kola, received the Atlantic Salmon Federation's prestigious International Award Thursday night.

"To the typical Russian, fishing is something that is done with great big vessels, enormous nets and tons of fish," said Luntsevich, the regional director of development who accepted the award on the behalf of his government. "The whole concept of sportfishing is very foreign to us."

It often seems that the very concept of conservation is foreign to the Russians, who are still reeling from the failed policies of the former Soviet Union and struggling with the transition to some version of a free-market economy. They are also battling the related demons of outright gangsterism and corruption that have flourished as the new order emerges.

"It's fashionable to see Russia as an environmental disaster area and a conservation disaster area," said Bill Hunter, an angling pioneer who helped to assess and open up the rich Kola sportfishery to Western anglers. "But there were real and painful economic reasons for Russia's environmental transgressions, and they aren't as universal nor as easily understood as they're made out to be. For instance, there are places in the Irish Sea that have 40 or 50 times as

much radiation in seaweed, algae and fish flesh as in the notorious Barents Sea.

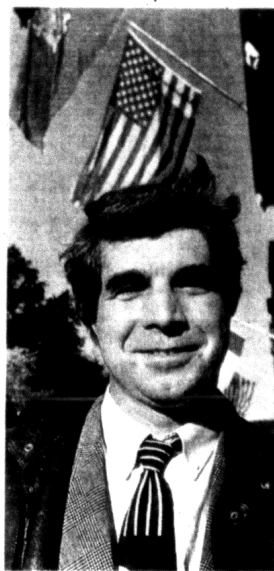
"And the rivers of the Kola, which was one enormous, off-limits military base throughout the cold war," Hunter continued, "have been so minimally affected by development and habitat degradation that they constitute perfect living laboratories for salmon research."

In fact, a joint team of A.S.F. and Russian scientists is currently doing extensive salmon research on the most famous of the Kola rivers, the Ponoi. There, they have limited access, a spirit of international cooperation and a great population of genetically uncorrupted fish in a stable environment.

Nevertheless, the most dramatic piece of news coming out of the Kola this year was a highly publicized "raid" in which local government representatives, including three armed men, shut down the Varzina River camp operated by an American angler and entrepreneur, Bill Davies. The action took Davies and six paying clients by utter surprise, and it came to be portrayed as an example of the perils awaiting businessmen and visiting anglers in the new Russia.

During his recent visit, Luntsevich adamantly defended his government's actions, and he produced numerous documents to support his claim that the episode had less to do with state-sponsored gangsterism or corruption than it did with the business practices of Davies, whom he characterized as an undercapitalized, rogue entrepreneur. "He was one American who kicked himself out of business because of the way he did business," Luntsevich said.

But whomever was right, the experience



Valentin Luntsevich has helped to introduce catch-and-release fishing to Russia.

certainly wasn't a pleasant one for the six unsuspecting anglers caught in the middle. The most notable feature of that incident might be that it was an isolated one.

Although the Russian salmon frontier was only opened up in the late 1980's, the Kola peninsula, which has 65 salmon rivers and runs of hundreds of thousands of fish, is now a preferred destination. Eight companies, including one each from the United States, Sweden and Finland, do a brisk business in providing dream fishing for salmon anglers.

It is not uncommon for anglers on even the most storied and prolific of North America's salmon rivers to return home from a week of angling without having landed a single adult salmon. On the Kola, where anglers pay about \$1,000 a day to fish, they routinely land a dozen fish or more per day.

"We hope that this award from the Atlantic Salmon Federation, and the work we are doing to create a fishery based on conservation and working hand-in-hand with science, is going to give people the correct impression of us," Luntsevich said. "Russia certainly has problems, but it also has great salmon rivers and fantastic fishing that we want to preserve for the future, for ourselves and visiting anglers, too."

Working toward that end keeps Luntsevich, a 41-year-old engineer, chained to his desk or pinned to the lapels of Moscow bureaucrats as he strives to make sportfishing a sustained growth industry in his boreal, sparsely populated, easily overlooked province. Last year, Luntsevich only managed to get in one day of fishing on the Kola.

"I caught five," he said. "It was a bad day."

Illustrations by Gary Ziegler