



ACROSS THE POND



A Retrospective of Oxford and Cambridge vs. Cornell

April 19, 1997

A Look Back

A wonderful athletic and cultural tradition was started back in 1894 with the first meeting of British and American track and field teams when Oxford competed against Yale. It was such a spirited competition that the teams decided to broaden the scope of the international competition. The combined-meet concept was born in 1899 when Oxford and Cambridge joined forces against Harvard and Yale. These American vs Brits meets continued until the outbreak of World War I. Following the war, a definite schedule for the meetings was established through the efforts of Cornell's long-time track coach, John T. "Terry" McGovern. Coach McGovern suggested the idea of a regular rotation while he was visiting England with the Cornell cross country team in 1922, and he worked with Dr. Rex Salisbury Woods of Cambridge to establish the meeting rotation. When the series was originally conceived, Harvard and Yale formed one team and Cornell and Princeton formed the other. Oxford and Cambridge would travel to the U.S. during the third year, and the fourth, always an Olympic year, was a break from the competition. The meets were interrupted again by World War II but resumed in 1949 after the 1948 Olympic Games in London. Princeton dropped from the rotation after 1950 because of financial difficulty, but the University of Pennsylvania seized the opportunity to pair up with Cornell and the meets continued uninterrupted. Dartmouth and Brown entered the current rotation in 1984, in which the six American teams travel to England in pairs of two for three years in a row, and the British come to the States for a tour every fourth year. The number of events included in the meet grew from nine before World War I, to 10 in 1921. After the 1924 Olympics, the 220 yard hurdles and the pole vault were added, and the quarter-mile relay was added in 1949. Finally in 1953, the discus and javelin were added to make the total number of events 15. The number of events has topped out at 19 for the men, with 17 being contested on the women's side.

Following is a collection of memories, some sent in by tracksters who remember their trip, some from published memoirs, and some from interviews conducted by Susie Curtis in 1992.



1934- Coach Moakley oversees the sea crossing

From Forty Short Years, by Bob Kane

1921 trip

The Cornell cross country team sailed to England to meet a combined Oxford and Cambridge team. The following men boarded the Aquitania during Christmas recess: Coach Moakley, Ambassadors John Terence McGovern '00, Barrett Smith '04, Captain Dickinson, C. C. Carter, T.C. McDermott, M.E. Richman, N. P. Brown, R.E. Brown, H.V. Bonsal, A.L. Lentz. A large amplifier erected on the roof of the General Electric Building emitted thunderous farewells and many a "Cornell, I yell, yell, Cornell!" as the ship sailed out of New York harbor.... Three days in Cambridge, two days in London served to rid the Red harriers of their sea legs. Running on the old Roehampton course near London, the English beat the Cornell team by a narrow 26-29 score. Apple-cheeked McInnes, Oxford freshman, carried off individual honors, beating out Nick Carter and Tom McDermott.

1926

In the Oxford-Cambridge versus Cornell-Princeton meet in Stamford Bridge, England, Hank Russell beat Arthur Porritt of England in both dashes, :10 in the 100 yards, :21.5 in the 220. Jack Sullivan won the shot put with 44- 9 1/2"; Gene Goodwillie was second in the 440 yards; Horace Benson was close second in the two-mile run. Reed Bontecou and Steve Bradley of Princeton tied for first place in the vault at 12-6". The Americans again bowed to the English, 7-5.

1930

Cornell and Princeton defeated Oxford and Cambridge at Stamford Bridge, London, 7-5, Cornell men taking six of the seven first places. Captains Charley Treman and Ben Hedges of the Americans were both out with injuries. Walt Heasley won the high hurdles from famed Bob Tisdall of Cambridge in :15 1/5; Larry Levy won the shot put with 48'-5 1/4"; Lew Elmer, the 440 in :51.0; Ev Collyer, the pole vault at 12-7"; and Carl Meinig carried off honors with a double victory in the 100- and 200-yard dashes, :10.3, :22.3.

1934

A definite let-down was noted after the Princeton meet — the meet that decided the men to travel across the ocean to England to meet Oxford and Cambridge. The English team beat the Americans in their meet at White City Stadium, England, 7-5. The American cause was given a considerable jolt when Princeton's Bill Bonthron, who had set a world's record for 1500 meters in beating Glenn Cunningham in the National AAU meet just before sailing, was beaten by Jack Lovelock of Oxford in a 4:15.4 mile; in the half mile by Stothard of Cambridge in 1:58.6. Cornell winners: Capt. Dick Hardy, 100 yards in :10.0; Bob Kane 440 yards in :48.8; Charley Scott, high jump, 6-3".

1934

Gran Godley

The call from Coach Moakley on my 21st birthday (June 16, 1934) to report to Ithaca immediately to join the Cornell/Princeton team was completely unexpected. Practice was continuous and very serious, but the highlight of the month in Ithaca was no practice on July 4, which marked the date of my first picnic lunch with Ginny Phillips. The 10 days on the ship the *Ile de France*, worn stone steps to stone dorms with porcelain pitchers and basins, plus hard to understand English were surprises as well as pleasures. Remembered team members are Coach Moakley, Johny Bangs, Charles Scott, Hank Godshall, Bob Kane, Ham Huckler, Duke Wook, Bob Linders, Walt Merwin, John Harlow, and John Messersmith. Meet day was hot and humid. The home teams won, but six or eight of us went to the Scottish National Handicapped Track and Field meet in Glasgow. Another highlight was on a rainy day I read a book in Cambridge University Library "How to Pick a Wife." Ginny Phillips scored twice as many points as any other girl I knew. From Paris to Ithaca in six days, eight hours via the SS Bremen was a record at the time. A proposal that September evening was a forerunner to the celebration of our 60th wedding anniversary in June 1996, at Cornell's own Statler Hotel. Cornell has been GREAT for both of us.

1950

Bob Mealey and Joe Bolster (Princeton alum)

We didn't get to fly over there in those days and we took a liner named the *Georgic*. It seemed like it had been sunk during World War II and that they had just resurrected it for this trip. The athletes had to get up at 6 a.m. to practice so they wouldn't bother the other passengers. The runners tried to keep in shape by tracing endless circles on the deck, with one of the greatest challenges being not to crash into one another. The least favorite among the passengers were the hurdlers, with their endless 1-2-3-BLAM waking the passengers below. After practice, the group would hit the ice-cold, salt-water showers to clean up before breakfast. Several of the men made efforts to get to know the young college women on the boat, and a lot of them ended up traveling together in Europe after the competitions were over.

1950

The Wastebasket

We landed on the morning of June 23.... Cambridge was a small college town and the University couldn't have been more beautiful. The architecture of the buildings was amazing and every footstep seemed to retrace some historical point of interest. At the



July 21, 1934- Walt Merwin from Cornell clears the first hurdle in the 120 yard race at White City

beginning of each meal we stood while grace was given by one of the Dons (Professors) in Latin and following the supper the same procedure took place. We were prepared for a food shortage, but the British actually "killed the fatted calf" for us and we were fed like kings. While residing at Cambridge, we were given personally conducted tours of the campus by the Cambridge team and we became more impressed as time went on. Practice began the next day on their one-third of a mile track, which was our first real good workout since we left the States. We tried to hold two practices a day, but this was interrupted on several occasions. We were told that the Trinity College dining hall steps had only been jumped three times in the history of the school...This appeared to be quite a feat and distinction, so our "not to be outdone boys" Moose Miller and Walt Ashbaugh, challenged the men of distinction by jumping the steps. Along came Gene Zeiner, who followed suit and the Cambridge boys were so astounded by this that they sent it in to the London Times.... After a stay of three days at Cambridge, the team left for London where we were to spend the day and then proceed to Oxford.... Oxford was a larger town than Cambridge and it was more developed, but its buildings were equally old.... On the big day, July 1, the team drove to London once again for the meet that we had so long been preparing for. Before an amazingly appreciative and sporting crowd of about 16,000, the Princeton-Cornell contingent beat Oxford and Cambridge by seven events to

six in a meet sponsored by the London Sunday Times.... After the meet, the teams showered and dressed and upon leaving the locker room, they were swamped with autograph seekers. Once back at the hotel and in our tuxedos, we attended a banquet given in our honor by the English Speaking Union....After spending Sunday, July 2, sight-seeing in London, the teams boarded the plane for Dublin on Monday morning. The next day, a trip was arranged through the Guinness Brewery and just preceding that, some of the Embassy secretaries had volunteered to give the boys a shopping tour. At 7:00 p.m., the meet started under lights at the Lansdowne Road Field [in front of a crowd of about] 10,000.... The Americans were beaten the first night by a score of 16 to 15, but recovered to win the second night...We adjourned to clean up for a party given by Mr. R.S. Caldwell at his home. Prizes consisted of medals, linen sets, watches, tea services, vegetable dishes, etc., which were very useful to the winners.... Our trip may have been a detriment to the Marshall Plan, but it will be long remembered as one of the most outstanding and gratifying experiences in our lives. We owe a great deal of thanks to our athletic director, Bob Kane, who was responsible for making such a trip possible. Such a trip is not only educational, but provides for a greater understanding between the peoples of different countries.



1957- Athletes from Cornell, Penn, Oxford and Cambridge pose at Franklin Field following the meet



1986- The Cornell/ Penn team poses with their friends from Birmingham

1957

*at University of Pennsylvania
Courtesy of Harvery Weissbard*

The banquet to celebrate this third international track meeting between Oxford, Cambridge, Cornell and Pennsylvania was held at the Racquet Club in Philadelphia. Seated at the head table, William E. Lingelback, Jr. served as the toastmaster, encouraging the attendees to clink their glasses many times as they downed the Great Western Brut champagne. Sir Harold Caccia, Ambassador to the United States, also dined at the head table, as did Robert J. Kane, who was then the director of athletics at Cornell. The group dined on chilled vichysoisse, roast prime rib, new potatoes, string beans, ice cream and "fancy cakes." After the banquet, many of the athletes exchanged autographs and signatures

1978

Neil Hall

On the trip to Ireland, we all wanted to go see the Blarney Stone because it is supposed to give you good luck. We got to the stone and saw lots of tourists following the tradition and kissing it. We were up for it and were waiting our turn, when one of the Dublin guys pulled me aside and told me to take a pass. It seems the natives in the area get their kicks by relieving themselves on the Blarney stone after the tourists have gone for the day. We made

our trip at a time when 'Saturday Night Fever' was really big. We went out to a disco in Birmingham and music from the movie came on. We had all had a bit to drink, so we got out on the floor and really started acting silly; dancing like John Travolta and making fun of it the whole time. Next thing we knew, all these women from the Birmingham team were running out onto the dance floor to dance with us. They wanted us to teach them how to do those moves. The song "The Hustle" came on and I was caught in a dance contest with the Cornell coach's daughter. We won the contest and we made it into the quarterfinals, which were going to be held the next night. Our itinerary had us leaving Birmingham the next day, so we both begged Coach to let us stay so we could win this enormous sum of money.

1982

Richard Oldrieve

One of my best memories of the Oxford/Cambridge trip was the one I couldn't make as a freshman because I was injured. Pete Pfitzinger and several other distance runners came back from the trip and taught us all the word "Fieshca!" I'm not sure of the spelling, meaning, or even if the word really exists, but we all were taught that after downing a round of beers, we were supposed to shout a hale and hearty "Fieshca!" Three years later a freshman named Harv Robinson suggested that since I had been injured throughout outdoor track during my freshman year, maybe I still had eligibility left. Both Coach Warner



1990- Four years later- Different competitors, but the same camaraderie

and myself doubted that could be true since I had competed throughout the indoor season. But Harv persisted and when I had a personal conference with then athletic director and later NCAA president Dick Schultz, he unhesitatingly said that since indoor track and outdoor track each have their own separate national championships, each sport is considered separately for eligibility purposes. He concluded that I could run outdoor track the following year as long as I hadn't graduated from Cornell by then. In the end, I qualified for the Oxford Cambridge trip in the 10,000m. While in England, my worst memory is the fact that all the banquets offered nothing to eat but some horrendous concoction of SPAM. My best memories were running my fastest 10,000 meters of the year against Oxford/Cambridge, my personal best 5,000m race in 14:52 on Birmingham's Olympic caliber track, the wonderful kids at Hull who treated us like royalty, and watching Chariots of Fire at an Oxford theater in the year it came out.

1986

Steve Kuntz

On our trip, we were housed in a convent instead of the regular College accommodations. The coaches told us to be good, to be in by 10 p.m. and to watch our language. Lots of us tried to hustle to be back in by 10, but of course not all of us made it on time.

The second night, part of the team came home past curfew and the doors were locked. They started yelling to be let in and were throwing stones at windows to try to get someone to come down and let them in. Of course, when they finally were let in by one of the team members, they were yelling and making lots of noise. The next night we were scrambling to find new accommodations. The coaches were not happy.

1990

Susan Culler Leonard

Of course, the first thing that popped into my head was "The Great Court Run" at midnight in Cambridge. Need I say more? But the best parts of the trip were the times spent relaxing and having fun with teammates. We had good times goofing around at somewhat relaxed practices, and who could forget punting? The food left something to be desired. I looked away every time we passed a kabob truck, with that slab of who-knows-what kind of meat revolving around. It was quite a challenge to get where we wanted to go sometimes. At the student union in Birmingham, Bill Rathbun asked someone where he could find the restroom and was directed to the lobby instead. There were inevitable travel hassles, like long layovers, delayed flights and trudging for what seemed like miles (and sometimes was!) with a 40-pound Big Red Bag on your back. I remem-

ber some of the weightmen having to move to the front of the plane so the weight would be evenly distributed and we could take off from Ithaca.

1990

Debbie Coccia Young

One cannot talk about our trip to England without mentioning the food, or lack thereof. It's no wonder that the English are generally thin people - all they offer to eat is cucumber and cheese on white bread sandwiches. At least I can't recall sacrificing my meal money for anything else. Actually, the one thing I recall eating the most of is Snickers bars. I think we lived off of them for 3 1/2 weeks. The team would stay somewhere and by the time we left, the vending machine would be void of candy bars. As this trip is still my only European experience, most of my memories are of the many fascinating tourist excursions. Our trip to Stratford-on-Avon was one of my favorites. The cultural experience in this town included attending the Shakespeare play "A Comedy of Errors." It was right there at an outdoor stage in the central park. Being too cheap to pay the tour fee for Shakespeare's family home, we were more than satisfied to merely place our hands on his birthplace's shingle siding. This was just one of the occasions where we found ourselves saying to one another, "I can't believe we're in England." Another favorite excursion was a day trip to Wales. Although it was a

very early morning train ride, you couldn't help but stay awake to look out the window. What I loved best was walking the bright green hillsides overlooking the coast and making friends with the wandering sheep, while trying to avoid their landmarks. And how can I forget our castle tours? Real torture chambers! I also enjoyed our few days in London where we took a momentous photo straddled across one of the lion statues in Trafalgar Square. Having grown up going to American History museums all my life, I was overwhelmed by the majority of exhibits at the British Museum, where we saw the oldest human being (petrified, of course), and chess pieces from the actual time period of knights and kings. I also recall the Tower of London and the bridge from where we spit into the Thames (I'm not quite sure why) and a visit to the London Zoo, where my friend Nicky patiently watched the chimpanzees with me. Who can forget the shopping? Most of us probably still have the souvenirs. I have an even greater appreciation now for the small Waterford Crystal pitcher I bought in Ireland and my Oxford rugby and Irish wool sweater. I will probably never again travel with this many people I can call friends. There were many good laughs among us but one in particular comes to mind. It's the night the guys decided to re-enact the midnight nude run in the Cambridge quad from Chariots of Fire. This took place after a feast sponsored by our Cambridge hosts in which the after-dinner port was a real hit. Forgive me for not mentioning the athletic perspective, but I



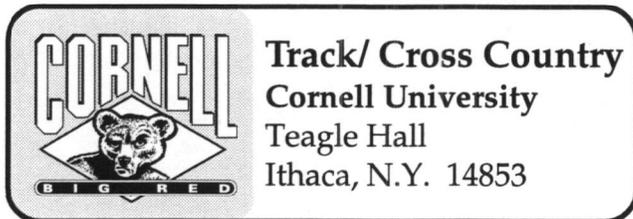
1990- (L-R): Kirsten Etko Hallstrom, Susie Curtis, Nicky Jurena Purves, and Debbie Coccia Young astride the Lion in Trafalgar Square

do in fact recall that our performance was impressive as a group, despite my personal struggles with injury. Overall, this experience will never be forgotten. I think the appreciation I have for the opportunity to make the trip just gets stronger.

1994

Ginny Ryan

Although Harvard and Yale got to celebrate the official 100 year anniversary of Ivy League vs Oxford/Cambridge competition, 1994 was the actual centenary year of the schools' trips across the pond. So Cornell and Penn celebrated too, with a gorgeous banquet at Jesus College in Cambridge. Included was a lesson on how and when to politely sip cognac, sherry and brandy while remaining good representatives of Cornell! Other highlights included: The chance to compete in the Scottish National Championships in Edinborough; the generous reception sponsored by a Cornell alum afterwards; making new friends in Birmingham; the midnight run around the square in Cambridge; touring London, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinborough and Birmingham; and competing on a beautiful day in Oxford on the track where Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile barrier. The weather was uncharacteristically warm and sunny for most of the two-week tour, and we took advantage of it by packing the days full of practices, meets, tours and travels. Best of all, we made good friends with our teammates from the University of Pennsylvania, who had always been our rivals! All in all, it was an exhausting but fantastic opportunity thanks to Cornell Track & Field!



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