

# Flanagan's Run

by Tom McNab (1982)

He chronicles the events of a fictitious foot race across America. This was based on a true story from 1928 where 55 out of 199 runners finished. Charles Flanagan was hosting a big publicity stunt unlike any other during the great depression. It would be a coast-to-coast foot race (3146 miles) for \$360,000 in prize money at the finish, plus more at stage wins (paid by race sponsors). But the \$250 entry fee kept most out, unless they were sponsored by their state or someone.

The route goes through Los Angeles, Denver, St Louis, Chicago & New York. Runners would head east about 25 miles in the morning and another 25 in the evening. Some of the race sponsors were Maxwell House Coffee, Coca-Cola, General Motors, Ford, 6 Companies (who was building Hoover Dam) & Women's Home Journal. It was quite a feat to organize food & shelter the caravan of all the runners & crew. Operating costs are 2x entry fees.

2000 runners left Las Angeles on 20 Mar 1931 & finished in New York on 20Jun1931. The main characters were: Carl Liebnitz was a reporter covering the story; Doc Cole was an old marathon runner from the '04 & '08 Olympics; Lord Peter Thurleigh was a British Olympian from '24 & '28; Juan Martinez of Mexico; Hugh McPhail was a miner from Scotland; Mike Morgan was a boxer from PN; & Kate Sheridan was a burlesque dancer from NY.

They ran through the heat & flashfloods of the desert; the snow, lack of oxygen & climbs of the mountains; and the winds & monotony of the flat plains. They were consuming 6500 calories per day. They need to commune more so they started drinking more milk. Some didn't think the body could be put through so much, but the mind is where the battle is. There was opposition from the Olympic committee, politicians & misinformed union strikers.

The first week broke down their bodies before starting to grow stronger & more confident. Inside the mind of a runner there are two forces at battle with each other: the meek wanting to stop the pain & the strong will to carry on. The downhill stretches are tough. Flanagan was more of a con artist, but his right-hand man, Willard, organized everything. But they did have financial troubles along the way.

The human body is made for running & running brings you to life. Your body can take far more discomfort & pain than you ever thought. An evangelist encouraged them on the radio & asked farmers to help feed them when the caterers walked out. 1912 Flanagan helped a starving runner who later became an FBI agent who returned the favor by helping stop the man that was causing most of the trouble.

Most runners became engaged in a battle within themselves. Flanagan loved to drink & gamble. He bet his runners could beat a horse in a 100 yd race & 10-mile relay. Somehow, they won. Later on, another bet he had them fight against a boxer. And then after the main race sponsor closed their doors, he lost money in a poker game. But found another race sponsor.

The mind is where battles will be lost or won. In realizing our abilities and achieving our potential we bring glory to God. Distance running had always been the province of men in their thirties and forties, seasoned by thousands of miles of running. Distinguish yourself, no man can ask for more.

#### Quotes:

“Every runner, whatever his abilities, was making a personal statement every time he ran. *Here I am. This is what I do. I run. This is what makes me different.*” “I think running brings you to life.” “It is never easy for an athlete, uniquely sensitive to his physical capacities, to accept the gradual fade into middle age.” Just as the runner hit ‘the wall’ “yet he did not drop to a walk. He did not dare, for he knew that if he did, he would never be able to restart.” “It’s always the pace that kills, never the distance.” “The moment you give up, you’re lost. The moment you give up, other men behind you die a little too. When you kill hope, you kill life.” “When you recognize effort & achievement, then everyone’s a winner.” “In every race, whatever the distance, there is a moment of truth, when one man imposes his will upon the field and stamps his authority upon it, or when he realized forces within himself whose existence he has not expected.” “After every marathon he had always needed time to forget the pain before he could face the next race.” “The toughest thing for an athlete is competing in life when there’s no more clapping.” “Jesus Christ wants every man to realize his abilities, his potential. In doing that you glorify not only yourself, you also glorify Him.” “Hell is life without dreams.” “It is never easy for an athlete to accept the gradual fade into middle age.” “Listen to your body.” “The fitter you were, the closer you were to injury.” “We identify with the athlete because we feel this sense that he is one of the privileged few who can go close to reaching his potential, while most of us spend our lives unaware that such a potential even exists.” “The race only released what had been lying dormant in him for 20 years.”

#### Books:

Complete Athletic Trainer (Sam Mussabini); C.C. Pyle’s Amazing Foot Race: the true story of the 1928 run across America (Geoff Williams):