



BORN TO RUN

BY LUCY CORRY

Arthur Lydiard believed that anyone could be a great athlete. “There are champions everywhere,” he said. “Every street’s got them. All we need to do is train them properly.” When it came to coaching, Lydiard wasn’t afraid to do things differently. And even though his approach was unique, his runners consistently set new records and won Olympic gold.

A MARATHON BEFORE BREAKFAST

Arthur Lydiard was born in Auckland in 1917. He left school early so he could work to support his family, and while he enjoyed athletics, his real passion was rugby. Because he played sport and he was only twenty-eight, Lydiard had assumed he was fit. Then one day, he went on an 8-kilometre run with a friend. Lydiard said the run nearly killed him. “My pulse rate rose rapidly. I blew hard and gasped for air. My lungs and throat felt like they had been scorched. My legs were like rubber.” Clearly this was not good.



Lydiard decided to get fit. He wanted to run long distances at speed, and he began to experiment, starting with building endurance. After some trial and error, he realised it was best to run every day. Some days, he ran long hard routes; other days, short easy ones. Within a few months, Lydiard was running up to 24 kilometres a day. But he still felt it wasn’t enough. Soon, he was covering 400 kilometres a week,

mostly in Auckland’s Waitakere Ranges. It wasn’t unusual for him to clock up a marathon before breakfast, then run again at night. Lydiard became fit, strong, and fast, whether he was running a few times around the track or an entire marathon. The way Lydiard trained helped form his ideas about how an athlete could reach their peak, and soon he would be asked to share these skills.



◀ In 1949, Lydiard came second in the New Zealand Marathon Championship.



STAMINA, STRENGTH, SPEED

Proof that Lydiard's method was working came in 1950, when he qualified for the Empire Games marathon. He led the race early on but came thirteenth (which was "a poor show", he said). Three years later, he put on a better show, winning the New Zealand marathon.

Young athletes began to notice this trailblazing runner. They wanted Lydiard to become their mentor and coach. Because of what he'd learnt from his own training, he told them that to increase fitness and stamina, they should run 160 kilometres a week, including a long run on the weekend. Lydiard's Sunday-morning runs were infamous. Auckland runner Bill Baillie (who later broke a world record) remembered that the 35-kilometre circuit, on steep hills, was his first test. The pain almost made him cry, "but you wouldn't give in". At the time, it was unusual for short- and middle-distance runners to cover so many kilometres. Other coaches didn't see the point. But Lydiard insisted that his method was a good one. After all, it had worked for him.

Once a runner had completed their "base training", Lydiard focused on strength and speed. This meant hill work and running short distances at a fast pace. The schedule was tough going, but Lydiard's group was determined. The young Peter Snell remembers how shattered he felt at the end of each run. "My legs were too sore to even walk, and I draped myself over a fence and told myself I was going to make it at all costs. In that company, I wasn't going to let anyone down, least of all myself."

By the late 1950s, "that company" included some of our most promising athletes. Lydiard predicted that his middle-distance runners Murray Halberg and Peter Snell would become two of the greatest athletes New Zealand had ever seen.

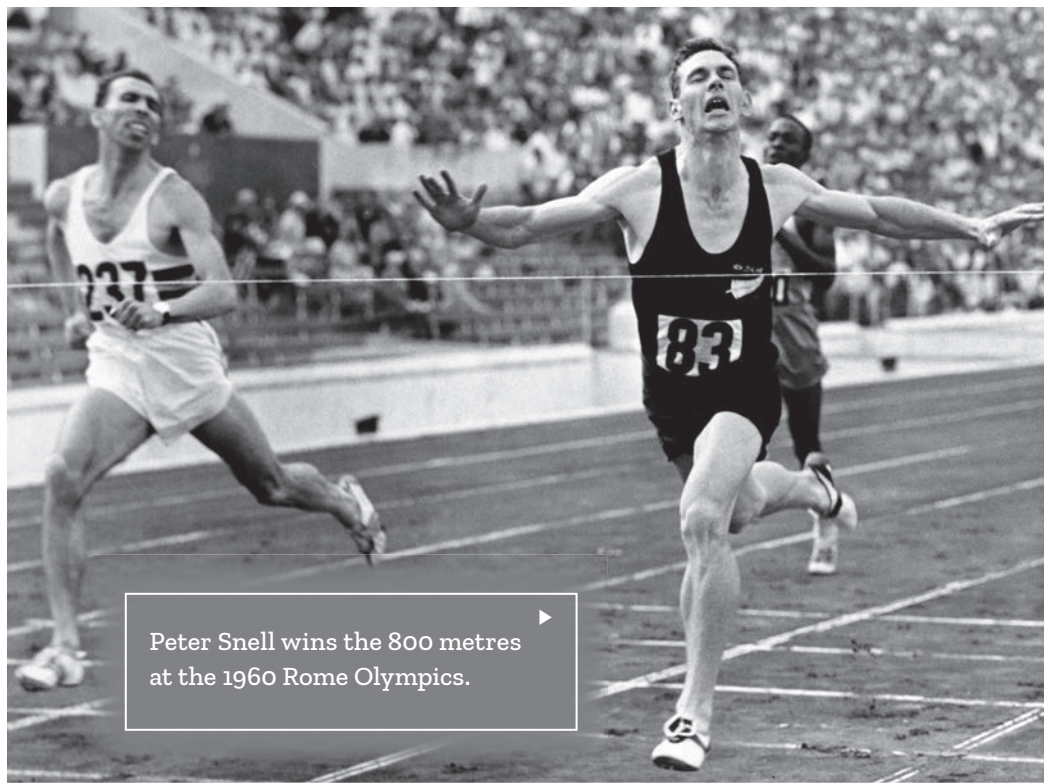


New Zealand's 1957 cross-country team contained many athletes who'd been trained by Lydiard, including Peter Snell (top, third from right), Barry Magee (top, second from left), Murray Halberg (top, third from left), and Bill Baillie (bottom, first left).

RECORD BREAKERS

The results started to come. In 1958, Halberg became the first New Zealander to break the four-minute mile. Then, at the Rome Olympics in 1960, double triumph! Snell won the 800 metres and set a new record. Less than an hour later, Halberg took the lead in the 5,000 metres and sprinted the last three laps to win. The two athletes became stars. Everyone wanted to know how they did it. The answer was obvious: five of the athletes who'd competed at Rome had been trained by Lydiard. Three of them won medals, including Barry Magee, who came third in the marathon. All of these runners came from the same Auckland suburb. Lydiard was right. There *was* talent on every street!

Over the next four years, no other middle-distance runner could beat Snell. He broke record after record. Suddenly, Lydiard was in demand around the world. In 1964, he finally became the official coach of the New Zealand athletics team for the Tokyo Olympics. He went on to work with runners in Venezuela, Finland, Denmark, Mexico, Turkey, and Australia.



Peter Snell wins the 800 metres at the 1960 Rome Olympics.

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

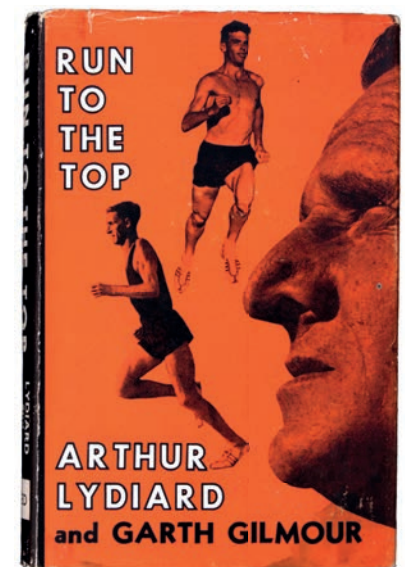
Lydiard (far right) gives training tips.



Lydiard was also interested in the idea of “mass fitness”. He believed that distance running was good for everyone. In 1962, he helped set up the Auckland Joggers Club, which attracted a lot of people with heart problems. Lydiard encouraged them to “run for their lives” – a concept no one had ever heard of. He claimed it was more satisfying to see club members “running around and enjoying life within a year” than it was helping an athlete get to the Olympics.

Bill Bowerman, who joined the joggers club to lose weight, was able to learn about Lydiard’s approach first hand. He returned to the United States and wrote a book that explained how ordinary people could use the Lydiard method. Suddenly running became hugely popular. People of all ages, everywhere, were taking to the streets. Lydiard’s message – that anyone could learn to run or become a better runner – was reaching more people than he could ever have imagined. Some even say that he invented jogging.

Lydiard wrote several books about running. His first, *Run to the Top*, was released in 1962.



LYDIARD'S LEGACY

Lydiard continued to run, to inspire everyday joggers, and to mentor athletes. He influenced generations of great sportspeople: John Walker, Dick Quax, Rod Dixon, Allison Roe, and Lorraine

Moller. He was also one of the first coaches in the world to take women runners seriously, giving them training schedules that were as demanding as the men's. Even now, more than sixty years after he first ran those great distances, Lydiard's ideas about coaching are still used around the world.

Runner Dick Quax used Lydiard's method to become one of New Zealand's top athletes. He said the coach improved the lives of millions. "We recognise all the great surgeons who are talented people and do a marvellous job. But they're the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. What Arthur did was get people out doing light jogging for their health, and you can't put a figure on how many lives that has saved."

The Lydiard running club in South Africa attracts some of the country's top runners. They all use Lydiard's training method.



LILLY TAULELEI

GOOD COACHES



Sport has always been a big part of Lilly Taulelei's life. So have coaches. By the time she was fourteen, she'd played basketball for New Zealand. She was also captain of the junior NBA Asia-Pacific team that competed at the Global Championships in 2019.

Lilly was a hockey and netball player when she first tried basketball. This was in year 7. She quickly discovered that basketball was her thing. "I enjoy the freedom of it. You can shoot, you can dribble, you can do anything. You're not restricted to any one position." Lilly plays in school and rep teams. She's committed to training and always shows up. "We have two intense training sessions a week," she says.

Another of Lilly's core values is fitness, and this means a lot of running. "There are times when I think 'I don't really want to do this', but I know the more I put in, the more I'll be able to take out." Although Lilly's good at motivating herself, she's grateful for the many great coaches she's had. "Coaches have a lot of authority and knowledge. Knowing you have someone there who understands the game and has your best interests at heart is really helpful."

A good coach, in Lilly's opinion, is someone who's supportive and direct, although never too direct! "Not everyone is motivated by being yelled at," she says. Lilly thinks it's good to have a coach you can talk to. "If you can't talk," she says, "everything will seem a lot harder."

Lilly believes the most important thing about playing sport is to find one you love. "Give lots of them a go while you're still young. Don't stress yourself by thinking you have to choose. Just have fun. There's not much point doing something that makes you miserable. Find the sport that makes you happy and go for it!"

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8

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The New Zealand Curriculum
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3



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