

Hedydd Davies (2)

In July 1952 I was listening on the wireless to Alun Williams's commentary on the 1952 Olympic Games marathon in Helsinki

'And into the stadium comes a balding figure in a red vest with number 903 on the front. It is the great Czech runner Emil Zatopek who is running his first ever marathon. He wins in 2 hour 23 minutes and 3 seconds. He had already in the Games won gold medals in 10000m and 5000m. His wife Dana also won a gold medal in the javelin'

Emil was my idol and inspiration to run a marathon

At about the age of 16 I decided to run a marathon from my home on a farm in Abergwili Road Carmarthen to Llandeilo and back. My younger brother paced me on his bike. On the way back I came to a stop at 19 miles in Nantgaredig and had to walk home

In my six years at Birmingham University I did very many races on the track, cross country and road but concentrated on the steeplechase winning 2 BUCS titles and 4 Welsh titles (1961-64)

I was still keen on running a marathon and in 1964 finished second in the Pembroke 20 mile race (at 15 miles led the great Ron Hill who later set a European Record for the marathon in 1970 with a time of 2 hours 9 minutes and 28 seconds)

My first real attempt at the marathon was the Welsh marathon in Port Talbot in 1966 which I won

This was the first of probably be about 40+ marathon or longer races in my athletics career.

Won the Welsh marathon title on 3 more occasions (1969, 1970 and 1972, second once and third twice). Competed for Wales in the 1970 Commonwealth Games marathon in Edinburgh (won by Ron Hill) and finished third in the Cardiff Marathon in 1981. Competed for Wales many times in the marathon and the last time was the Glasgow international marathon in 1982

Emil Zatopek won 4 Olympic gold medals (10000 gold and 5000m silver in London 1948) and a sixth place in the Melbourne Olympic Games marathon in 1956

He gave one of his gold medals to the great Australian athlete Ron Clarke who had set 18 world records but failed to win an Olympic gold medal Tokyo 1964 and Mexico City in 1968

I had the pleasure of competing in the 1965 AAA 3000m steeplechase in the White City Stadium London which was followed immediately after by Ron Clarke's great 3 mile record race time of 12 minutes 50.4 seconds

Emil Zatopek came to Cophthall Stadium Hendon London in 1968 to give a talk to coaches and athletes. What a humble person who was able to speak eight languages

Sadly, Emil suffered enormously in his later life from the political system at the time in Czechoslovakia. He was a man of high principles

In recent years I have been to the Czech Republic many years and seen the change since the end of communism in the country (so different to the time when I was there in 1971)