

MY FRIEND, ABEL

*Fred Lebow**

June 23, 1991, was Abel Kiviat's 99th birthday. At that time, he was America's oldest living Olympian. A track and field champion, his victory came in the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, where he captured a silver medal in the 1500 meters, losing the gold medal by a narrow margin.

Kiviat began his career at Curtis High School on Staten Island, N.Y. where he competed on the All-City Track Team. At age 19, Kiviat broke the world record for 1500 meters three times in thirteen days, bringing the world record down to a 3:55.8 where it remained for six years.

Among his many other accomplishments, Kiviat held the world indoor record at 800 yards, 1,000 yards and the mile. He won nine national championships from 1911 through 1914, at distances ranging from 600 yards through cross-country. In 1913, he won the indoor national titles at 600 yards and 1,000 yards the same night - an unmatched achievement. In its time, the Baxter Mile, at the New York Athletic Club Games, was the most important mile in the country. Kiviat won it four straight years - from 1911 through 1914.

However, I remember Abel Kiviat for his fighting spirit. The New York Road Runners Club held a party for his 99th birthday, just as we had on his 90th and 95th birthdays. President Bush sent him a birthday greeting. The President of the 1992 Olympics sent him a letter inviting him to be a guest in Barcelona when Abel would be 100 years old. The New York Road Runners Club presented him with a special award.

After most of his many friends had taken their leave, Abel ran a short distance down Fifth Avenue with me. The reporters loved it, and the next day Abel Kiviat was remembered again by all the major newspapers. June 23, 1991, was the last time I saw Abel. Soon after this he fell ill and passed away on August 24, 1991, of prostate cancer. Kiviat shaped the sport of track and field, and he will be greatly missed. He is an inspiration to runners of the past, present and fu-

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ture. I, too, will miss Abel. However, Abel Kiviat's "Olympic" spirit lives on in my heart and in the hearts of many others.