

BOOK REVIEW - *King of the Peds*

THE long-lost sporting world of pedestrianism has inspired a comprehensive and exhaustive study in Paul Marshall's magnificent book, *King of the Peds*.

Marshall has mined over a quarter-of-a-century's worth of material on the sport's eminent personalities and greatest endeavours between the early 1860s and late 1880s.

Arcane and arduous, pedestrianism rose to popular distinction in the late Victorian era. A professional, long-distance walking/running sport, huge crowds attended its key, lucrative meetings in London, New York and other cities on either side of the Atlantic.

In this enthusiastic work of historical drama and intrigue, Marshall presents a detailed, compelling journey through record-breaking sporting exertion. His vivid introduction portrays the agony, insomnia and exhaustion suffered during mind-boggling feats of physical endurance.

As 'peds', dozens, if not hundreds, of gruelling miles were regularly covered around sawdust tracks for days at a stretch. In pursuit of crazy wagers, domestic honours and international championship belts, heavy gambling and large prize money made pedestrianism an attractive proposition.

The author's account is filled with vital statistics and fiscal pulling power as competitors were massaged back into shape by ruthless promoters or crooked managers. Corruption, murder and suicide are also exposed, alongside American pedestrian Charles Harriman's extra-marital scandal.

Fascinating original newspaper articles sourced from around the globe convey the heated rivalries, colourful characters and riotous scenes. The immediacy and humour of the 'trackside' interviews with breathless 'peds' are also a delight.

A marathon-length publication, *King of the Peds* runs to more than 700 pages and 60 chapters. Amongst this book's many excellent career studies, early coverage is given to pedestrianism's early US exponent Edward Payson Weston, and three-time world record holder, Daniel O'Leary.

The Irishman regales an 1885 interviewer with the secrets of his success, denying that pedestrianism's post-1879 popularity is waning. It was left to Sheffield's world champion George Littlewood, and his incredible feat of covering 623 miles in six days and nights, to produce pedestrianism's final zenith in 1888.

Brimming with colourful dispatches from these epic Victorian battles, *King of the Peds* is an entertaining encyclopedia packed with tales of pain, pride and glory.