

**** RUDY HALUZA 1931 – 2021 ****
The pilot who had 'his feet on the ground'

Two weeks ago, news broke that dual US Olympic race walker **Rudy Haluza** had passed away, aged 90.

While not a name that would stir many memories today, Haluza's brief career near the top is highlighted by one race – one which, had things gone as evidence indicates they should have, would have produced a second US Olympic race walking medallist to join Larry Young.

A resident of Orange County (California), Rudy Haluza was born in New York State in 1931. He grew up in Bayside, New York where he attended PS 41 and Bayside High School. He attended Queen's College and was active in Track and Field events, including race walking.

In 1953, Rudy joined the US Air Force, assigned as a Navigation Instructor at Harlingen Air Force Base in Harlingen, Texas. After graduating from Air Force Pilot training and attaining the rank of Captain and C-47 Pilot, Rudy was eventually transferred to London for a three-year assignment flying C-47s to many parts of Europe. Upon completing his assignment, Rudy joined United Airlines in 1967 as a Flight Officer for a 25-year career flying B727s, DC-8s, and DC-10s.



*Rudy Haluza during his USAF posting in England and race walking years with Essex Beagles AC
(Photo courtesy David Ainsworth)*

Rudy won his first of 10 National Race Walking titles in 1957. In the '60s he was a double Olympian, appearing in 20 kilometres walks at 1960 (Rome) & 1968 (Mexico). In 1960 he was 24th clocking 1:45.11.0. In the rarefied air of Mexico City in 1968 he was 4th in 1:35.00.2 and unlucky not to gain a bronze medal, as serious questions were raised about the mode of progression employed by that race's silver medallist (Jose Pedraza – Ed.).

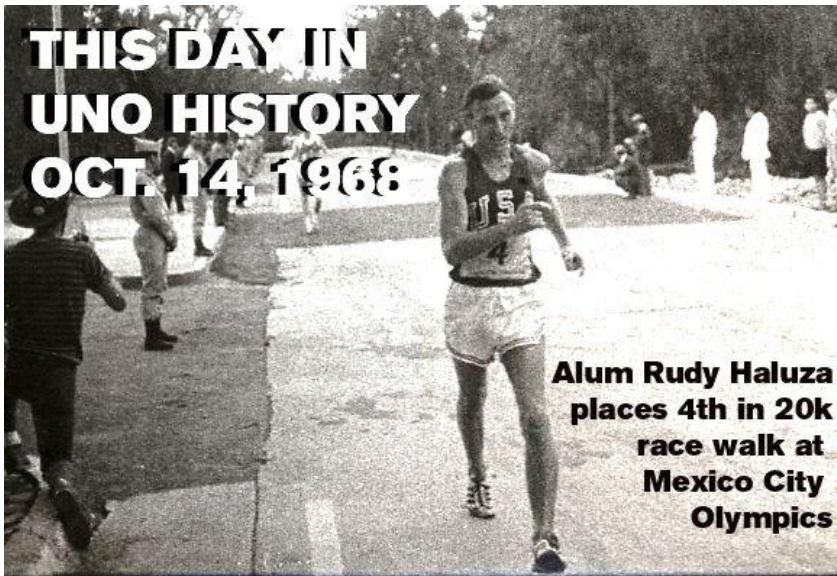


Photo: UNO Alumni Association

Rudy won his first of 10 National Race Walking titles in 1957. In the '60s Rudy was a double Olympian, appearing in 20 kilometres walks at 1960 (Rome) & 1968 (Mexico). In 1960 he was 24th clocking 1:45.11.0. In the rarefied air of Mexico City in 1968 he was 4th in 1:35.00.2 and unlucky not to gain a bronze medal, as serious questions were raised about the mode of progression employed by that race's silver medallist (Jose Pedraza – Ed.).

As a USAF pilot, Haluza was stationed in England for three years in the 1960s. During that time he belonged to **Essex Beagles AC**, and featured prominently in their history. With Ron Selmes, Mike Desmond and Colin Young, he was part of a

talented quartet who achieved many high placing in team events. The intensity and frequency of race walking competition in England, as well as a favourable supply of strong training companions, obviously worked to Haluza's long-term advantage at the top level.

Aussie international **Frank Clark** raced twice against Rudy – in Mexico City, of course, and two years earlier in 1966, in a hastily-arranged USA v. British Commonwealth meet that replaced an abortive USA v USSR match (the Soviets having boycotted in protest over US bombing raids on Hanoi and Haiphong.) Haluza won that race. Frank recalls him as being 'very much a quiet and polite person, but a very tough competitor as results show.'

The hectic life of an airline pilot with a family to support clearly did not deter Rudy from having another crack at the Olympic big time. He duly fronted the starting line in Eugene, Oregon, as joint favourite with Larry Young for the 1972 Olympic trials 20km. Having third place sewn up, he made the fateful decision to overtake Goetz Klopfer for second, picked up two reds for contact and was disqualified on crossing the line.

In a *Runners World* magazine report on those trials, Rudy is quoted as saying “*C’est la vie*. I’ve been on two teams already and, frankly, I haven’t been training very hard.” He then added, “I’ve always got the 50km.” He started well in the 50 and was, from all accounts, well up with the leaders. But it all fell apart mid-race. He stopped at the feed station and said, “My head was willing, but my legs were weak. It was fun while it lasted.”

Runners World concluded this piece by stating: ‘Regardless of what the walking judges say, Rudy Haluza has his feet on the ground.’ It’s hard to disagree.

So ended the top-level walking career of Rudy Haluza, although he would go on to feature in Masters competition in later years.

Upon his retirement from United Air Lines in 1998, Rudy devoted much of his time to the care and maintenance of a mixed grove of avocado, various citrus, cherimoya, and other subtropical fruits in Temecula, California.

He was preceded in death by his wife Elizabeth in 2015. He is survived by his brother Theodore R. Haluza, his three children, six grandchildren, and one great-grandson.

Condolences are expressed by the worldwide race walking fraternity to Rudy's family.



Rudy (left) pacing it with Norm Read (NZ), with Frank Clark just in arrears at the US v British Commonwealth meet 20km in Los Angeles, 1966.

(Photo courtesy Frank Clark)



Start of the 1968 Mexico Olympic 20km. Rudy Haluza in 5th place behind winner Vladimir Golubnichiy (URS), Ron Laird (USA), Peter Frenkel (GDR) and K. Saito (JPN)

(Photo courtesy Tim Erickson)

Mid-race. Haluza leads, bracketed by Nikolai Smaga (URS) and Golubnichiy (1), and shadowed by Hans-Georg Reimann (GDR, 18). Rudy would hold onto a medal position right up until Jose Pedraza’s infamous ‘sprint’ in the stadium.

Note the ‘state of the art’ media car. You’d hope that cameraman was on a danger wage ...

On Golubnichiy’s left is Arthur Jones (GBR, 29) who finished 11th. Arthur emigrated to Australia in 1969 and lives in Adelaide.

(Photo courtesy Frank Clark)





Fifty years on: the USA's 1968 Olympic race walking team meets again.

From left – Tom Dooley, Ron Laird, Goetz Klopfer, Rudy Haluza and Larry Young. (Absent is Dave Romansky)

(Photo courtesy Paul DeMeester)

*We gratefully acknowledge the following contributors and sources of material for this tribute –

- David Ainsworth (Essex, UK)
- Frank Clark (NSW, Australia)
- Track & Field News - <https://trackandfieldnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/1972.pdf>
- Obituary Rudolph Haluza - <https://www.shannonfamilymortuary.com/obituary/Rudolph-Haluza>
- Runners World magazine 1972 (issue unknown)
- University of Nebraska, Omaha, Alumni Association

Stuart Cooper
Tuesday 23rd November 2021