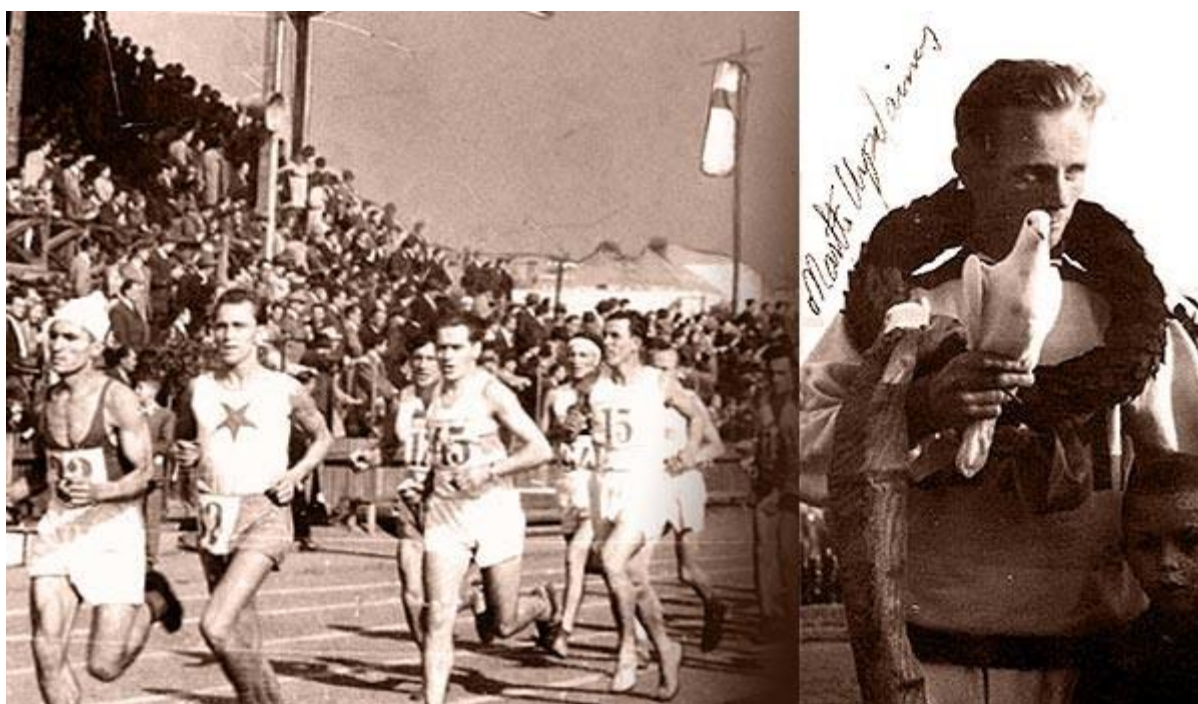




CHAPTER THREE

STORIES OF NINE DECADES WHAT HAPPENED 70 YEARS AGO



Not even a train could stop the era of the northerners

*According to records, 91 runners stood at the start of the marathon on **Sunday, 23 October 1949**, which was precisely the number that spring in Boston. There could have been more, but the organizers of the 25th anniversary of the event's founding decided to set a qualification time for participating in the race at 3:45:00.*

*The period between **1946 and 1956** in Košice belonged to runners from northern Europe, yet only three times in this decade didn't a Scandinavian stand in the highest position on the podium. One of them was 1949, when Finn **Martti Urpalainen**, fresh off his victory at the marathon in Stockholm, travelled to Košice as one of the favourites to win. This victory in the Swedish capital had just put him in an excellent 4th place in the world rankings for 1949.*

*Other northerners, and there were several on the course, didn't fare so well and finished well outside the winners, although at the turnaround point the Swede **Söderstrom** and the Norwegian **Systad** were breathing down the neck of the Finnish champion. But not even*

Urpalainen was necessarily fated to be the winner. He was helped in this by a resourceful engine-driver of a slow train from Moldava, who, seeing the course of the race and Urpalainen by himself in the lead, speeded up the train near Barca so that the level-crossing would quickly open, and the race leader did not have to jog in place while watching his competitors draw closer.

*Urpalainen's winning time in 1949 was at the same time the historically **second best time at the marathon in Košice**, just behind the course record of later Olympic champion **Juan Carlos Zabala** from Argentina, who in 1931 had won with a performance of 2:33:19.*

RESULTS

Kosice Freedom Marathon, October 23, 1949

Men

1.	Martti Urpalainen	FIN	2:33:45,6
2.	Jaroslav Fiala	TCH	2:35:42,0
3.	Václav Weisshäutel	TCH	2:37:45,0