

STORIES OF NINE DECADES
WHAT HAPPENED AT THE MARATHON IN KOŠICE 60
YEARS AGO



Foto: © Maratónsky klub Košice – archív

When Košice was dying of curiosity.

*The year 1961 ranks among the most memorable in the rich history of the marathon in Košice, thanks to the start of the Olympic champion **Abebe Bikila**.*

This athlete, considered by many experts to be the best marathoner of all time, only began training seriously at the age of 24, but despite the late start he could still boast twelve victories, two of which were achieved in the Olympic Games.

*When he won the first of them in **Rome in 1960**, running barefoot, the world began wanting to see him at the start of other races. In the year following his Olympic triumph, spectators awaited him in Athens, Osaka and finally in Košice, where they were dying of curiosity. He won everywhere he visited, and he recorded his best time of the season here in the eastern Slovakia. This was certainly also due to the competition from four continents that came here and the fact that he had faithfully prepared in training. His attack on the Russian Popov's course record lasted until the 25th kilometre, but he was then thwarted possibly by the excessively warm weather, when the mercury rose to 19 °C. Some **30,000 spectators** were waiting at the stadium and tens of thousands of others created impenetrable corridors along the city streets. In the end, the crowd escorted 88 runners to the finish line, and among them the best runner from Košice itself, Tibor Biskup, who finished 22nd.*

The strict amateur rules of the time did not permit Bikila to be paid a financial reward, so he was at least pleased with the local brand running shoes he received from František "Buben" Kapcár, still living today and now 98 years old. And perhaps this champion was

able to enjoy something aside from the victory that day: the warm reception and the memories, which remained in this city in the form of a **bronze bust** made by Arpád Račko, the celebrated maker of another iconic work – the Statue of the marathon runner.

Bikila later enjoyed the second Olympic triumph in **Tokyo in 1964**, but afterwards he was not so lucky. He died as a result of a car accident in 1973.

RESULTS

Košice Peace Marathon, 8 October 1961

Men

| | | | |
|----|----------------|-----|-----------|
| 1. | Abebe Bikila | ETH | 2:20:12,0 |
| 2. | Pavel Kantorek | TCH | 2:23:50,4 |
| 3. | Takayuki Nakao | JPN | 2:23:53,0 |