Arthur Lydiard invented jogging. The method of building up physical fitness by gradually increasing stamina is a simple one, used by millions of men and women worldwide as part of their everyday health and fitness regime. It was used to train New Zealand’s greatest track athletes, and helped propel New Zealand to the top of world middle-distance running.

Arthur Lydiard was born in 1917 in Auckland. He was educated at Mt Albert Grammar School and later trained as a shoemaker. Like many young New Zealand men, he was a keen schoolboy rugby player and continued to play into his 20s. He also enjoyed swimming and believed he was fit merely because he participated in physical activities. He never trained in a formal or organized way. But by the age of 27 his metabolism was naturally slowing and he could feel himself getting fat and lazy. A six-mile run with a friend who was a disciplined athlete proved to Lydiard that his fitness was on the wane. He described the feeling in the 1983 book *Jogging with Lydiard*:

"My pulse rate rose rapidly. I blew hard and gasped for air. My lungs and throat felt like that had been scorched. My legs were like rubber. My whole body felt the effects of the run and the effort expended to get me to the end of it."

He speculated as to how many other first time runners had identified with this feeling. His interest had been ignited. He wanted to know how to improve his fitness. He wanted to be in shape for the rest of his life. In looking for answers Lydiard would change the way the world got fit.

**Using Himself as a Test Subject**

Lydiard had watched local runners of the day training, but that was discouraging. Their philosophy was ‘no pain no gain’ and they sped around the tracks at top speed until they collapsed. Realizing his own necessity to get fit, he tried this technique a few times but it was too difficult, too disheartening. He decided to experiment.

Lydiard is a thorough and logical man; he didn’t have unrealistic expectations of himself, but he wanted to improve, and through slowly evolving patterns he gradually defined a basic theory:

"...that long, even-pace running at a strong speed produced increased strength and endurance – even when it is continued to the point of collapse – and was beneficial, not harmful, to regular competition."
This is the essence of jogging.

From his fateful six mile run, Lydiard started a concerted training schedule. Within a few months he was covering up to 15 miles a day, but his natural tenacity and curiosity forced him to go further. His training technique came straight from his own imagination and he wanted to test it against other athletes, so at the age of 27 when many athletes are preparing to retire, he started competitive running.

He started running one to three mile races, continuing to further refine his training and increase the distances he was running. He became a provincial cross-country representative and his training frequently consisted of runs of up to 50km. Getting older but also getting fitter: he set his sights on the marathon.

He soon discovered his marathon training was improving his time over shorter distances: a revelation that was to transform New Zealand runners into the best in the world.

Super Coach
By the start of the 1950s Lydiard was New Zealand’s top marathon runner. He competed in the 1950 Empire Games (finishing 13th, a placing he described as "poor") and took the national title in 1953 and 1955.

The success of this more mature athlete had attracted attention from younger runners around Auckland. The first was Lawrie King. He had been running with Lydiard for two years and usually struggling behind the older man. King’s victory in a provincial championship mile race where he led from the first lap and won by 80 metres set Lydiard on course to be an unwitting coach.

King went on to be a national cross-country champion and six-mile record holder as well as a 1954 Empire Games representative.
The group of runners, at first informal, were among the greatest of all New Zealand track athletes: Barry Magee, Ray Puckett, Jeff Julian, Murray Halberg, John Davies, Bill Baillie and Peter Snell.

This was not an official ‘team’ selected from the country’s top athletes; it was a group of promising Aucklanders, members of the Owairaka Harriers and Lynndale club, who enjoyed running together.

Lydiard became more than a mentor to these runners. He didn’t so much push them, as force them to push themselves. The training runs he initiated were tough, they had to be. He saw the potential in his athletes, potential that perhaps wouldn’t have been released by a softer coach. At the time it didn’t make the runs any easier, as Peter Snell describes in his book *No Bugles No Drums*:

"I remember getting into Hendon Avenue, very close and yet so far from home. My legs were too sore to even walk and I draped myself over a fence and told myself I was going to make it at all costs. In that company I wasn't going to let anyone down, least of all myself."

Of course the exertion had a purpose. Lydiard knew his runners well. In 1953 (only a year after they met) he predicted Murray Halberg would be the greatest middle distance runner in New Zealand. A year later he made similar comments about Peter Snell. In 1978, with the benefit of hindsight, athletics journalist and co-author of *Run – the Lydiard Way*, Garth Gilmour would say of Snell that he was "probably the most brilliant runner the world has ever seen, John Walker and Filbert Bayi included". In the interim Lydiard’s predictions would be absolutely demonstrated on the international stage.

**Rome 1960**

Five Lydiard-trained athletes competed at the 1960 Rome Olympics. This fact was recognized in New Zealand and he was well known to the general public. Yet Lydiard was not part of the official coaching staff; his presence in Rome was doubtful.

In *No Bugles No Drums* Peter Snell blames the near-sightedness of the athletics administrators of the day who, he said, were out of touch with what the athletes needed:
"The men that decide these matters are so far removed from the practical side of the sport, that they cannot comprehend the value of the correct mental attitude in competition at levels as high as the Olympics."

The athletes and the country knew how important it was to have Lydiard there, but the administrators wouldn’t budge. In the end a public appeal was launched, the money was quickly raised, and Lydiard attended the 1960 Olympics as an "independently traveling unofficial coach".

Within the space of one hour on a hot September day in Rome, Peter Snell took Gold in the 800 metres (with a new Olympic record) and Murray Halberg won Gold in the 5000 metres. There have been many great moments in New Zealand sport, but that effort is arguably New Zealand’s finest Olympic hour. The two athletes were instantly stars on the global stage and Lydiard, unofficial or not, had become the world’s most respected athletics coach.
The New Zealand administrators could no longer ignore Lydiard. For the next few years he continued to take New Zealand athletes to the top of world running. Snell was his most famous pupil and was the dominant force in world middle distance running in the early 1960s. His success at the Rome Olympics was followed two years later when he ran an incredible 3 minutes 54.4 seconds mile on a grass track in Wanganui. One week later he broke the world records for the 800 metres and the 800 yards. Also in 1962 he broke the world record for the indoor 880 and 1000 yards; and he comfortably won the mile and the 880 yards (with a new Games record) at the 1962 Empire Games in Perth.

**Worldwide Influence**

After 1964 Tokyo Olympics where Snell collected two more gold medals and John Davies winning a bronze medal in 1500m behind Snell, Lydiard received recognition, not from New Zealand, but overseas as the greatest athletic coach and the man with the “answers.”

He was first appointed to Mexico as their national coach in 1966. He had moderate success there when Joan Martinez finished fourth in both 5000m and 10,000m at Mexico City Olympics but where Lydiard obtained second golden era of the Lydiard method was Finland where he arrived in 1966 as their national distance running coach. There his focus was to “coach coaches” and among them who listened was Rolf Heikkola, the coach of Lasse Viren. In his autobiography with Antero Raevuori and Rolf Haikkola, *Olympic Champion*, they wrote:

> In many respects Arthur Lydiard’s work was biblical in nature: when the master left, his disciples went on, carrying the message all over the country. Coaches picked up every single crumb of knowledge that Arthur Lydiard had let fall. They applied this knowledge to Finnish athletes. They were forging the new future of Finnish distance running."

After the famous fall in the middle of 10,000m at Munich in 1972 Olympics, Viren got up quickly and won the race in the world record time. He went on to claim three more gold medals. Pekka Vasala also recognized the value of Lydiard principle and implemented successfully to win the gold medal in 1500m at Munich. Lydiard was awarded the White Cross of Knighthood by Finns.
He is the only non-Finn to have ever received this honour. Lydiard would go on to serve as the national coach for Denmark and Venezuela also.

Among other countries that recognized and quickly followed the Lydiard system was Japan. Their national team sent a delegation of coaches and athletes in 1963 for their preparation to Tokyo Olympics the following year. Out of that team, Kokichi Tsuburaya would win a bronze medal in the marathon at Tokyo and Kenji Kimihara would win a silver medal in the marathon four years later at Mexico City. The delegation’s leader was Kiyoshi Nakamura who would later coach great Toshihiko Seko who won Fukuoka marathon four times and Boston marathon twice as well as Chicago and London marathons. Current Olympic women’s marathon champion and the first woman to break 2:20 barrier, Naoko Takahashi, was coached by Yoshio Koide who also coached a double Olympic medalist (1992 and 1996), Yuko Arimori, and 1997 world marathon champion, Hiromi Suzuki. He is a huge fan of Lydiard.

“Lydiard has shown us as early as 1963 what fundamental of training is all about. There would have never been the golden era of Japanese marathon running of today if it wasn’t for Lydiard. I still open his book ("Running with Lydiard" translated in Japanese) everyday and read at least a page.”

Fitness For The World
At the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo Snell broke his own Olympic record for the 800 metres and won the 1500 metres (fellow New Zealander John Davies took the bronze). He finished off 1964, and his career on the track, by breaking his own mile world record with a time of 3 minute 54.1 seconds. Three events, three Golds.

By the 1964 Olympics Lydiard had achieved ‘official’ status and was the coach of the New Zealand athletics team.

When Lydiard first started training his ideas were ignored at best and considered dangerous by many. The question was asked "how will a 400m runner benefit from running 15 miles?" Lydiard couldn’t give an answer in physiological terms, but he knew it worked – and it did. By the mid 1960s the rest of the world understood. In his career he has coached the Venezuelan, the Finnish and the Mexican National teams.
In February 1999 a group of athletes who had been coached by Lydiard lent their weight behind a campaign to have him knighted. Lydiard had already been awarded an OBE in 1962 and was made a Member of the Order of New Zealand (an honour regarded as higher than Knighthood), in 1990.

Dick Quax, the Olympic silver medalist in 1976 and the former world record holder in 5000m, commented that Lydiard, besides training great athletes to perform at their best, has also taught the rest of the world better fitness and health practices.

"We recognize all the great surgeons who are talented people and do a marvelous job. But they’re the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. What Arthur did was get people out doing light jogging for their health and you can’t put a figure on how many lives that has saved."

When Lydiard started speaking about the virtues of mild to vigorous exercise for ordinary health, doctors were still prescribing bed rest for recovering heart patients. Today exercise as part of recuperation is routine. The jogging phenomenon has swept the world, past fad and fashion, to a lifestyle choice for millions of people. The information on Lydiard at New Zealand Sports Hall of Fame conveys his importance to health, fitness and excellence:

"Like none other, Arthur Lydiard’s philosophy of running touches everyone that pulls on a pair of running shoes. He devised the principles of training employed by leading coaches and athletes all around the world, in track and field and many other sporting spheres; he invented the simple exercise of jogging which has infected millions with its benign bug."

In the Runners’ World (magazine) Millennium issue Arthur was named one of the five influential figures of the century in running.

With literally millions of trainers everyday pounding the pavements of the planet, Arthur Lydiard's influence on personal health and fitness reverberates all over the world. Lydiard's
influence on competitive athletics is just as indelible. He can rest in peace in the knowledge that the athletes he nurtured were the best New Zealand has ever produced, and amongst the finest middle-distance runners that the world has ever seen.

Lydiard today in his mid-80s still actively preaching his principle around the world: photo from USA Lecture Tour in 1999: permission Bud Coates

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