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Today We Die a Little!: The Inimitable Emil Zátopek, the Greatest Olympic Runner of All Time

Richard Askwith

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“We are different, in essence, from other men. If you want to enjoy something, run 100 meters. If you want to experience something, run a marathon.” —Emil Zátopek

For a decade after the Second World War, Emil Zátopek—“the Czech locomotive”—redefined the sport of distance running, pushing back the frontiers of what was considered possible. He won five Olympic medals, set eighteen world records, and went undefeated in the 10,000-metre race for six years. His dominance has never been equaled.
In the darkest days of the Cold War, he stood for a spirit of generous friendship that transcended nationality and politics. Zátopek was an energetic supporter of the Prague Spring in 1968, championing “socialism with a human face” in Czechoslovakia. But for this he paid a high price. After the uprising was crushed by Soviet tanks, the hardline Communists had their revenge. Zátopek was expelled from the army, stripped of his role in national sport, and condemned to years of hard and degrading manual labor.

Based on extensive research in the Czech Republic, interviews with people across the world who knew him, and unprecedented cooperation from his widow, fellow Olympian Dana Zátopková, journalist Richard Askwith’s book breathes new life into the man and the myth, uncovering a glorious age of athletics and an epoch-defining time in world history.

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