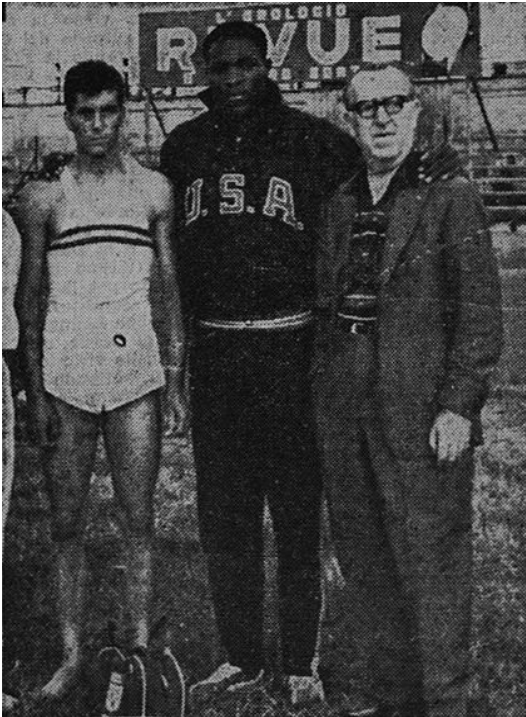




Just a few track enthusiasts know that Rafer Johnson toured Italy three years before winning the decathlon gold medal at Rome Olympic Games. Marco Martini, in both Italian and English language, unveils that forgotten event whose outcome resulted so fruitful for Italian decathlon. We present today the English translation.

On the left: Rafer Johnson with the Italian Franco Radman (national record holder of the decathlon before being a good javelin thrower, 80.89 with the old implement) and the FIDAL president, Luigi Ridolfi.

One of his favorite amusement as a boy, together with his brothers and sisters, was to roll along with – or inside of – the empty boxes of a conveyor belt of a cannery of his hometown, Kingsburg. One day, when he was ten years old, he waited too much time to hop off, and his left foot wedged between the belt and the metal rollers, and his instep got entirely torn loose. Surgeons sewed the flap of skin back into place, but the functional recovery process was long, and the foot never returned to normality. Throughout his athletic career and his whole life, it kept hurting. That painful injury did not hamper that boy so keen on sport, to become one of the greatest decathlete of all time. His name is Rafer Johnson and, three years before winning the gold medal at the Rome Olympics in 1960, he toured Italy for a fortnight.

La Gazzetta dello Sport of 12 July 1957 gives notice of his arrival with the following words: «
The decathlon world record holder Rafer Johnson is due to arrive at the Malpensa airport to-day, at 16.45, directly from the United States.□ Johnson is going to spend a few days in our country. He will be present in Parma on July the 14th and 15th to watch the decathlon second and third-class level italian championships, then will be in Brescia on 16 July, and later on also at Schio together with the decathletes of our national team»

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