



Kings of the Road: How Frank Shorter, Bill Rodgers, and Alberto Salazar Made Running Go Boom

Cameron Stracher

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Winner of the 2015 Armory Foundation Book Award from the Track & Field Writers of America

For fans of *The Perfect Mile* and *Born to Run*, a riveting, three-pronged narrative about the golden era of running in America—the 1970s—as seen through running greats, Frank Shorter, Bill Rodgers, and Alberto Salazar

It was 1978. Jimmy Carter was President; gas prices were soaring; and Americans were hunkering down to weather the economic crisis. But in bookstores Jim Fixx's *The Complete Book of Running* was a bestseller. Frank Shorter's gold medal in the 1972 Olympic marathon had put distance running in the mind of a public enamored of baseball and football. Suddenly, the odd activity of "jogging" became "running," and America was in love.

That summer, a junior from the University of Oregon named Alberto Salazar went head to head with Olympic champion Frank Shorter and Boston Marathon champion Bill Rodgers at the Falmouth Road Race, losing in the last mile to Rodgers's record-setting 32:21, nearly dying in the process, and setting the stage for a great rivalry. In Shorter, Rodgers, and Salazar, running had its conflict and drama like boxing had Ali and Foreman, like basketball had Russell and Chamberlain. Each man built on what the other achieved, and each pushed the other to succeed. Their successes, in turn, fueled a nation of coach potatoes to put down the remote and lace up their sneakers.

Kings of the Road tells the story of running during that golden period from 1972 to 1981 when Shorter, Rodgers, and Salazar captured the imagination of the American public as they passed their figurative baton from one to the other. These three men *were* American running during those years, while the sport enjoyed a popularity never equaled. As America now experiences a similar running boom, *Kings of the Road* is a stirring, inspiring narrative of three men pushing themselves toward greatness and taking their country along for the ride.

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