

Marathoner charges Athletic Congress with bribe offer

NEW YORK (AP) — Alberto Salazar, the fastest marathoner in history, Monday charged officials of The Athletics Congress, the national governing body for track and field, with offering him a bribe of \$50,000 to \$60,000 to run in the Los Angeles Marathon May 14.

Salazar, who said he rejected the offer made late last year, said the officials were Ollan Cassell, TAC executive director, and Alvin Chriss, a lawyer who manages the trust fund for road running and track and field athletes under TAC's jurisdiction.

Chriss and Cassell denied the allegations.

"They were willing to pay me \$50,000 to \$60,000" to run in the Los Angeles race, Salazar said. "They were trying to bribe me."

He said \$40,000 of that money would be for conducting a clinic the day before the race. Salazar said Chriss suggested that would be one way of circumventing TAC's rules against accepting money outright for running. The rest of the money could be put into a trust fund for Salazar, the distance runner claimed Chriss told him.

Salazar's comments came during a telephone hookup from his home in Eugene, Ore., to a luncheon of the Metropolitan Track Writers' Association.

Chriss was quoted in Monday's New York Times as calling Salazar's charge "an incorrect assertion."

It doesn't "even have a kernel of truth in it," he added.

Attempts by The Associated Press to reach Chriss by telephone were unsuccessful. His secretary said he deferred all comments concerning the matter to TAC.

At TAC's headquarters in Indianapolis, Cassell said, "This is another of Alberto's histrionic lessons," a reference to Salazar's comments after winning the 1981 New York City Marathon in which he called the organization "hypocrites" and "thieves."

"This is not true," Cassell added. "I've never spoken to Mr. Salazar in person or on the telephone. If I were to speak to Mr. Salazar, it certainly wouldn't be to propose something that would violate the rules of The Athletics Congress, something that would jeopardize TAC's and my own standing with the IAAF (the International Amateur Athletic Federation, the world governing body for the sport).

"Likewise, no members of the TAC staff have ever made such a proposal, either to Mr. Salazar, nor any of his coaches or his representatives."

Salazar said the offer was not made to him directly, but was made through his coach, Bill Dellinger.

Drew Mearns, vice president of International Management Group, a Cleveland-based group that represents Salazar and many other top athletes in several sports, supported the runner's charge. "TAC was involved right from the start," he said.

Dellinger reportedly was out of the country and not available for comment.

Salazar said he decided to disclose the offer because TAC had criticized him for not running in the Boston Marathon, which would qualify United States runners for the inaugural World Championships at Helsinki Aug. 7-14. Salazar had requested that his victory in the 1982 New York City Marathon be his qualifying race for the Championships. TAC's Long Distance Running Committee rejected the request at the group's convention at Philadelphia in December.

Salazar claimed that TAC had criticized him for running in a lucrative "match race" in Brisbane, Australia, against Australian Robert de Castella, who owns the second-fastest marathon time in history. The Brisbane race will be held the same day as Boston. Salazar said total prize money for that race would be \$90,000, with \$30,000 to the winner.

Salazar said he had received a copy of a four-page letter sent last week from Chriss to Joe Henderson, editor of a West Coast running magazine. The thrust of the letter, Salazar said, was that he was more interested in running for money in Australia than in running at Boston.

"For them to say I am running entirely for money is entirely false," Salazar said. "If I was just running for the money, I would have run in Los Angeles."

He charged Chriss and Cassell with "trying to ruin my reputation."

"They want to set themselves up as an agent," he continued. "They want to be in on the action. They want to make money, too."