

Track and Field



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Two Fingers to the Press

Though he never won a gold medal, no runner did more to bring back the crowds to athletics in Britain than David Bedford. His brash ebullience and his unfailing readiness to get out in front and force the pace made him the man they liked or detested. In front he often stayed, breaking at one time or another every United Kingdom track record from 2,000 metres to 10,000 metres (except only the 2 miles). Included in this catalogue was the steeplechase which he took up, apparently in a moment of caprice, and dominated for a short spell.

Over the country Dave was, on his day, unapproachable, winning the International cross-country both as a junior and senior—the only major international title he succeeded in winning. One of his least publicized exploits, and one his most astonishing, was at the Southern cross-country championships in 1970. Still eligible for the junior title, he was even then strong enough to win the senior race over nine miles. After only 20 minutes rest he started the junior 6 miles event, while backmarkers of the senior race were still finishing, and won that too.

In 1971 Bedford smashed the European record for 10,000 metres at Portsmouth with a time of 27 min 47.0 sec on a cinder track. But at the European championships in Helsinki a few weeks later he seemed not to have the same inspiration and finished sixth. His result in the Munich Olympics was no better and there he may have left his best behind him by going too hard in the heats. Next year he got one back on his critics by cracking Lasse Viren's world record at Crystal Palace and waved his derision to the press by a two-finger signal from the track. In the Commonwealth Games in 1974 he was disappointed to finish only fourth, already a victim of the leg injury which was to prevent him coming back to anything like his great form.

DAVID BEDFORD

Born Dec. 30, 1949, in London, England

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1971: International cross-country champion, San Sebastian

World record:

10,000 m 27 min 30.8 sec, 1973.

No. 1, David Bedford's favourite position