

Track and Field



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Hats on!

It was early summer in 1972, and Dave Wottle had just won a berth on the U.S. Olympic team with a world record-breaking time of 1:44.3 in the 800 m run. Coaches, competitors and officials alike were stunned by the eye-popping time. Then Wottle punctured the high spirits of the moment. "I'm no 800 meter man", he declared, "I'm a miler. I don't know anything about this distance."

Considering what the competition was going to be like at the Olympic Games at Munich, Wottle had only to know two words: Yevgeny Arzhanov. The 800 m man who had been unbeaten in more than 2 years of competition. Wottle's prospects were further dimmed when the Bowling Green University senior began suffering pain in his knees from an inflammation of tendonitis. Just before the race Wottle revealed, "I don't know how much strength I've lost." As a result, his plans for the race were to stay near the lead and hope for the best, counting on some special luck from a dirty white golf cap he planned to wear during the race.

Once the race got under way, Kenyans Mike Boit and Robert Ouko took the

early lead, running the first 400 m in a slightly slow time: 52.3 seconds. Rather than being just off the pace as he had planned, Wottle was shuffled back to the rear of the pack. With about 300 m left in the race, Arzhanov rushed past the leaders. Wottle took up the chase, but the Russian kept sprinting. "When I saw Arzhanov that far ahead", Dave later recalled, "I knew he had a last kick, so I was running for second." The 22-year-old American kept inching closer, as his Soviet foe began to weaken about 20 m from the finish. With 5 meters left, the two were even with one another, Wottle on the outside, Arzhanov on the inside. Dave leaned forward, Arzhanov lunged toward the tape. The American won by less than a foot.

Later, during the award ceremony, Wottle mounted the victory stand still wearing his dirty white golf cap. He was wearing it when they slipped a gold medal around his neck and it was there when the band struck up the U.S. national anthem. "I'm so embarrassed", he said after learning that he left his hat on throughout the playing of the anthem. "What will those millions of television watchers think of me?"

Wottle even wore his hat indoors