

Track and Field



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A Good Lad that...

There must be something about the air in Yorkshire which produces great cricketers and athletes. Any sports fan will be able to recall a string of names. High up among them for flair, brilliance and sheer sporting exuberance stands Derek Ibbotson, only the third man in the 20th century track history to break the world mile record for Britain.

Ibbotson started as a 3-miler and then worked his way down—an unusual progress in itself. It was in 1955 that he leapt into the news by winning the Inter-Counties 3-miles title with a time half a minute under his previous best. He won his place in the Olympic team in 1956 and in the 5,000 metres in Melbourne took a bronze medal behind Vladimir Kuts and Gordon Pirie.

But what astonished experts more than anything Ibbotson did that year was his vivid breakthrough in the mile. Only two days after winning an international 3 miles against Czechoslovakia at London's White City, he turned out and won the Emsley Carr mile, slicing an incredible seven seconds off his previous best to equal Roger Bannister's British record in 3 min 59.4 sec. Ibbotson launched into the 1957 season

in buccaneering style. A European mile record of 3 min 58.4 sec in June was the first shot. In July, he was eliminated from the AAA mile heats after arriving late at the stadium.

Undeterred, he entered the 3-mile event and won that instead, breaking the British record in the process...

A week later he dropped down to his proper distance and smashed the world mile record with 3 min 57.2 sec, defeating the Olympic 1,500-metres champion, Ron Delaney and the Czech Stanislav Jungwirth who had broken the world 1,500-metres record a week earlier.

Ibbotson undertook too heavy a programme of competition in the ensuing months and was never again to reach the heights. But he was always great spectator value, smiling as easily when he lost as when he won.

DEREK IBBOTSON

Born June 17, 1932, in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, GB

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1956 OG: bronze medal in the 5,000 m, 13:54.4

World record:

1 mile: 3:57.2, July 19, 1957