

Track and Field



Diane Leather



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The Five-minute Mile

Who was the first woman to break five minutes for the mile? Only a track fan could tell for when Diane Leather did it in 1954, women's world records for the mile were not recognised by the world governing body. Moreover only 23 days earlier Roger Bannister had become the first man to break four minutes, and relatively little notice was taken of Diane's feat. Diane also became the first to run 1,500 metres in under 4 1/2 minutes.

Making her entry into the record books for the first time in 1953, Diane was a member of the British team which compiled a time of 6 min 49.0 sec for the 3 x 880 yards relay. The time was improved by exactly three seconds in 1954. It was an intensive summer for the 5 ft 10 1/2 in (1.79 m) girl from Staffordshire. On May 26, she cut her own British mile record to 5 min 00.2 sec; on May 29, she improved this mark to 4 min 59.6 sec for an unofficial world record and on the same day the 800 metre time at 2 min 14.1 sec; on June 19, she slashed the latter time to 2 min 09.0 sec—being timed over 880 yards in this race, the time being accepted for the shorter metric distance where no separate time-keepers had been pro-

vided; on July 17, the 3 x 880 yards world record of 6 min 46.0 sec; on August 21, British records for 400 metres and 440 yards in 56.6 sec; on August 25, she further lowered her British 800 metre mark to 2 min 08.9 sec when winning a silver medal at the European Championships.

The 800 metres underwent five more renovations, culminating in a time of 2 min 06.6 sec in Stockholm when regaining her silver medal status in 1958. In the meantime she had made giant inroads into the mile record, getting down to 4 min 45.0 sec in 1955. There is no doubt that Diane would have gained added medal honours had it not been that the events at which she was supreme were not then included in either the Olympic or Commonwealth Games.

DIANE LEATHER

(married name Charles)

Born Jan. 7, 1933, in Streetly, Staffordshire, England

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1954 ECH: silver medal, 800 metres, 2 min 08.9 sec in Berne

1958 ECH: silver medal, 800 metres, 2 min 06.6 sec in Stockholm

World records:

1953: 3 x 880 yards, 6 min 49.0 sec

1954: 880 yards, 2 min 09.0 sec

3 x 880 yards, 6 min 46.0 sec.

Another win for Diane: British Games 880 yards, White City, 1958