

Track and Field



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The 'Mighty Mouse'

Heroes come in all sizes. Napoleon was only 5 ft 6 in tall. So also was Don Thompson, but there the comparison ends. For while the great Emperor never appeared on the scene of his conquests except on horseback, Thompson won his battles like an infantryman, walking.

As a matter of fact, Thompson started out to be a runner, but a strained Achilles tendon limited his action, so he trained as a walker instead. The accident proved to be a blessing both to the 'Mighty Mouse' as he came to be known, and to the British team. He won his first race and kept on walking, capturing his first major honour in 1956 which was the first of seven successive wins in the 52-mile London to Brighton walk. In 1956 he took the first of six 50-kilometre national walk titles together with UK records on the track for that distance as well as for 20 miles and 30 miles.

The Olympic Games in Melbourne, one of his major disappointments, was a very rare instance of failure to complete the course. But at Rome in 1960, there was to be no such shortcoming. For one thing, his preparation for the torrid heat of the Italian capital was

thorough. For month after month during the damp winter at his home near London, he artificially acclimatized his body to the conditions which he anticipated in the Olympic city. The device he used was crude yet effective. In the bathroom of his home, he rigged up a steam-heating apparatus where for hours he subjected his tiny frame to heavy workloads in unseasonal temperatures.

In Rome, Thompson proved the efficacy of his unorthodox methods. In the 50 kilometre walk over the cobbled streets, wearing his desert headgear, he moved into the lead before the halfway stage. Overtaken briefly by the defending champion, John Ljunggren of Sweden, he retaliated strongly and produced a crescendo finish to capture the gold medal.

Thompson defended his title in Tokyo in 1964, and though recording a time nearly three minutes faster than in Rome, was able to finish only tenth.

DON THOMPSON

Born Jan. 20, 1933, in Hillingdon, Middlesex.

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1960 OG gold medal: 50 km walk, 4 hr 25:30
1962 ECH bronze medal: 50 km walk 4 hr 29:00

Mighty Mouse strides out to Victory, 1960 Brighton Walk