

Track and Field



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1952 OG: Accomplishing the Impossible

The "amateur experts" who, in various capacities, have been to athletics stadiums and the great meetings over the years still claim that the Helsinki Olympic Games in 1952 were the finest, the friendliest and the most moving. Why? Because Finland has a unique sporting tradition and the spectators were completely involved in the events in the stadium. Because Paavo Nurmi, reinstated, carried the olympic torch in front of 90,000 fellow-Finns. And also because Emil Zatopek accomplished what some considered the impossible: winning the 5,000 m, the 10,000 m and the marathon – all within seven days! No-one has ever equalled this feat.

So the Helsinki Games were the high-point of the exceptional career of this likeable Czech athlete, whose jerky style and grimaces did not detract in the slightest from the effectiveness of his running. It all began on 20 July with the 10,000 m. Zatopek swallowed up twenty-five laps of the track at a constantly fast pace which soon detached the pack. He left all his adversaries in his wake: Alain Mimoun (FRA), who finished 120 m behind him, the third man being Alexander Anonfrieu (USSR). First gold medal for Zatopek.

Four days later, the man nicknamed "the engine" lined up for the final of the 5,000 m. It looked as though this race was going to be harder: the German Herbert Schade had skipped the 10,000 m to save himself for the 5,000 m. In fact, he had had an easy time winning his heat, and made no secret of his intention of keeping up a fast pace, as he felt that this was the only way he could break his rivals. But things did not go according to plan for Schade and, at the bell, Zatopek, Mimoun and the young Chris Chataway were still up with him. Chataway fell 120 m from the line, Zatopek overtook Mimoun and Schade. Number two!

On July 27, Zatopek rounded off his treble by cruising home to victory in his first-ever marathon... the same day that his wife won the gold medal in the javelin.

EMIL ZATOPEK

Born Sep. 19, 1922, in Koprivnice, CZE

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1948 OG: gold medal, 10,000 m
1952 OG: gold medal, 5,000 m, 10,000 m and marathon
Has beaten all the world records from the 5,000 m to the 30 km

Through sport, he reached very high