

Track and Field



Glenn Cunningham



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Miracle Miler

One would be hard pressed to come up with an athlete who matches Glenn Cunningham for ability, physical courage and self-sacrificing generosity. Indeed, the tale of the Kansas Flyer borders closer to make-believe than reality.

The very fact that he was able to walk as a child was considered a medical miracle, yet he went on to set world records for the mile both indoors and outdoors. Later in his career, it was discovered that Cunningham ran for almost two years before learning that a series of ailments could be attributed to abscessed teeth. The dentist who uncovered the problem told him that with all the poison that had escaped into his system, it was a miracle he was alive.

How well Cunningham overcame his devastating physical problems is attested by the fact he recently was honored as the most outstanding track athlete in the 100-year history of New York's Madison Square Garden.

Speaking of his adversities, Cunningham said modestly, "I've never looked upon myself as someone special. Maybe it's because ignorance was always my greatest asset. I never knew I couldn't do certain things."

Even more of a testament to the man was

the deep love he and his wife, Ruth, displayed when they turned their 840-acre home in Kansas into a youth ranch, providing a home and personal attention to more than 8,000 needy children. When their own money ran out, the Cunninghams moved to a smaller ranch near Wichita, Kansas.

Cunningham, a part-Indian, was only seven years old when tragedy struck. His brother, Floyd, was killed when a stove exploded at school, and Glenn was burned so badly that doctors said he would not walk again. But helped along by daily massages from his mother, and his own intense determination, Glenn was walking in six months and running two years after that.

Cunningham went on to hold the world mile record of 4:06.7 from 1934-37, was a silver medalist in the 1936 Olympics in the 1,500 meters, and won the AAU mile-1,500 meter title six times and the NCAA equivalent twice. He also set a world indoor best of 4:04.4 for the mile in 1938.

GLENN CUNNINGHAM

Born Aug. 4, 1909, in Elkhart, Kan.

AWARDS AND RECORDS

Sullivan Award, 1933

He defied his doctors