

Track and Field



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What Good is Something that Comes Easy?

When Ian Stewart finished as runner-up in the English cross-country championship at Leeds in March 1978, close followers of the sport were reminded that on track or open country, this tough distance-man is never a runner to be underestimated. The fast finishing Bernie Ford won the day, but Stewart, some nine years after his first major championship success, came second—still a man to be respected and feared.

It was in 1969, in the torrid heat of the floodlit European Championship arena at Athens, that Stewart first made his mark. Then only 20, he was an outsider with little to lose, although he had already taken the European indoor title over 3,000 metres earlier that year. But in Athens, over the full championship distance of 5,000 metres, he showed an equal mastery against a field of seasoned distance men.

A year later, wearing the blue vest of Scotland—for which he qualified on Scottish parentage—he tackled and dominated the Kenyan ace, Kip Keino, in the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh. When it came to the final straight of the 5,000 metres, it was the formidable Kenyan who cracked and

Stewart who forged on with his steady, thorough-going stride to win the gold and break the European record. In Munich in 1972 it was perhaps typical of Stewart that a bronze medal behind Finland's Lasse Viren was, to him anyway, a failure. 'I wanted to chuck that bronze medal out of the stadium' he later confessed.

Although he made the Olympic final again in 1976, he was never again to reach the heights of Athens and Edinburgh. But his victory in the International cross country in 1975 was the first individual Scottish win since 1920, and his inspiration was to rub off both on his brother Peter, former holder of the United Kingdom 1,500 metres record, and on his sister Mary, one of Britain's most competitive track girls of recent years. For all of them the maxim seemed to be that athletic fame is not a thing of glamour but of hard, unrelenting work.

IAN STEWART

Born Jan. 15, 1949, in Birmingham, England

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1969 ECH gold medal 5,000 m 13:44.8 Athens
1970 CG gold medal 5,000 m 13:22.8 Edinburgh
1972 OG bronze medal 5,000 m 13:27.6 Munich
also winner of European indoor 3,000 m 1969, 1975.

Stewart leading in heat 2 of the 1976 Olympic 5000 m