

Track and Field



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'Take a Good Look...'

A career in long-distance running bridging more than two decades is a hard sporting life indeed. Jack Holden was an international cross-country runner in 1929 and reached his climax in 1950 with two major marathon titles. Harder men than that are difficult to find. Holden might in fact have retired in 1939 with a fine bag of honours. Three times English cross-country champion, he won the international crown four times, a tally only equalled by the Frenchman Alain Mimoun, who was himself to become Olympic marathon champion. In addition, Holden collected four AAA track titles over 6 or 10 miles.

Then when most men are thinking of taking life a little easier, Holden came back in 1946 to break British records for 25 and 30 miles. In 1947, he took the first of four national marathon championships. The Olympic Games at Wembley in 1948 was a setback for the hitherto unstoppable Jack. At 41, he may have seemed ready for retirement. But he ran on into what turned out to be the finest phase of his remarkable career.

In Auckland, New Zealand for the 1950 Commonwealth Games, he was in

irrepressible form. "Take a good look at me now" he told his opponents before the marathon start, "as you will only see my back during the race". He won by four minutes, but the last eight miles were torture as his blistered feet turned to pulp and a large dog attacked and nearly prevented him from finishing. In Belgium later that year, he completed his major double, dominating the European marathon through the rainswept streets of Brussels. At one point in the race he was challenged by a Soviet competitor. Holden told the press: "It was either King George or Joe Stalin—so I went." The holder, Veikko Karvonen of Finland, was beaten by nearly half a mile. While waiting for the arrival of the Finn, Holden, apparently unextended, entertained the crowd with a brisk display of knees-up exercises.

JACK HOLDEN

Born March 13, 1907, in Bilston, Staffs, England

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1950 CG: marathon, gold medal: 2 h 32:57.0
(Auckland)

1950 ECH: marathon, gold medal: 2 h 32:13.2
(Brussels)

Jack Holden, entering the final lap of the 1950 Polytechnic Harriers Marathon Race