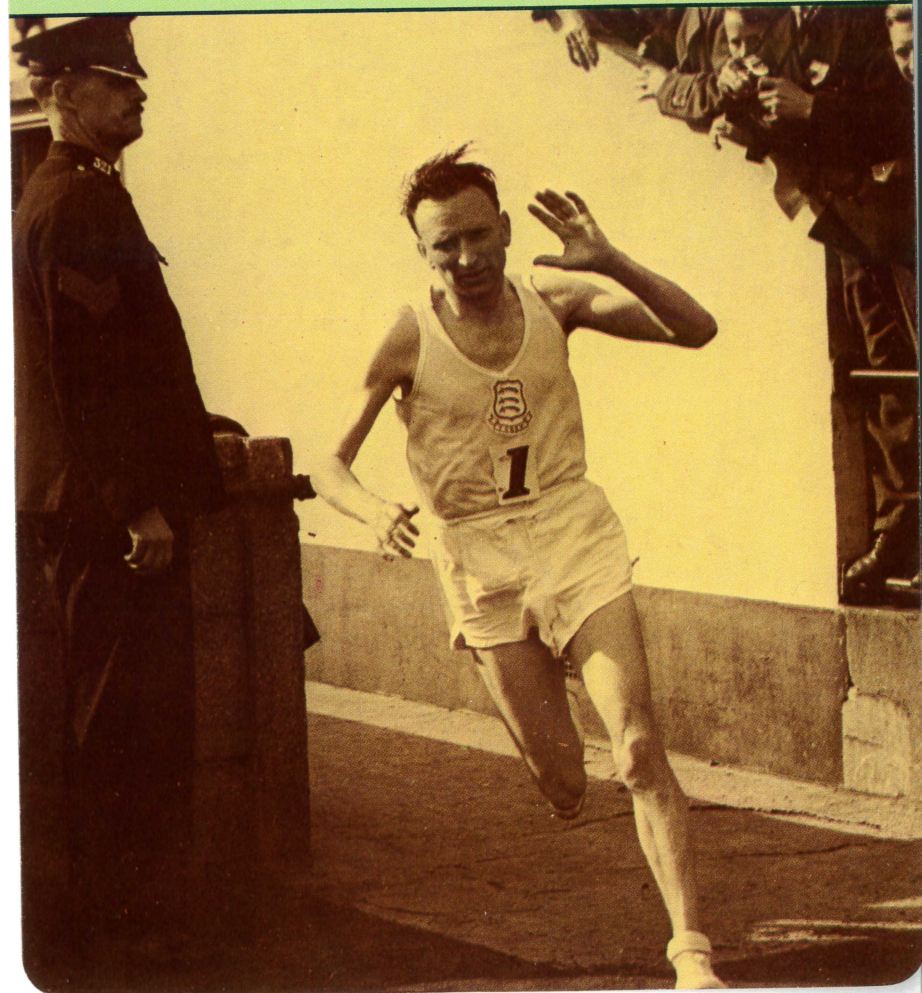


Track and Field



Jim Peters



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So near... and yet

Few runners have travelled so far and so painfully along the road to marathon fame as Jim Peters. Certainly no British runner up to that time was more deserving of honours. But it was the fate of Jim Peters to be deprived of a coveted gold medal, although he did receive a special award from the Duke of Edinburgh to "a most gallant marathon runner".

The story of Peters began in 1948, when he ran for Britain in the Olympic 10,000 metres final. Lapped by the first two men home, Peters made up his mind to retire from first-class athletics. He had two national titles on the track, over 6 and 10 miles. The zest for running returned, however, and Peters tried for the marathon. His defeat of the reigning European and Empire champion, Jack Holden, in the Polytechnic marathon in 1951 showed that Jim's legs were made for harder work than just a few miles on the track.

In 1952 Peters again won the Poly marathon, this time in 2 hr 20 min 42.2 sec, a full five minutes better than the then world's marathon best. Favourite for the Olympic title in Helsinki, Peters faced the man who had lapped him in Wembley and had already collected

golds medals at 5,000 and 10,000 metres in the Finnish capital. The incredible Zatopek, in his first-ever marathon, was a clear winner as Peters broke down with cramp and failed to finish. Undeterred by this setback, Peters intensified his training programme. In 1954, he reduced the world best time to 2 hr 17 min 39.4 sec and travelled to Vancouver an odds-on favourite for the British Commonwealth Games title.

There he ignored advice to take refreshment in the unaccustomed heat and raced to a huge lead, reaching the stadium 3 miles ahead of his nearest rival. Then disaster struck. His body, dried out by the blazing sun, lost its sense of balance. After staggering and lurching around the arena for 11 minutes, Peters was carried from the track still 200 yards away from the finishing line.

JIM PETERS

Born Oct. 24, 1918, in London, GB

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1954 CG bronze medal: 6 miles, 29:20

Best performances on marathon:

2 h 20:42.2 (1952) 2 h 18:34.8 (1953)

2 h 18:40.2 (1953) 2 h 17:39.4 (1954)

N.-B. Marathon courses cannot be standardized; therefore, no official records are recognized.

Jim Peters at the end of the Windsor to Chiswick Marathon, June 26, 1954—his fastest time