

Track and Field



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The Mile Man

"I feel well and I wanted to run a fast race", Jim Ryun explained in a matter-of-fact manner. It might have sounded like just another race, and to Ryun it might have been, but to everyone else it was a unique event. Ryun had just completed a fast race—the fastest ever run by a human being going a full mile. The date was June 23, 1967, the place was Bakersfield, Calif., where the national AAU track and field championships were being held. There was a strong group of runners assembled for the mile, but instead of racing against the clock, they jockeyed for position and set a rather slow pace. Shortly after the start, Ryun realized this and took the lead. He never relinquished it and finished with a world record time of 3:51.1.

Two weeks later Ryun reverted to his usual form, staying well off the pace and unleashing a furious finishing kick on the last lap. This time his effort resulted in another world record, this for a 1500 meters run in 3:33.1. The 20-year-old sophomore at Kansas University had created two world marks in two weeks—an almost unheard-of accomplishment. Doing the unusual was not unusual for the 6' 2",

170-lb native of Wichita. As a 16-year-old Wichita East junior, he became the first schoolboy to break the 4-minute barrier in the mile and in 1965 he lowered the high-school record to 3:58.3. The next year he established a world record of 1:44.9 in the half-mile, running a competitive 880 yards for only the eighth time.

Ryun was a quiet, soft-spoken competitor and could most often be seen in his sweatsuit early in the morning jogging along rural roads, concentrating on his work and keeping his thoughts to himself. As he grew older, he grew more withdrawn in reaction to meet promoters and crowds who were disappointed if he did not break a record each time. No American has ever run a mile or 1,500 meters faster than Jim Ryun. He ran three of the nine fastest mile times ever recorded, a distinction no other man holds.

JIM RYUN

Born April 29, 1947, Wichita, Kans.

AWARDS AND RECORDS

AR mile: 3 min. 51.1

AR 1500 meters: 3 min. 33.1

Sullivan Trophy: 1966, as outstanding American athlete

Ryun pioneered new times in the mile