

Track and Field



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The First to Beat 44 Seconds

To say he was elegant on the track would be to exaggerate, but how effective he was! What a will to win! In 1966, Lee Evans of San José State, reached the top of the American ladder in the 400 m, and a particularly rigorous ladder it was. But he had just met the best American sprint trainer, Bud Winter, and he did not shirk any of the demands made on him in training. When he and his companions reached the limit of endurance, he alone went on. Although his personal best was only 46.9 seconds for 440 yards (about 46.6 seconds for 400 m) at the beginning of the season, he became United States champion, with a time of 45.9 seconds, before running the 400 m in 45.2 seconds—three-tenths less than the world record.

However, it was at Lake Tahoe, at the time of the United States Olympic selections in 1968, that he performed his major feat. In the space of two days he ran 400 m three times, in 45.4, 44.9 and 44 seconds. The last performances was not recorded officially because he was not wearing the type of shoes required by the regulations.

At the Mexico Olympic Games, benefiting from the lowered air resistance at that altitude, Evans became the first man to run the distance in less than 44 seconds. In these Games, Evans with his companion Tommie Smith, was at the center of a demonstration in favor of Black Power.

Four times United States champion, from 1966 to 1969, he pursued his career until 1970, and was for a brief period a professional before taking a job as trainer at his old university. Later he did several stints in Africa as technical adviser.

LEE EVANS

Born Feb. 25, 1947, at Madera, Calif.

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1968 OG: Gold medal in 400 m in 43.8 sec
Gold medal in 400 m relay (last leg) in 2 min 56.1 sec (with Matthews, Freeman and James)
World records:

43.8 in the 400 m. on Oct. 18, 1968 at Mexico
2:59.6 in the 400 m relay (second leg) on July 24, 1966 at Los Angeles (Frey, Tommie Smith, Lewis)

2:56.1 in the 400 m relay on Oct. 20, 1968 at Mexico (see above)

1:22.1 in the 200 m relay (third leg) on May 13, 1967 at Fresno (with Shakleford, Talmadge and Tommie Smith)

Lee Evans: a forthright style with exceptional ability