

Track and Field



Lillian Board



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She won ... and lost

The story of Lillian Board is one of the most poignant to come out of British athletics history. At one moment, the darling of the fans, at almost the next, struck down by a cruel stroke of fate.

Lillian was at first a good sprinter and long jumper who turned her capacity for hard work into useful account by running the 440 yards. Not a star in 1966, she nonetheless gained a place in the English team for the Commonwealth Games in 1966. Her fifth place in the final in Kingston, Jamaica, was not really a promise of greatness, just a fine result for a trier.

A year later, she was only 18 when her potential burst forth. Sprinting for the British Commonwealth team against the United States in Los Angeles, she pulled off a sensational victory over the Kingston gold medallist Judy Pollock of Australia. Her time of 52.8 sec was more than a second under her personal best. In 1968, she made a highly significant debut over what was to prove her optimum distance, the 800 metres, clocking 2 min 2.0 sec behind the Yugoslav girl Vera Nikolic, who broke the world record.

In the Olympic Games, however, Lillian chose the 400 metres and was edged

out of gold-medal honours in a thrilling final by Colette Besson of France. The lesson of the Mexico City disappointment was not fully learned until late in the 1969 season. Hindered by a persistent back injury, Lillian asked to be named for the 800 metres in the European Championships in Athens. There she spelt out her true greatness with a sweeping victory in 2 min 1.4. She then overtook Besson in a brilliant final leg in the 4 x 400 metres relay, in a world record time.

The hope that her fullest ambitions were to be realized in the following two or three seasons were savagely dashed when she was cut down by cancer, just 22 years of age.

LILLIAN BOARD

Born Dec. 13, 1948, in Durban, SAF.
Died Dec. 26, 1970.

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1968 OG: Silver medal in the 400 metres
1969 ECH: Gold medal in the 800 metres
Gold medal in the 4 x 400 metres relay

World records

1968: 4 x 110 yards relay in 45.0
1969: 4 x 400 metres relay in 3:37.6
4 x 400 metres relay in 3:30.8
1970: 4 x 800 metres relay in 8:27.0

Truely courageous