

Track and Field



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Faster than Nurmi

On 27 August 1922 in Turku, the Finn Paavo Nurmi astonished the athletics world by running the 3,000 m in 8:28.6, a new world record. On 7 August 1976, a woman, Ludmilla Bragina, achieved the remarkable feat of improving on this time. At College Park, near Washington, during a USA/USSR meeting which was dominated by the Russians, she covered the distance in 8:27.2. Even if the comparison between two world records set 50 years apart is not strictly valid, it helps one to assess the merit of the performance of this Krasnodar (USSR) schoolteacher who, at 33, so contradicted all the basic premises of women's long-distance running.

In one fell swoop, Ludmilla Bragina, who was born on 24 July 1943 in Sverdlovsk, improved on the world record, which had been set by the norwegian Grete Waitz-Andersen in June 1976 by more than 18 secs. Unfortunately for the Russian, the 3,000 m is not an olympic event. At Montreal in 1976, she had to be satisfied with running in the 1,500 m (where she came fifth). Four years before, in Munich, she had taken the olympic title

at this distance after breaking the world record three times (4:06.2 in the heats, 4:05.1 in her semi-final, 4:01.4 in the final). This time of 4:01.4 would have taken the olympic title in the men's event in 1896, 1900, 1904, 1908 and 1920.

Besides her 1,500 m olympic title in 1972, Ludmilla Bragina, a member of the USSR national squad since 1969, has 14 national titles to her credit. She was also runner-up in the 3,000 m in the 1974 Rome European Championships.

The women's 3,000 m was first included in international competition in 1970. Since 1974 it has been contested in the European Championships, but it is still not an olympic event.

LUDMILLA BRAGINA

Born July 24, 1943, In Sverdlovsk, USSR

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1972 OG: gold medal, 1,500 m
1974 EC: silver medal, 3,000 m

Her world records:

1,500 m	4:06.9	July 18, 1972, Moscow
	4:06.5	Sep. 4, 1972, Munich
	4:05.1	Sep. 7, 1972, Munich
	4:01.4	Sep. 9, 1972, Munich
3,000 m	8:52.7	July 6, 1974, Durham
	8:27.12	Aug. 8, 1976, Washington

Hard luck for L. Bragina (335); there was no 3,000 m event in the 1976 OG...