

Track and Field



Mary Rand



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Britain's First "Golden Girl"

Women's track and field athletics first appeared in the Olympics in 1928. British women first entered in 1932. Not until 1964 did a British girl win a gold medal.

Mary Bignal was an athletics prodigy in her teens, winning an international selection in the GB senior team while still at Millfield School in Somerset. With the photogenic grace and poise which always marked her out as a crowd-puller and champion, she won the high jump against Poland in 1957. She was still only 18 the next year when she won her first major championship medal, a silver in the Commonwealth Games in Cardiff.

The promise was not to be fulfilled at her first Olympic appearance in 1960. A disappointing 9th place in the long jump, she surprised everybody by placing fourth in the 80 m hurdles. Marriage to Sydney Rand, the Olympic sculler, and the birth of her daughter made a natural break from sport in 1961 but like other feminine "greats" she showed that the best often follows motherhood. Getting back to form in 1962, she won two bronze medals in the European championships in Belgrade.

The Tokyo Olympic Games was the summit of her career with a world record in the long jump, coupled with silver and bronze medals in the pentathlon and the relay. In the long jump she had no jump under 21 ft 6¼ in in the series of six and defeated the Polish track genius Irena Szewinska.

After this supreme moment, all else was bound to seem mundane. She had shared in the world sprint relay record in 1963 and in 1966 was to add the Commonwealth Games gold medal to her long jump honours.

Mary almost made the Olympic team for the third time in 1968 but was prevented by injury from qualifying. However, she attended the Games in Mexico City as a commentator with BBC television.

MARY RAND

Born Feb. 10, 1940, in Wells, Somerset, GB

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1964 OG: gold medal in long jump, 22 ft 2¼ in, world record

1964 OG: silver medal in pentathlon, 5,035 points
1964 OG: bronze medal in 4 x 100 metres relay, 44.0 sec

1958 CG: silver medal in long jump, 19 ft 7 in
1966 CG: gold medal in long jump, 20 ft 10½ in
World records: long jump, 22 ft 2¼ in, and 4 x 110 yards relay, 45.2 sec

The Golden Girl of British athletics—Mary Begnell Rand