

Track and Field



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He only Lived Twice

When stories are told of men who made it with a handicap, you are likely to hear the name of Murray Halberg. Halberg beat a handicap and beat the world in the hardest sport on two legs, distance running. His story is one of rare persistence and courage.

It was in 1950 that the 17-year-old Halberg met with a near-fatal rugby accident. Doctors feared he might not survive. His left arm, badly crushed and paralyzed, was to remain withered, a bony remnant over which his running vest kept slipping. Rugby was clearly out, but running was the lonely sport to which he could and did dedicate himself.

In 1954, when he was 20, he startled an unbelieving track world with a time of 4 min 4.4 sec for the mile. Picked for the Commonwealth Games that year, he finished fifth in Vancouver in the famous "Miracle Mile" won by Britain's Roger Bannister.

Progress in the following two years was not marked and he finished eleventh in the 1,500 metres final at the Melbourne Olympics in 1956.

From then on, tuning his rhythm to longer distances, he reached his real calling. In the 3-mile event of the Com-

monwealth Games in 1958, he made the Cardiff crowd gasp as he surged decisively three laps away from home to capture his first major gold medal. The method was the same when he ran at the OG in Rome. Tearing away from the pack, he covered the tenth lap in 61 seconds to open a gap of 20 metres. Some of it was clawed back by his pursuers, but he was still 8 metres clear when he broke the tape.

The following year he made three world records his own before recapturing his 3-mile title in the Commonwealth Games in Perth.

His 3-mile record of 13 min 10 sec was perhaps his greatest effort against the clock. It was achieved en route to 5,000 metres, at which line he was timed in 13 min 35.2 sec, a tantalizing one-fifth of a second outside the world record then held by Vladimir Kuts.

MURRAY HALBERG

Born July 7, 1933, in Eketahuna, NZL

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1960 OG: Gold medal in the 5,000 m, 13:43.4

1958 CG: Gold medal in the 3 miles, 13:15

1962 CG: Gold medal in the 3 miles, 13:34.2

World records:

2 miles: 8:30, July 7, 1961

3 miles: 13:10, July 25, 1961

4 x 1 mile relay: 16:23.8, July 17, 1961

Halberg winning the 2-mile event in 8:33.0 during the 1958 London v. Warsaw Athletic Match