

Track and Field



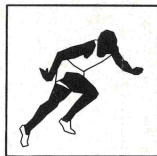
*Olympic 1,500, 5,000
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A Race to Glory

For most Americans, the 1,500 meter run, commonly referred to as the metric mile, is the glamor event of track and field. Likewise, the 5,000 meters (about 3.1 miles) and the 10,000 (about 6.2 miles) also attract much interest. For all three races, strategy often can be as decisive as pure speed and there is visual excitement in watching the runners parry with each other. Often the field includes a "rabbit," whose function is to jump to the front and maintain a fast pace. Some top class runners prefer to set the pace for themselves, while others would rather sit back in the pack, watch the race develop before them, and then come on with a blistering kick on the final lap. Inevitably, the gun lap produces vivid and memorable duels.

The United States, while often competitive in long distance races, has not brought home much gold. Jim Lightbody won the 1,500 meters twice, in 1904 and 1906, and Mel Sheppard made it three straight for the Yanks in 1908, but that was the last victory. American men captured the 5,000 and 10,000 meters once each, with both successes coming in 1964 when Bob Schul won the 5,000 and Billy Mills the 10,000.

Some of the fabled runners of history earned their reputation in the longer distances. Paavo Nurmi, the Flying Finn, won the 1,500 and 5,000 meters in 1924 and the 10,000 in 1920 and 1928. A later-day countryman, Lasse Viren, did him better by taking the 5,000 and 10,000 in both 1972 and 1976, becoming the first person ever to complete the twin double.

Previously, Emil Zatopek of Czechoslovakia put together an incredible triple by winning the 5,000 and 10,000 meters along with the marathon in 1952. Brendan Foster of England set the Olympic 5,000 record of 13 minutes, 20.3 seconds during the 1976 trials, and Viren holds the 10,000 mark of 27:38.4 which he set in 1972.

New Zealand's John Walker won the 1,500 meters at Montreal in 3:39.17, far short of the record of 3:34.9 set by Kipchoge Keino of Kenya in 1968.

The 1,500 meters is the longest distance run by the women in the Olympics, and they have been going that far only since 1972. Russian women have won both races, Tatiana Kazankina taking the gold in 1976.