

Track and Field



Olympic Middle Distances



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Between the Long and the Short

The 400 and 800 meters, falling as they do between the sprints and long distances races, present an interesting challenge to the competitors and a visual delight to the spectators. The 400, in particular, at approximately a quarter of a mile, sometimes is referred to as a run and occasionally as a dash. While a runner usually will break fast and push hard for about 100 meters, he still must remember to pace himself until the pack approaches the final turn, and then open up again. Even in the 400 meters, stamina is important.

The 800 meters, or a half mile, demands a combination of speed and endurance. Most coaches will recommend a program of cross country or modified distance running to prepare for the 800. As in longer events, pacing oneself, and getting a feel of the race as it develops, are critical. The middle distance races are among the more popular in the track and field program.

Traditionally, Americans have fared well in these events, although Dave Wottle, in 1972, has been the only U.S. winner of the 800 since 1956. The most remarkable feat was accomplished in 1976 by Alberto Juantorena, a powerfully built

Cuban who became the first man ever to win the double. Despite undergoing foot surgery the previous year, Juantorena set a world record of one minute, 43.5 seconds for the 800 and captured the 400 in 44.26.

Fred Newhouse and Herman Frazier gave the U.S. the silver and bronze medals in the 400 and Dick Wohlhuter salvaged a bronze in the 800.

Juantorena's victory in the 400 ended a string of five consecutive triumphs by U.S. men in that event, including Lee Evans' Olympic record time of 43.8 in 1968. Douglas Lowe of Britain, Mal Whitfield of the U.S. and Peter Snell of New Zealand each put together back-to-back victories in the 800.

The 400 meters has been included for women only since 1964, when Australian Betty Cuthbert was the winner, and in 1976 Irena Szewinska of Poland established a record by winning in 49.29. The Olympic mark also fell in the women's 800, which went to Tatiana Kazankina of the Soviet Union in 1:54.94. The only American woman to win either event was Madeline Manning, who captured the 800 in 1968.