

Track and Field



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One Hour's Rest

It was on 10 July 1924, at the Paris Olympic Games, that the Finn Paavo Nurmi achieved his most memorable performance. After winning the 1,500 m and the 5,000 m (with one hour's rest between the two finals, run on 10 July, he was first across the line in the team 3,000 m (won by Finland) on 13 July, 24 hours after his victory in a particularly demanding cross-country event (10.650 m). The difficulties of this race, run on a hot and humid day, were increased by the proximity of the road to a pig farm which smelt to high heaven. But it needed more than that to stop Nurmi, who once again was first to the tape, helping Finland to take a gold medal. Nurmi had tried out his 1,500 and 5,000 m double a month before, at the Finnish Championships in Helsinki. The planned olympic timetable was adopted for the finals. Nurmi won both of them, each time breaking the world record (3:52.6) in the 1,500 m and (14:28.2) in the 5,000 m.

At the Games, he set, as usual, a fast pace. In both events he found himself inside a world-record schedule at the half-way stage. Over 1,500 m the opposition was not strong enough, and he

therefore settled for a winning time of 3:53.6, ahead of the surprising Swiss Willy Schaerer (3:55), who had come back on the final straight to beat the Britons Henry Stallard and Douglas Lowe.

The starting gun for the 5,000 m was fired exactly one hour after the start of the 1,500 m. Nurmi's task was much more difficult this time, because Ville Ritola, a 28-year-old expatriate Finn living in the USA, was running, and in Nurmi's absence he had already won the 10,000 m in a world-record time. The first kilometer was run in 2:46.4, and at that stage the leading pack consisted of Nurmi, the Swede Edwin Wide, the young Frenchman Lucien Dolques and Ritola. Dolques was the first to be left behind. Wide had to give up before the half-way mark. At the bell, Ritola was still hot on Nurmi's heels. But he never managed to close the 2-m gap which had developed, and Nurmi crossed the line in 14:31.2, compared with Ritola's 14:31.4. The duel between the two Finns had left Edwin Wide a long way back, and he won the bronze medal with a time of over 15 minutes (15:01.8).

At the 1924 OG, after winning the 1,500 m race, one hour later won the 5,000 m