

Track and Field



Paavo Nurmi



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The Man with the Stop-Watch

For more than ten years, the legendary Finnish runner Paavo Nurmi literally juggled with world records: he set 23 of them. He could have improved on this tally, but he knew that his records would lose their significance if he broke them too often. That is why, stop-watch in hand, he would time his laps himself. He used to hold on to his watch until just before the bell when the other athletes started to put on the pressure (he would put his watch down gently on the grass at the edge of the track). Paavo Nurmi was a loner. He trained by himself and gave advice to no one, not even to his clubmates. He dedicated his whole life to running, but never seemed to derive much enjoyment from it. This human stop-watch of the cinder track always gave the impression that he was not running much faster than the rest.

His sporting career spanned twelve years; it might have lasted longer had he not been disqualified, on the grounds of his having been a professional, in 1932, when he was training for the marathon in the Los Angeles Olympics. However,

his was the sweetest of revenges when, 20 years later, carrying the olympic torch on its last stage, he lit the flame at the Helsinki Games.

PAAVO NURMI

Born June 13, 1897, at Turku, FIN
Died Oct. 2, 1973

AWARDS AND RECORDS

- 1920 OG: gold medal 10,000 m
silver medal 5,000 m
gold medal individual and team cross-country
- 1924 OG: gold medal 1,500 m
gold medal 5,000 m
gold medal individual and team 3,000 m
gold medal individual and team cross-country
- 1928 OG: gold medal 10,000 m
silver medal 5,000 m
silver medal 3,000 m steeplechase

Principal world records:

1500 m	3:52.6	from 1924 to 1926
Mile	4:10.4	from 1924 to 1931
2,000 m	5:26.3	from 1922 to 1925
2,000 m	5:24.6	from June to July 1927
3,000 m	8:28.6	from 1922 to 1925
3,000 m	8:25.4	in 1926
3,000 m	8:20.4	from 1926 to 1932
5,000 m	14:35.4	from 1922 to 1924
5,000 m	14:28.2	from 1924 to 1932
10,000 m	30:40.2	from 1921 to 1924
10,000 m	30:06.2	from 1924 to 1937
19,210 m	in one hour	from 1928 to 1945
20,000 m	1 h 04:38.4	from 1930 to 1936

He was really No. 1 of his time