

# Track and Field



*Ron Delany*



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## Ron Delany

### *From Out of Nowhere*

Among the finalists in the European Championship 800 metres in 1954 at Berne was a needle-thin Irish runner with an erect, slightly jerky rhythm. His presence in the final was surprising enough, since he was only 19, but he finished eighth in a time nearly four seconds better than before. A few weeks later he was on his way to America, to the University of Villanova, breeding ground of several fine Irish athletes. Coached there by the renowned Jumbo Elliott, Ron Delany developed fast.

After one collegiate season Delany was able to return to Ireland and set new national records for both 880 yards and 1 mile. Back in the States the following summer he became only the seventh man to break four minutes for the mile with 3 min 59.0 sec at Compton, Calif.

The story of Delany's Olympic bid was almost a nonstarter. Only days before the Irish team was due to depart for Melbourne, their greatest hope had yet to receive word from the selectors. But upon hearing from his father that a registered letter was awaiting him at the post office he prevailed on the postal authorities at Villanova to sort the mail out of normal hours. The news was good and he caught the flight for Australia.

In the 1,500 metres final Delany faced Australia's John Landy, world record holder for the mile, the New Zealander Murray Halberg and a whole batch of classy Europeans, several capable of fast finishes. To the amazement of nearly everybody, Delany hung back, lying no better than tenth of the dozen starters until the last lap. Then, with an incredible build-up from the bell, he picked off each one of the nine ahead of him to complete the final lap in 54.0 sec, break the Olympic record by four seconds and claim his gold medal. Though he improved his Irish mile record to 3 min 57.5 sec Delany never had a finer moment than Melbourne. Similar tactics at the 1958 European Championships enabled him to win only a bronze medal behind Britain's Brian Hewson and Sweden's Dan Waern.

#### RON DELANY

Born March 6, 1935, at Arklow, Co. Wicklow, Ireland

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1956 OG: gold medal in 1,500 metres in 3 min 41.2 sec, Melbourne

1958 ECH: bronze medal in 1,500 metres in 3 min 42.3 sec, Stockholm

*Ron Delany wins an AAA 880-yd title from England's Mike Rawson*