

Track and Field



Sydney Wooderson



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So Small, so Great

For a good many years, before and after World War II, the name to conjure with in British athletics was Sydney Wooderson. His achievements are, in the longer perspective, the more remarkable because he was always the smallest and apparently frailest man in the field. Yet he broke world records and won major titles and did so with a modesty and absence of self-advertisement which would be quite unheard of in the more commercial world of televised sport today.

A schoolboy mile record holder at 18, Wooderson only a year later, in 1934, defeated the famed New Zealander Jack Lovelock. By 1936 he was British record holder for the mile with 4 min 10.8 sec but a cracked bone in his ankle ruined his chances of an Olympic medal in the 1,500 metres which Lovelock was to win in world record time at Berlin that year.

In 1937, Wooderson himself entered the list of world record holders with a mile time of 4 min 6.4 sec at Motspur Park. Preparing for the European Championship 1,500 metres in 1938, he again made history at Motspur Park, breaking the world records for 800 yards and 800 metres in the same race. War ruled

out all chance of his making a second Olympic appearance in 1940 and a further five years elapsed before he could come back to London's tracks. At White City in 1945, the crowds to see him meet the Swede Arne Anderson was so large that many were turned away from the gates. He lost gallantly to Anderson then and again in Gothenburg but succeeded, incredibly, in improving his British mile record to 4 min 4.2 sec in second place.

In 1946, Sydney Wooderson won a second European title, this time over 5,000 metres. By then aged 32, he downed, among others, the immortal Emil Zatopek. Before his retirement, he moved up to even longer distances and took the English cross-country crown. By his feats and his personal example, Wooderson carved for himself a unique place in English track history and in the memories of his fans.

SYDNEY WOODERSON

Born Aug. 30, 1914, in London.

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1938 ECH: gold medal, 1,500 m, 3:53.6 (Paris)
1946 ECH: gold medal, 5,000 m, 14:08.6 (Oslo)
World records:
1 mile: 4:06.4 (1937)
800 m: 1:48.4 (1938)
880 yards: 1:49.2 (1938)

Wooderson first—the rest nowhere. One-mile race, 1946