

Track and Field



The 800 m



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A Record Which Stood For Over 16 Years

Oslo, 3 Aug. 1955: the Belgian Roger Moens smashed the world 800 m record in 1:45.7. The Norwegian Audun Boysen who finished second also beat the world record with his 1:45.9.

Over sixteen years had elapsed since the record set by the German Rudolf Harbig on 15 July 1939 in Milan was inscribed in the history books. Harbig won in 1:46.6 after a memorable duel with the Italian Mario Lanzi. Later, the New Zealander Peter Snell, among others, was to do very much better, but Rudolf Harbig was original in that he was the first long sprinter to win the 800 m; at the time of this victory he was also 400 m record holder, in 46 seconds.

Rudolf Harbig was born on 8 Nov. 1913 in Dresden and figures on the long list of champions discovered by the famous coach Waldemar Gerschler. He did not start running competitively until he was 21 years old; he was killed in action on 8 March 1944 on the East Prussian front.

Harbig was already the 800 m and

400 m record holder when he also beat the world record for the kilometer on 24 May 1941 (2:21.5). Owing to illness he was not at peak form during the Berlin Olympics in 1936 and was eliminated in his heat of the 800 m, but he won a bronze medal in the 4 x 400 m relay. Two years later he captured the European 800 m title in Paris.

CHRONOLOGY OF WORLD RECORD

1:51.9	Ted Meredith (USA)	July 8, 1912
1:51.6	Otto Peltzer (Germany)	July 3, 1926
1:50.6	Séra Martin (FRA)	July 14, 1928
1:49.8	Tom Hampson (GB)	Aug. 2, 1932
1:49.8	Ben Eastmann (USA)	June 16, 1934
1:49.7	Glenn Cunningham (USA)	Aug. 20, 1936
1:49.6	Elroy Robinson (USA)	July 11, 1937
1:48.4	Sydney Wooderson (GB)	Aug. 20, 1938
1:46.6	Rudolf Harbig (Germany)	July 15, 1939
1:45.7	Roger Moens (BEL)	Aug. 3, 1955
1:44.3	Peter Snell (NZL)	Feb. 3, 1962
1:44.3	Ralph Doubell (AUS)	Oct. 15, 1968
1:44.3	David Wottle (USA)	July 1, 1972
1:43.7	Marcello Fiasconaro (ITA)	June 27, 1973
1:43.5	Alberto Juantorena (CUB)	July 25, 1976

Milan, 15 July 1939: Sydney Wooderson's 800 m record has just been smashed