

Track and Field



The Metric Mile



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It needed Nurmi...

The 1,500 m figured in the Olympic program right from the inception of the Games in 1896. But in those days the British and Americans rarely took part in this event, preferring to run the mile (1,609.35 m). So for a long time there was a considerable imbalance between the two records and it was not until 1912 that the 1,500-m world record was first noticeably faster than that for the mile, thanks to the American Abel Kiviat who won the Olympic preliminary heat in the States with a time of 3 min 55.08. However, it needed the Finnish runner Paavo Nurmi to bring true distinction to the 1,500-m event. Nurmi set a world record on June 19, 1924, in Helsinki in a time of 3 min 52.6, two hours before breaking the world 5,000-m record. He lost it two years later in Berlin to the German Otto Peltzer, an 800-m man who had the pleasure of beating the Swede Edwin Wide as well as Nurmi in 3 min 51.1. Peltzer never again ran anywhere near this fast, and Nurmi, who had suffered his first defeat in six years over a distance longer than 1,000 m, made no further attempt on the world record.

So the Frenchman Jules Ladoumègue had the honor of becoming the first man to break the 3 min 50 barrier in 1930 in Paris with a time of 3 min 49.2. Ladoumègue might well have done even better, had he not been disqualified two years later on grounds of professionalism.

CHRONOLOGY OF WORLD RECORD

3:55.8	A. Kiviat	(USA)	6/08/12	Cambridge
3:54.7	J. Zander	(SWE)	8/05/17	Stockholm
3:52.6	P. Nurmi	(FIN)	6/19/24	Helsinki
3:51.0	O. Peltzer	(GER)	9/11/26	Berlin
3:49.2	J. Ladoumègue	(FRA)	10/05/26	Paris
3:49.2	L. Beccali	(ITA)	9/09/33	Turin
3:49.0	L. Beccali	(ITA)	9/17/33	Milan
3:48.8	B. Bonthron	(USA)	6/30/34	Milwaukee
3:47.8	J. Lovelock	(NZL)	8/06/34	Berlin
3:47.6	G. Haegg	(SWE)	8/10/41	Stockholm
3:45.8	G. Haegg	(SWE)	7/17/42	Stockholm
3:45.0	A. Andersson	(SWE)	8/17/43	Göteborg
3:43.0	G. Haegg	(SWE)	7/07/44	Göteborg
3:43.8	L. Strand	(SWE)	7/15/47	Malmö
3:43.0	W. Lueg	(WGE)	6/26/52	Berlin
3:42.8	W. Santee	(USA)	6/04/54	Compton
3:41.8	J. Landy	(AUS)	6/21/54	Turku
3:40.8	S. Iharos	(HUN)	7/28/55	Helsinki
3:40.8	L. Tabori	(HUN)	9/06/55	Oslo
3:40.8	G. Nielsen	(DEN)	9/06/55	Oslo
3:40.6	I. Roszavolgyi	(HUN)	8/03/56	Tata
3:40.2	O. Salsola	(FIN)	7/11/57	Turku
3:38.1	S. Jungwirth	(CZE)	7/12/57	S. Boleslav
3:36.0	H. Elliott	(AUS)	8/28/58	Göteborg
3:35.6	H. Elliott	(AUS)	9/06/60	Rome
3:33.0	J. Ryun	(USA)	7/08/67	Los Angeles
3:32.2	F. Bayi	(TAN)	2/02/74	Christchurch

F. Bayi (TAN), holder of the world record (3 min 32.2) since 1974