

# World Athletics from 1860 to 1960

*Mr. Gaston Meyer, Editor-in-chief of L'ÉQUIPE of Paris has recently painted, with sweeping strokes, a picture showing the various stages of the situation in world athletics since the revival of the sport in Great Britain about the middle of the 19th century. Here are his findings:*

**1860-1895:** Supremacy of Great Britain. Athletics became a part of the scholastic system and has remained so.

**1895-1900:** The United States, previously held up by the Civil War, reached and overtook the British and took the lead in world athletics, which lead they have maintained up to the present day.

**1912-1930:** Very rapid general development particularly thanks to the Olympic Games. Finland, a very small country, in which athletics are practised as a religion by all physically fit members of the population — three hundred thousand athletes out of three million inhabitants — arrived

at the same level as the U.S.A. This was especially notable in tests of endurance, from the 1,500 metres to the marathon, and in certain other competitions, especially the javelin. In 1920, 1924 and 1928, Finland captured almost as many Olympic titles as did the United States.

**1930-1940:** Germany, having become a totalitarian State, replaced Finland at the head of European athletics (Harbig). On the other side of the world, Japan became famous for its jumpers and its Marathon runners.

**1940-1950:** Sweden, neutral during World War II, took the lion's share in Europe. The middle distance races were revolutionised thanks to Gunder Haegg, trained by esta Olander, whose methods became classic. The disqualification of the great Swedish performers for professionalism stopped this advance.

**1950-1958:** The U.S.S.R. appeared on the scene and very rapidly took first place in

Europe. The Eastern European nations in chronological order — Czechoslovakia (Zatopek), Hungary, Poland and finally East Germany — arrived in their turn at the top of the tree, but all these countries had some difficulty in maintaining their position, whilst the Western nations slowly tended to overtake them.

*1959-1960:* The Games at Rome confirmed the supremacy of the United States throughout the world, and that of the U.S.S.R. in Europe. The real Olympic 'heroes' however came from the Australian continent: Elliott, Snell, Hallberg, and from Ethiopia, (the awakening of Africa typified by Mimoun), for long distance events.