

# THE 1948 10,000 METRES

*By Les Crouch*

The London Olympic Games 10k was to see the first appearance on the world stage of Emil Zatopek from Czechoslovakia. He had competed in the 1946 European championships in Oslo at the 5k distance but did not figure in the medals. As the 1948 celebrations approached track fans noted that he had achieved ten of the twelve fastest 5k times achieved in 1947. However, he had not raced over the longer distance.

With the commencement of the European summer season Zatopek tried out the 10k. On May 29th, at Budapest he won in 30:28.4, a National record. This performance would have ranked him sixth the previous year and was not considered especially noteworthy. However, in Prague June 17th he recorded 29:37.0, again a National record and only 1.6 seconds outside the World record of the Finn, Heino, set in 1944. This latter was still active having run 30:07.4 in 1947, the best achieved that year. The scene was set for a monumental battle and lips were whetted in anticipation.

These two were not the only contenders for the Gold Medal. The Finns, Konnonen 30:10.8, Heinström 30:11.0 and Stokken 30:24.4. With his brilliant June performance Zatopek seemed to have almost half a lap on the best of them but nothing is certain. What seemed probable was that at least six or seven men would be on the last lap at the same time.

The 1948 10k run was run as a final, without heats. At 18:35 hrs on July 30th 28 men faced the starter (some records show 27). Heino took the lead for the first 4k, Zatopek was cautious, he was 17th at 2k, 11th at 1600 metres, 6th at 2800 metres. He took the lead at 4k only for Heino to briefly take over at 5k. From then on Zatopek took command, pulling away steadily to win in 29:59.6, a new Olympic Record.

Behind Zatopek chaos reigned. Heino had dropped out as had Heinström. Albertsson was almost a lap down with Stokken behind

him. The surprise silver medallist was Mimoun of France.

The official result appeared as follows:

Zatopek	29:59.6
Mimoun	30:47.4
Albertsson	30:53.6
Stokken	30:58.6
Dennolf (Sweden)	31:05.0
Ben Said (France)	31:07.8
Cox (GB)	31:08.0
Peters (GB)	31:16.0

With Konnonen next followed by O'Toole and Wilt, both of the USA. The also rans were listed as Bralo, and Guinez of Argentina, Fahy of Ireland, Kjersem of Norway, Lataster of Holland, Wenao of China, McCooke of GB, Nelson of New Zealand, Mirand of Spain, Rojo of Spain, Ramjohn of Trinidad, Paris of France. The non-finishers were listed as Heino, Heinström, Everaert, and Goffberg of the USA.

Dennhoff had originally been placed fourth but he supported the Norwegian's appeal to have Stokken moved up. The Belgian Everaert was placed sixth, having dropped out with some laps to go he pointed out the error but the officials were not moved until his team argued the case!!!

It was thought that as the officials rang the bell one lap early that some of the runners ran one lap short, certainly the winner did not, but the matter appears unresolved. The British officials, and it is assumed they were all British, would have experienced six mile races. Such races were of 24 laps not the 25 of a 10k. Is it too obvious to suggest that these men were in Imperial mode rather than metric? We may never know. Certainly AAA's six-mile championships of 1946, 1947 and 1948 contained runners that were lapped and there is no record of mistaken lap counting or wrong placings being awarded.

The situation is further complicated by most of the field performing well below their own

capability. Why was this? The weather must be at least partly responsible. The British Weather station at nearby Kew recorded a temperature of 31°C at 1600 hrs and a humidity of 43%. After some light-rain the temperature at 1700 hrs, just as the rain was finishing was 26°C and the humidity 75%. Athletes, and officials, would have endured heat above 31 during the middle day and unless water was taken in copious quantities some considerable dehydration would have taken place with a decline in performance.

Is there some significance in the fact that the only athlete near his best was North African Mimoun who, it may be assumed, more easily coped with the conditions? As to the lap counting and placing of finishers it needs to be

noted that television did cover the Games and an “official” film was made by Castleton Knight. It is doubtful if either gave full coverage to the 10k that would enable the record to be correctly established. We must accept the final result but with some question marks.

Acknowledgements:

*Track and Field Performances through the years.* A.T.F.S.

*The Modern Olympic Century 1895-1996.*

E. Z. Megede

*The Complete Book of the Olympics.* D. Wallechinsky

### **Note from the Editor:**

The only Dutch entrant in this race, Jef Lataster had, for over half a century, always thought that he had been disqualified in this race, because according to the judges he should have run one lap less as required, but when I contacted Stan Greenberg (UK) about this, Greenberg told me that only those who did not finish the race (like the Belgian runner Everaert) would not have been mentioned in the final results. Strange enough only the six first finishers have been recorded and all other competitors, including the ones who left the race, are mentioned as ‘also competed’. We have informed Mr. Lataster (now 80 years old) that he was not disqualified in this race!