

GLENN CUNNINGHAM  
THE WORLD'S GREATEST MILER

Early on a winter morning in 1918 a small eight-year-old boy and his older brother arrived at a little frame schoolhouse on the bleak prairies of Stevens County, Kansas. The older boy was to light the fire before the other pupils came. It was very cold; the fire was slow in starting. He threw kerosene on the stubborn coals. The explosion which resulted set the schoolhouse on fire, and the two boys were terribly burned. The elder brother died; the younger fought his way back to life through six months of suffering. It was feared for a time that this boy--who even in his pre-school days had loved to race with the wind across the wide plains--would never walk again. But he did. He walked; he ran. And how he did run!

That boy was Glenn Cunningham. How he overcame his almost insurmountable handicap to become the "King of the Milers" is as fine a story of courage, determination, and a fighting spirit coupled with conscientious training and clean living as can be found in the annals of sport. Holder of four world's records, two American records, numerous intercollegiate and meet records, and winner of the coveted Sullivan trophy as the outstanding amateur athlete in 1933, Cunningham is undoubtedly one of the greatest athletes of all time. He may deservedly be called the world's greatest miler.

The way hasn't been easy. Glenn's legs were a mass of scar tissue and the circulation was somewhat retarded. Running would be the best treatment, the doctor told him. So Glenn began to run at every opportunity, to and from school over the prairies, everywhere he went. As he ran, those flame-scarred legs which were to carry him to fame the world over strengthened into the tapered, well-muscled limbs of a runner, and he developed that lung power which was later to make him the barrel-chested iron man of the track.

Glenn's first chance in competition came when the officials at a county fair asked him to run in the mile race against a group of high school boys. Although still of grade school age, he won rather easily after leaving the pack behind at the half-way mark. In high school he took part in basketball and football as well as track, which however remained his major interest. Completing his course in three years, this Elkhart, Kansas, high school boy was a senior in 1930 when he won the national interscholastic mile at Stagg Field, Chicago, in the time of 4:24.7, a record that still stands.

Coming to the University of Kansas, Cunningham continued his track work to the exclusion of other sports, as he was advised by Coach Brutus Hamilton. The 1932 season found him for the first time in intercollegiate competition. In the Big Six meet of that year at Lincoln, Nebraska, he established new conference records, running the half in 1:55.3, the mile in 4:14.3. A week later in the national intercollegiate meet in Chicago he set a new record of 4:11.1, at that time the fastest mile ever run in an outdoor meet in this country. Throughout his college career Glenn was a valuable asset to the varsity track team, usually winning two or more events in a meet.