

FASTER THEY GO, AND FASTER STILL

Two Great Athletes

In the keen competition of international athletics a runner has to start young, start fast, and make his single aim each season the reduction of his time. Faster they go every year, and faster still. Over the mile and half-mile distances two New Zealanders, especially, have won international fame. This is something of their story:

A BIT over ten years ago, eight or nine secondary school students lined up for the start of a mile championship event. They went away well, and held fairly close together over the first two circuits of the 440-yard course. Among them ran a slim youth with a profile and wavy hair that had earned him the nickname of "Bonny."

The track was green, fresh, just springy enough. It was an early summer's day.

As they ran, a whisper of excitement followed the race, for the pace was hot. The fair-haired youth held his position without difficulty. For him, the race was not fast enough.

Impatient, he soon left the field, and was five, eight, ten, twelve yards ahead as he came up the straight in front of the wide hats of all the sisters and cousins, the bobbing heads of the mothers, the condescending smiles of the fathers, and the wide open eyes of the boys in the aspiring lower forms.

He ran easily, gracefully, effortlessly. Even then J. E. Lovelock on the track was a sight to go a hundred miles to see. He was not yet one of the gods of the twentieth century Olympiad, but even then they thought of the Greece of Achilles as they watched him and wondered if the Greeks had known anything quite as good to see in action.

World Record

There was silence as he flew over the trimmed grass. No use cheering the others on. Silence as he came round the last corner; faster, faster, with every yard covered; and silence changing into a confusion of murmurings and then to cheers and more cheers as he cut the ribbon.

That race gave the world secondary school mile record to Timaru Boys' High School.

At that time a younger lad lived in Ashburton and began to take an interest in running at Ashburton Boys' High School.

By 1931 he had come to Timaru Boys' High School, and in the annual magazine of that year his name appeared: third in a special 880 yards handicap race (run in 2 mins. 10 secs.), and third in the mile championship (4 mins. 46 1/5 secs.).

He looked like being a strong runner some day, but was young enough then, and simply did not have the pace to match the older boys running in competition, which was always keen.

On the Way

In 1932 he was ten times the runner he had been the year before. He was second in championship points for the year, and had run a hard mile to equal Lovelock's record. V. P. Boot was on the way up. . . .

Still improving, in 1933 Boot broke Lovelock's record time and established a world record. Lovelock had covered his mile in 4 mins. 44 2/5 secs. Boot, in 1933, set a world standard with 4 mins 26 4/5 secs.

At the same one-day meeting, Boot competed and was placed prominently (first, second, or third), in

New Zealand title, in 1 min. 55 2/5 secs., and the New Zealand mile title in 4 mins. 22 4/5 secs.

By now he was coming close to his best form. At school, he tells *The Listener*, A. Jackson, one of the masters (and well remembered also by Wellington College), and Phil Whisker, a keen local sportsman, had started him on the right lines of training. In Christchurch, R. A. Drewery took him in hand. Drewery has trained winners of New Zealand titles over every distance from the 100 yards to the mile. He has been a good track runner himself, and can still cover the distance. That year Boot was running the 880 regularly in 1 min 53 2/5, or 1 min. 54 4/5.

His selection for the New Zealand Olympic Team was inevitable, although it was not certain that he would go until the last minute. He ran into the semi-finals of the half-mile, and was in the British Empire team against the U.S.A. relay team. A record time of 2 min. 14 3/5 secs. for the 1000 yards gave him still another feather in his cap that same season.

In 1937 his half-mile in 1 min 53 4/5 secs. was a New Zealand record; but his fastest races were to follow.

Faster Still

In 1938 he ran for New Zealand in the British Empire Games and set an Empire record for the half-mile in 1 min. 51 1/5 secs. In the mile he ran third with 4 min. 12 3/10 secs. The New Zealand half-mile championship was his again that year, and in 1939 he won the half-mile and the mile in New South Wales with 1 min. 53 secs. and 4 min. 7 3/5 secs. respectively.

He held the New Zealand half-mile title again, and in the Wellington Centre's meeting won a mile in 4 min. 14 3/5 secs.

He has also held Canterbury Provincial and New Zealand University championships in the mile and half-mile events.

Since he left Lincoln College he has spent a year working in Christchurch, two years for the Department of Agriculture in Ashburton, and the rest of the time at the Department's head office in Wellington.

This season he believes he has struck form once again. His big races will be the mile relay at Masterton, probably with Pullar, Allen and Matthews, and the Centennial Mile at Wellington.

Into Boots

To compete in these events he must secure permission from the Army Department. On February 1 he was due to go into camp.

Much more powerfully built than Lovelock, Boot has found his speed in a powerful stride and a big heart. Lovelock ran like a deer. Boot travels as purposefully as a steam engine. His style is certainly graceful, but grace is the wrong word to describe it while Lovelock's name is coupled. Big boned, well muscled, firm jawed, Boot has worked all the way for his success, and deserved every cup or medal in his astonishingly large collection.

"I'd be glad," he said, "if you mentioned Jackson, and Whisker, and Drewery. It's a good opportunity to thank them for helping me, for this may be my last season."

He hopes for a chance to put his ideas on training into black and white.



PAT BOOT . . . into boots

the 100 yards, putting the shot, 880 yards (his time, 2 mins, was a school record), 120 yards, 220 yards, 440 yards. A few days before he had won the steeplechase over a gruelling course round the Timaru Golf Links. That year he was school athletics champion.

Open Competition

At Lincoln College in 1934-35 Boot won his races in average times, and did not come out into open competition until 1936, when he won the half-mile