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BRIAN HEWSON,

winner of the European 1,500m, one-time conqueror of Herb Elliott and a challenger in Olympic and Empire Games, has been one of Britain's greatest post-war runners. In this article, written exclusively for "World Sports," he tells of incidents in his career in his own words . . .

Midnight tactics talk . . . then my finest hour

HOW do you win a European athletics championships gold medal? In my case by staying up until 12.30 a.m. on the night before the race. This is what I did in company with AAA coach John le Masurier and steeplechaser Eric Shirley before winning the European 1,500m title in Stockholm in 1958—the race which gave me my biggest thrill in 13 years of competitive athletics.

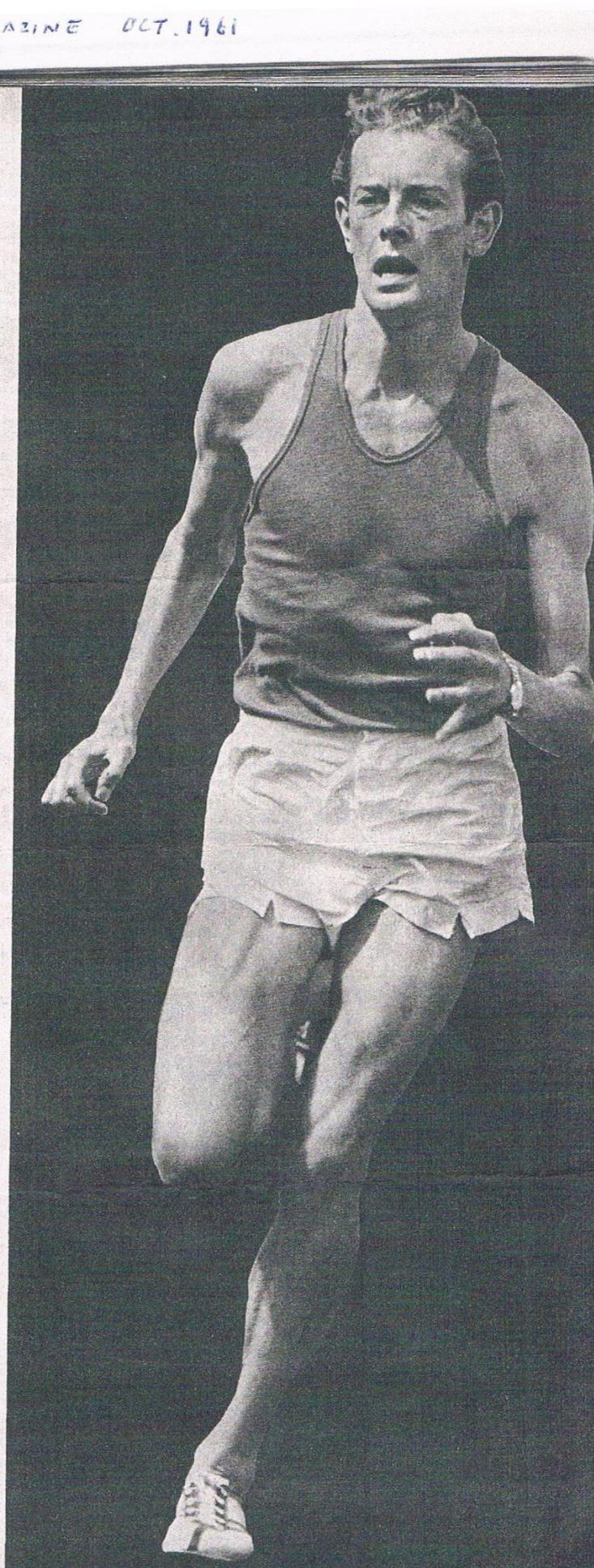
Several things worked in my favour for that triumph. I was always said to be a nervous, temperamental athlete, and I must admit that I disliked staying in athletic "villages" at big games, surrounded by athletes in track suits all day long and continually meeting my rivals in training. I liked to get away from the pressure of approaching competition, and when the British team was quartered with the Norwegian team in a school just outside Stockholm and I was able to go about in "civvies" it helped me tremendously.

Then my confidence received a great boost just before we went to the starting line for the final. A large group of supporters from my club, Mitcham AC, began to chant "2-4-6-8, who do we appreciate, H-e-w-s-o-n . . . HEWSON!" I was so touched that I had tears in my eyes, and from that moment I was determined to win—for my club-mates.

When the gun went, that midnight conference began to prove valuable. After qualifying in my heat in the then British best time of 3min 41.1sec, I had decided I could win a medal in the final—hence the talk with John and Eric only a few hours before the start of my greatest race.

While most of my opponents were, I presumed, tucked up in bed, we three considered all 11 of them one by one and discussed the tactics I should use against them. The plan we decided upon worked perfectly. Keeping as relaxed as possible for the first two laps, yet maintaining contact with the main group, I began to move up at the bell to be in a challenging position.

Continued overleaf



MIDNIGHT TACTICS TALK... THEN MY FINEST HOUR (continued)

Coming into the final straight, I was in seventh place, but very close up to the leaders. I gave it all I had in a mad dash to the tape. My acceleration round the last bend had taken me into the fourth lane and I forged ahead in the last few yards to beat Dan Waern (Sweden) into second place with Olympic champion Ron Delany (Republic of Ireland) third.

That eventful summer of 1958 had seen some remarkable changes in my fortunes. After beating the fabulous Australian Herb Elliott in the AAA championships 880yd in 1min 48.3sec (an AAA record) and losing narrowly to him in the Cardiff Empire Games over the same distance, I had set my mind on competing in the 800m in the Europeans.

When, despite the fact that in the Cardiff mile (won by Elliott) I had finished tired and very depressed well down the field, the British Board decided that I should run in the 1,500m in Stockholm I was very downhearted. It was the American coach Joe Yancey who changed my mind.

His powerful personality altered all my ideas about the European 1,500 in the course of one lunch-time meeting. He made me feel I had an outstanding chance, and two of his main points stick in my mind still. One was "when you are in front, don't worry about anyone behind... just run and let them worry about you." Then, with the aid of knives and forks, he showed me how to prevent becoming boxed in. Run at the shoulder of the leading runner, he said, not behind. Then if another runner comes up on the outside, you still have a clear way forward.

Nearly two years after my Stockholm triumph, I was approaching the Rome Olympic 800m with high hopes; but, as it turned out, there was a disappointing outcome. Again I was the centre of controversy when the team was being selected. Some people said I was not fit and should have made way for another athlete. Let me tell my side of the story...

Just before the Olympics began, I had a

severe strain in my left leg where the Achilles tendon joins the calf muscle. A doctor's certificate stating that the leg would be completely cured in four days was not accepted by the BAAB and I was forced to run a fitness-proving race at London's White City before the leg was completely recovered—and was further told that if I did not run I would not be considered for the Rome team.

Frankly, I just did not know what to do. About 35 minutes before the race a well-known British official implied that all that was expected of me was to run two even laps in a reasonable time and finish sound. So I did exactly that, finishing last, but close up, in about 1min 50sec. I was then examined by an official masseur, passed fit and included in the team.

But the "fitness race" retarded the recovery of my leg and I was unable to race or train hard before the Games. Still, I felt so confident and fit as we set out on my heat of the Olympic 800m that I took the lead after a few yards.

I was on the first steps towards a triumph I had planned four years previously after coming fifth in the Melbourne Olympic 1,500m. But after only the first furlong I felt my leg go and it became stiffer and more painful with every stride. Still I forced myself to keep the lead until the final straight: the will to win was there but the leg was not "working" at all. So I finished fourth and despondently realised I had failed to qualify for the final.

This disastrous episode was sufficient excuse for renewed charges that my temperament was not suited to tough international running, and that I lacked "guts." This is something I had to contend with throughout my career because I was not a rough or forceful runner and people tended to think I would get knocked all over the track in a large field. Being frail, I had to take this chance—and accept the criticism—but I have always managed to prevent myself being badly baulked.

Charges that I lacked guts annoyed me. I

think I am a very determined person. For example, although my best races have always been won by coming from behind, I have varied my tactics considerably. Running for London against Warsaw in 1959, I led from the gun to win the 880yd in 1min 48.6sec. It was a hard way of running, but I prove I could do it.

So far as temperament goes, the greatest competitor I ever opposed was Herb Elliott. He oozed confidence before a race and appeared quite unmoved by the excitement of a big occasion.

Among British athletes, Derek Johnson and Derek Ibbotson typified the word "gut" on the track. At their best, they would never give up, yet both liked to lead a gay life.

I remember once sharing a spacious suite with Ibbotson in a Moscow hotel. We were staggered to find ourselves installed in a room which included a magnificent lounge with piano, television set, cocktail cabinet (unfortunately empty when we arrived!) and beautiful furnishings, including an enormous chandelier. Derek and I arranged a party for the night after the athletics meeting against the Russians. We laid on some beer and soft drinks and about 30 men and women athletes came along. Stan Vickrey proved an invaluable asset on the piano and eventually the party broke up about 3 a.m. Later I was able to arrange a similar party for the whole team in Helsinki, which 4 Finnish nurses also attended. Not a athlete, you see, are dull dogs!

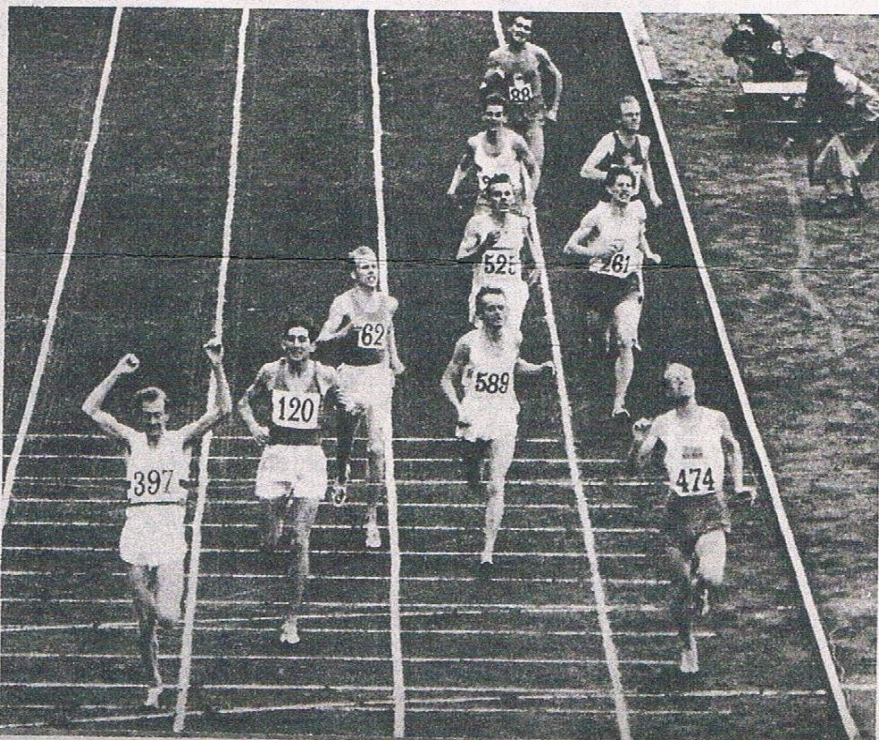
Much of the credit for what I achieved is due to my first coach, Frank Drew, of Millham AC, who made sure I did not train too hard or race in senior competition while I was still growing. As an athlete gains experience, the coach plays a smaller part in giving advice and so on, but I feel that no enough tips such as Yancey gave me are passed on to our youngsters.

It would also be more encouraging for the younger runners if more of them were selected for small teams competing on the Continent as reward for the hours of hard training they have to endure. And so far as international matches are concerned, many would undoubtedly benefit from official advice on tactics in a four-man field.

In my experience of watching international athletics in this country since my retirement I feel that more effort should be made to emphasise the possibility of records being established. This is the sort of attraction which draws the crowds.

In the shorter events it is correspondingly more difficult to lower the existing times, and that is why I feel record-attempts particularly should be made—and publicised—over the middle distances. Pace-making seems to be a customary and accepted tactic abroad, but is generally frowned upon in Britain. It would assuredly help.

You may feel, perhaps, that in placing such emphasis on record-breaking, the public are putting the time before the race in terms of importance. Nevertheless, the crowds are needed—and as long as the public demands a record-attempt, a record-attempt should be made.



An elated Hewson (397) wins the 1958 European Championships 1,500m. Sweden's Dan Waern (474)—see page 10—was second, with Ron Delany (120) third

JOHN BRADFORD.

John's Notable Representative Career

Onetime Rugby Club Captain until departing to Doha, Qatar in 1978.

Represented Doha in the Gulf League, earning some 20 Caps.

Earned more caps when playing in the Bahrain 7's..

Played for Qatar in the Harlech, Wales 7's.

In 1984 he moved to Hong Kong and made the Hong Kong National Team in 1985 (Aged 38!).

As a finale, the following year he turned out for a London Welsh touring team.