

## STAN VICKERS (1932-2013)

Last week, 1960 Olympic 20km bronze medallist Stan Vickers died, aged 80. The following short profile will let our younger readers learn a little more about this champion English walker.

Stanley Frank Vickers was a tall and lanky athlete who, in his competition days, stood 1.85m tall and weighed in at a slight 60 kg. He was born on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1932 in Lewisham, on the outskirts of London, and raced for Belgrave Harriers. He died on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2013, aged 80.

He came to national prominence in 1956, aged 24, taking second place in the AAA 7 Mile Track Championship, winning the Southern Counties 10 Miles 'Garnet' Championship and doing well enough to gain selection in the 20km event at the Melbourne Olympics. There, he walked outstandingly, taking fifth place with 1.32.34, just over 1 minute behind the Soviet winner Leonid Spirin (1.31.27) and only 20 secs behind the bronze medallist Bruno Junk (1.32.12).

The next few years saw him dominate short distance walking events in Britain, both on the track and on the road. On the track he won the AAA 2 Miles and 7 Miles Championships in 1957 and 1958. He also won the RWA 10 miles roadwalk championship in both these years. With this form he was considered a good chance in the 20km walk at the 1958 European Championships in Stockholm and his performance there proved to be the highlight of his career. He won in 1:33:09, beating silver medallist Spirin by almost two minutes. He probably would have also won the walking event at the Commonwealth Games held that year in Cardiff if he'd been given the chance, but walking wasn't added to the Commonwealth Games program until 1966.

By 1959, he was facing fierce competition on the local front from a young Ken Matthews who took his titles from him that year. But just when it looked like a changing of the guard, Vickers bounced back in 1960, winning both the AAA 2 Miles and the RWA 20 Miles championships. In fact, the 1960 AAA 2 mile walk is considered one of the greatest contests in the history of the championships. Vickers and Matthews duelled virtually neck and neck for the first seven laps, until Vickers powered away in the last lap to win in a new UK record of 13:02.4. Peter Lovesey described it as follows in his book *The Official Centenary History of the AAA*:

*In spectacle, excitement and sheer athleticism, the 1960 AAA 2 Mile duel between Stan Vickers and Ken Matthews stand comparison with any of the great races in the history of the Championships. Scrupulously fair, yet at the fastest pace ever seen in Britain, the two kept within a yard of each other, Matthews leading until the bell, when Vickers powered past to cut 9 sec from George Larner's 56-year-old record, with 13:02.4 and Matthews 13:09.6 also inside the old figures.*



**Vickers wins over Ken Matthews in the 1960 AAA 2 Mile Championship**

Both Vickers and Matthews were considered strong contenders for the 20km walk at the Rome Olympic Games, held later that year. The race was held on a very hot day and Matthews, weakened by recent flu, started to wilt in the oppressive conditions. Concerned for his teammate, Vickers eased his pace until Matthews urged him on. Vickers then

took off, finishing strongly to win the bronze medal (1:34:56) behind Russian Vladimir Golubnichiy (1:34:07) and Australian Noel Freeman (1:34:16).

After the race, Vickers sat down to rest and was carried off by ambulance crew who thought he was sick. The crew didn't speak English and several hours passed before officials discovered what had happened. A member of the London Stock Exchange, he was carried shoulder high round the trading floor on his return.



*The winners of the 20 kms road walk after the award: to the left the Australian N. Freeman (silver medal), in the centre, the Russian V. Golubnichiy (gold medal) and to the right, the Englishman S. Vickers (bronze medal).*

### **The 1960 Olympic 20km medallists Noel Freeman, Vladimir Golubnichiy and Stan Vickers**

With the death of Vickers, the racewalking world has lost one of the protagonists of the golden age of British racewalking, a gallery that includes names such as Don Thompson (1933-2006), Ken Matthews (b. 1934), George Williams (n . 1935), Paul Nihill (b. 1939) and Ray Middleton (b. 1936) .

References:

<http://www.omarchador.blogspot.pt/2013/04/stanley-vickers-1932-2013.html>

<http://www.thepowerof10.info/athletes/profile.aspx?athleteid=40394>

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-2311818/Stan-Vickers-Olympic-bronze-medalist-dies.html?ITO=1490&ns\\_mchannel=rss&ns\\_campaign=1490](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-2311818/Stan-Vickers-Olympic-bronze-medalist-dies.html?ITO=1490&ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490)

<http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes/vi/stan-vickers-1.html>

<http://lewishamlegacy.wikidot.com/stanley-vickers>

*The Official Centenary History of the AAA* by Peter Lovesey, 1979

Tim Erickson

Tuesday 23 April 2013