

SPORTING LEGENDS: STEVE OVETT

SPORT: ATHLETICS

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1973 - 1988

Stephen Michael James "Steve" Ovett (born October 9, 1955), is an English middle distance runner and gold medallist in the 800m at the 1980 Olympics.

Born in Brighton, Steve Ovett was an outstandingly-talented teenage athlete. His first major title came in 1973 when he won the European junior 800m, followed the next year in Rome with a silver in the senior event. He won AAA titles in the 800m from 1974 to 1976, in the 1500m in 1979 and in the mile in 1980.



Ovett gained some Olympic experience in 1976 when he ran in the final of the 800m and was placed fifth. At the European Championships in 1978, he won gold in the 1500m and silver in the 800 m.

Ovett arrived at the Moscow Olympics as most people's favourite to take the 1500m title. Earlier that month, he had established a new mile world record of 3:48.8 and two weeks later equalled Sebastian Coe's world record of 3:32.1 in the 1500m.

He had been unbeaten over the 1500m and mile for three years. His participation in the 800m would serve as a test for the 1500m. In the 800m final, Ovett was only in sixth place at the halfway mark, but pushed his way through the crowd to second place.

Seventy metres from the finish, he shot into the lead and held off Coe to win by three metres. In the 1500m, contested six days later, it was Coe who came from behind to win, while Ovett had to settle for third place.

SPORTING LEGENDS: STEVE OVETT



Ovett's 800m Gold Medal at the 1980 Moscow Olympics was his finest hour.

After the Olympics Ovett lowered the 1500m world record time to 3:31.36. In 1983 he lowered it further to 3:30.77.

Ovett attempted to defend his 800m title in the 1984 Summer Olympics. Battling with bronchitis, he barely qualified for the final and then finished eighth, after which he collapsed and spent two nights in a hospital.

He returned to compete in the 1500m. Running in fourth place at the beginning of the last lap of the final, Ovett collapsed with chest pains and was taken away on a stretcher.

In 1986 he won the 5000m in the Commonwealth Games at Edinburgh.

He failed to make the 1988 Olympic team and decided to retire soon after that.

He has been a Track & Field television commentator since 1992.

SPORTING LEGENDS: STEVE OVETT



Scott Burton's Final Thought

Steve Ovett was one of the best middle-distance runners of his generation.

His achievements are to be commended, considering that he competed during one of the most competitive eras of middle distance running history.

His battles with Seb Coe are remembered even to this day.

At his peak, Ovett seemed untouchable, floating effortlessly around the track with superlative grace. I grew up watching his races against some of the best middle-distance talent that Great Britain ever had.

Competing against Seb Coe, Steve Cram, Peter Elliott and Tom McKean brought out the very best in Ovett, and he achieved race times that are still impressive by today's standards.

His Olympic Gold from Moscow 1980 remains his greatest achievement, although I believe that his consistent ability to break World Records year in, year out also should be remembered.

I also believe that if not for the intense atmospheric fog at L.A. '84, Ovett could have achieved a double Gold success, having established great times only a couple of months previously.

Steve Ovett deserves to be considered as a true sporting legend, and he inspired an entire generation of would-be middle distance athletes around the world.



Another medal for Steve Ovett's huge collection!