

# GREATEST RACES OF ALL TIME

## 1984 Olympic 1500m final - Britain's Best!

You can always judge the popularity of an event when borrowing a video from the extensive library of the National Sports Information Centre at the Australian Institute of Sport. If the tape is cued precisely at the conclusion of an event, you know that it was the last that was previously viewed. Each video I viewed of the 1984 L.A Olympic games was positioned at the conclusion of the heats or

final of the men's 800m or 1500m events, a good starting point for this issue's 'Great Races of All Time'.

The series of events leading up to the 1984 Olympic 800m and 1500m finals are made for books rather than magazine articles, but let us try to relive some of the magic for you. Sebastian Coe had burst onto the front page of Athletics in 1979 (aged 22 years) when he set three World Records in

just over a month. Seb obliterated the 800m World Record by over 1 second, lowered the mile record by four tenths of a second and wiped one tenth off the 1500m Record.

At the 1980 Olympics, Seb was the strong favourite for the 800m, while his compatriot Steve Ovett, who had recently equalled the 1500m World record and taken the mile Record, was favoured to take out the 1500m. In a strange series of events, Coe was beaten in a slow tactical 800m final by Ovett, the 1500m specialist, only to later exact his revenge by taking Olympic gold in the 1500m.

In the intervening years between the Moscow and Los Angeles Olympics the drama continued. In 1981, Coe went on to lower his own 800m Record to 1.41.73 (A record which stood for 26 years) and was still the only man to have ever run under 1.43. One month later, Coe reclaimed the World mile Record from Steve Ovett, only to lose it back to Ovett within a week. Not to be outdone, Coe reclaimed the title of World mile record holder just two days later. This phenomenal series of races saw the mile record broken three times in nine days! Certainly 1981 was a significant period in history for World, and in particular British, middle distance running. Fast forward to 1984. Seb Coe had missed the inaugural World championships due to an illness, which cost him most of the 1983 season but still held the 800m and mile World Records. Ovett was the current 1500m World record holder and a new Briton had emerged onto the scene, Steve Cram, the winner of the World 1500m Championship. Thus the Brit's went into the Los Angeles Olympic games with the defending 800m and 1500m Olympic champions, the World 1500m champion and the World 800m, 1500m, and mile Record holders.

In the 800m final it was again Ovett and Coe who were representing Britain against the rest of the World. However unlike 1980, Ovett was never a threat and was hospitalised after the race. Coe put up a brave performance attempting to capture his first major title at the event he owned on paper since 1979. But it was Brazil's Joaquim Cruz who ran an Olympic Record and the third fastest time in history

(1.43.00) to take gold. Coe was in contention until the final 80m when Cruz pulled away, leaving Coe in a nail-biting battle with Jones from America. Coe eventually got up to win his second consecutive Olympic 800m silver medal. So the now that the scene is set – it is the last day of the 1984 Olympic Games and the men's 1500m final. The field is one of the best ever assembled and it contains three of the best British athletes of all time. The early pace was controlled by Khalifa from Sudan who led all of the contenders through the first 400m in 58.8. A storming back straight saw American Steve Scott hit the lead and press onwards from the 500m point. With 2 laps to run, Coe was sitting comfortably on Scott's shoulder, with Cram and Ovett both within the top six and within two metres of Coe. 800m was reached in 1.56.8 and Abascal from Spain

flew to the front with 600m to run and kept pressing the pace. The bell was reached in 2.39.0 with Abascal leading a single file train of Coe, Cram and Ovett, in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. With 350m to go, Ovett stepped onto the infield and out of the race. Looking very distressed he was later carried from the track on a stretcher. This was heart breaking for Ovett who had competed while still ill and a disappointing ending to his 1984 Olympic experience. A 56 second third lap saw the leaders pass through 1200m in 2.53.2 and charging down the back straight for the last time, Cram made a strong move for the lead. However Coe was able to respond and squeezed between Abascal on the rails and Cram in lane 1. From this point Coe was never really challenged for the lead and opened up the after burners in the home straight to put five metres into Cram and

another ten metres into Abascal. The winning time was 3.32.5 and a new Olympic Record. The last lap, 53 seconds. The first time anyone has ever defended their Olympic title in the 1500m. A truly phenomenal race.

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|--------------------|-------|---------|
| 1. Sebastian Coe   | (GBR) | 3:32:53 |
| 2. Steve Cram      | (GBR) | 3:33:40 |
| 3. Jose Abascal    | (SPA) | 3:34:30 |
| 4. Joseph Cheshire | (KEN) | 3:34:52 |
| 5. Jim Spivey      | (USA) | 3:36:07 |
| 6. Peter Wirz      | (SWI) | 3:36:97 |
| 7. Andres Vera     | (SPA) | 3:37:02 |
| 8. Omer Khalifa    | (SUD) | 3:37:11 |

Seb Coe leads the Brits through



Getty Images

## Sebastian Coe

The salute of an Olympic champion!



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