

Derek James Neville Johnson
(b. 5 Jan 1933 London)



Johnson displayed his immense talent early, running a British age-17 best of 48.8 to win the AAA junior 440y in 1950. He improved his best to an English Native record 47.9 in 1954 and to 47.7 in 1958, but it was at 800m that he achieved his greatest distinction. In 1954 he won the Empire Games 880y, with a second gold medal as his 46.9 final leg took the English 4 x 440y team to victory, and set a British record of 1:47.4 when 4th in the European 800m. In 1956 he took the Olympic silver medal when narrowly beaten in a great 800m race by Tom Courtney (USA), and he further improved the British record to 1:46.9 and 1:46.6 in 1957. In 1958 he won a silver medal on the English 4 x 440y team at the Empire Games, but after running 3:42.9 for 1500m in 1959 contracted tuberculosis and spent a year in a sanatorium. He displayed great tenacity in shaking off the illness and returning to run 800m in 1:50.0 in 1963.

Other best times: 1000m 2:20.4 (1956), 1 mile 4:05.0 (1957), 440y hurdles 53.7 (1956), 3000m steeplechase 9:16.8 (1957). A graduate of Oxford University, he became a leading figure in the International Athletes Club and the South of England AAA.