

= Paavo Nurmi =

Paavo Johannes Nurmi (Finnish pronunciation : [?p???o ?nurmi] ; 13 June 1897 ? 2 October 1973) was a Finnish middle- and long @-@ distance runner . He was nicknamed the " Flying Finn " as he dominated distance running in the early 20th century . Nurmi set 22 official world records at distances between 1500 metres and 20 kilometres , and won nine gold and three silver medals in his twelve events in the Olympic Games . At his peak , Nurmi was undefeated at distances from 800 m upwards for 121 races . Throughout his 14 @-@ year career , he remained unbeaten in cross country events and the 10 @,@ 000 m .

Born into a working @-@ class family , Nurmi left school at 12 to provide for his family . In 1912 , he was inspired by the Olympic feats of Hannes Kolehmainen and began developing a strict training program . Nurmi started to flourish during his military service , setting national records en route to his international debut at the 1920 Summer Olympics . After a silver medal in the 5000 m , he took gold in the 10 @,@ 000 m and the cross country events . In 1923 , Nurmi became the first , and so far only , runner to hold the world record in the mile , the 5000 m and the 10 @,@ 000 m races at the same time . He went on to set new world records for the 1500 m and the 5000 m with just an hour between the races , and take gold medals in the distances in less than two hours at the 1924 Olympics . Seemingly untouched by the Paris heat wave , Nurmi won all his races and returned home with five gold medals , but embittered , as Finnish officials had refused to enter him for the 10 @,@ 000 m .

Struggling with injuries and motivation issues after his exhaustive U.S. tour in 1925 , Nurmi found his long @-@ time rivals Ville Ritola and Edvin Wide ever more serious challengers . At the 1928 Summer Olympics , Nurmi recaptured the 10 @,@ 000 m title but was beaten for the gold in the 5000 m and the 3000 m steeplechase . He then turned his attention to longer distances , breaking the world records for events such as the one hour run and the 25 @-@ mile marathon . Nurmi intended to end his career with a marathon gold medal , as his idol Kolehmainen had done . In a controversial case that strained Finland ? Sweden relations and sparked an inter @-@ IAAF battle , Nurmi was suspended before the 1932 Games by an IAAF council that questioned his amateur status . Two days before the opening ceremonies , the council rejected his entries . Although he was never declared a professional , Nurmi 's suspension became definite in 1934 and he retired from running .

Nurmi later coached Finnish runners , raised funds for Finland during the Winter War , and worked as a haberdasher , building contractor , and share trader , eventually becoming one of Finland 's richest people . In 1952 , he was the lighter of the Olympic Flame at the Summer Olympics in Helsinki . Nurmi 's speed and elusive personality spawned nicknames such as the " Phantom Finn " , while his achievements , training methods and running style influenced future generations of middle and long distance runners . Nurmi , who rarely ran without a stopwatch in his hand , has been credited for introducing the " even pace " strategy and analytic approach to running , and for making running a major international sport .

= = Early life = =

Nurmi was born in Turku , Finland , to carpenter Johan Fredrik Nurmi and his wife Matilda Wilhelmiina Laine . Nurmi 's siblings , Siiri , Saara , Martti and Lahja , were born in 1898 , 1902 , 1905 and 1908 , respectively . In 1903 , the Nurmi family moved from Raunistula into a 40 @-@ square @-@ meter apartment in central Turku , where Paavo Nurmi would live until 1932 . The young Nurmi and his friends were inspired by the English long @-@ distance runner Alfred Shrubbs . They regularly ran or walked six kilometres (four miles) to swim in Ruissalo , and back , sometimes twice a day . By the age of eleven , Nurmi ran the 1500 metres in 5 : 02 . Nurmi 's father Johan died in 1910 and his sister Lahja a year later . The family struggled financially , renting out their kitchen to another family and living in a single room . Nurmi , a talented student , left school to work as an errand boy for a bakery . Although he stopped running actively , he got plenty of exercise pushing heavy carts up the steep slopes in Turku . He later credited these climbs for strengthening his back

and leg muscles .

At 15 , Nurmi rekindled his interest in athletics after being inspired by the performances of Hannes Kolehmainen , who was said to " have run Finland onto the map of the world " at the 1912 Summer Olympics . He bought his first pair of sneakers a few days later . Nurmi trained primarily by doing cross country running in the summers and cross country skiing in the winters . In 1914 , Nurmi joined the sports club Turun Urheiluliitto and won his first race on the 3000 metres . Two years later , he revised his training program to include walking , sprints and calisthenics . He continued to provide for his family through his new job at the Ab . H. Ahlberg & Co workshop in Turku , where he worked until he started his military service at a machine gun company in the Pori Brigade in April 1919 . During the Finnish Civil War in 1918 , Nurmi remained politically passive and concentrated on his work and his Olympic ambitions . After the war , he decided not to join the newly founded Finnish Workers ' Sports Federation , but wrote articles for the federation 's chief organ and criticized the discrimination against many of his fellow workers and athletes .

In the army , Nurmi quickly impressed in the athletic competitions : While others marched , Nurmi ran the whole distances with a rifle on his shoulder and a backpack full of sand . Nurmi 's stubbornness caused him difficulties with his non @-@ commissioned officers , but he was favoured by the superior officers , despite his refusal to take the soldier 's oath . As the unit commander Hugo Österman was a known sports aficionado , Nurmi and few other athletes were given free time to practice . Nurmi improvised new training methods in the army barracks ; he ran behind trains , holding on to the rear bumper , to stretch his stride , and used heavy iron @-@ clad army boots to strengthen his legs . Nurmi soon began setting personal bests and got close for the Olympic selection . In March 1920 , he was promoted to corporal (alikersantti) . On 29 May 1920 , he set his first national record on the 3000 m and went on to win the 1500 m and the 5000 m at the Olympic trials in July .

= = Olympic career = =

= = = 1920 ? 1924 Olympics = = =

Nurmi made his international debut in August at the 1920 Summer Olympics in Antwerp , Belgium . He took his first medal by finishing second to Frenchman Joseph Guillemot in the 5000 m . This would remain the only time that Nurmi lost to a non @-@ Finnish runner in the Olympics . He went on to win gold medals in his other three events : the 10 @,@ 000 m , sprinting past Guillemot on the final curve and improving his personal best by over a minute , the cross country race , beating Sweden 's Eric Backman , and the cross country team event where he helped Heikki Liimatainen and Teodor Koskenniemi defeat the British and Swedish teams . Nurmi 's success brought electric lighting and running water for his family in Turku . Nurmi , however , was given a scholarship to study at the Teollisuuskoulu industrial school in Helsinki .

Buoyed by his defeat to Guillemot , Nurmi 's races became a series of experiments which he analyzed meticulously . Previously known for his blistering pace on the first few laps , Nurmi started to carry a stopwatch and spread his efforts more uniformly over the distance . He aimed to perfect his technique and tactics to a point where the performances of his rivals would be rendered meaningless . Nurmi set his first world record on the 10 @,@ 000 m in Stockholm in 1921 . In 1922 , he broke the world records for the 2000 m , the 3000 m and the 5000 m . A year later , Nurmi added the records for the 1500 m and the mile . His feat of holding the world records for the mile , the 5000 m and the 10 @,@ 000 m at the same time has not been matched by any other athlete before or since . Nurmi also tested his speed in the 800 m , winning the 1923 Finnish Championships with a new national record . After excelling in mathematics , Nurmi graduated as an engineer in 1923 and returned home to prepare for the upcoming Olympic Games .

Nurmi 's trip to the 1924 Summer Olympics was endangered by a knee injury in the spring of 1924 , but he recovered and resumed training twice a day . On 19 June , Nurmi tried out the 1924 Olympic schedule at the Eläintarha Stadium in Helsinki by running the 1500 m and the 5000 m inside an hour

, setting new world records for both distances . In the 1500 m final at the Olympics in Paris , Nurmi ran the first 800 m almost three seconds faster . His only challenger , Ray Watson of the United States , gave up before the last lap and Nurmi was able to slow down and coast to victory ahead of Willy Schärer , Henry Stallard and Douglas Lowe , still breaking the Olympic record by three seconds . The 5000 m final started in less than two hours , and Nurmi faced a tough challenge from countryman Ville Ritola , who had already won the 3000 m steeplechase and the 10 @, @ 000 m . Ritola and Edvin Wide figured that Nurmi must be tired and tried to burn him off by running at world @-@ record pace . Realizing that he was now racing the two men and not the clock , Nurmi tossed his stopwatch onto the grass . The Finns later passed the Swede as his pace faded and continued their duel . On the home straight , Ritola sprinted from the outside but Nurmi increased his pace to keep his rival a metre behind .

In the cross country events , the heat of 45 ° C (113 ° F) , caused all but 15 of the 38 competitors to abandon the race . Eight finishers were taken away on stretchers . One athlete began to run in tiny circles after reaching the stadium , until setting off into the stands and knocking himself unconscious . Early leader Wide was among those who blacked out along the course , and was incorrectly reported to have died at the hospital . Nurmi exhibited only slight signs of exhaustion after beating Ritola to the win by nearly a minute and a half . As Finland looked to have lost the team medal , the disoriented Liimatainen staggered into the stadium , but was barely moving forward . An athlete ahead of him fainted 50 metres from the finish , and Liimatainen stopped and tried to find his way off the track , thinking he had reached the finish line . After having ignored shouts and kept the spectators in suspense for a while , he turned into the right direction , realised his situation and reached the finish in 12th place and secured team gold . Those present at the stadium were shocked by what they had witnessed , and Olympic officials decided to ban cross country running from future Games .

In the 3000 m team race on the next day , Nurmi and Ritola again finished first and second , and Elias Katz secured the gold medal for the Finnish team by finishing fifth . Nurmi had won five gold medals in five events , but he left the Games embittered as the Finnish officials had allocated races between their star runners and prevented him from defending his title in the 10 @, @ 000 m , the distance that was dearest to him . After returning to Finland , Nurmi set a 10 @, @ 000 m world record that would last for almost 13 years . He now held the 1500 m , the mile , the 3000 m , the 5000 m and the 10 @, @ 000 m world records simultaneously .

= = = U.S. tour and 1928 Olympics = = =

In early 1925 , Nurmi embarked on a widely publicised tour of the United States . He competed in 55 events (45 indoors) during a five @-@ month period , starting at a sold @-@ out Madison Square Garden on 6 January . His debut was a copy of his feats in Helsinki and Paris . Nurmi defeated Joie Ray and Lloyd Hahn to win the mile and Ritola to win the 5000 m , again setting new world records for both distances . Nurmi broke ten more indoor world records in regular events and set several new best times for rarer distances . He won 51 of the events , abandoned one race and lost two handicap races along with his final event ; a half @-@ mile race at the Yankee Stadium , where he finished second to American track star Alan Helffrich . Helffrich 's victory ended Nurmi 's 121 @-@ race , four @-@ year win streak in individual scratch races at distances from 800 m upwards . Although he hated losing more than anything , Nurmi was the first to congratulate Helffrich . The tour made Nurmi extremely popular in the United States , and the Finn agreed to meet President Calvin Coolidge at the White House . Nurmi left America fearing that he had competed too often and burned himself out .

Nurmi struggled to maintain motivation for running , heightened by his rheumatism and Achilles tendon problems . He quit his job as a machinery draughtsman in 1926 and began studying business intensively . As Nurmi started a new career as a share dealer , his financial advisors included Risto Ryti , director of the Bank of Finland . In 1926 , Nurmi broke Wide 's world record for the 3000 m in Berlin and then improved the record in Stockholm , despite Nils Eklöf repeatedly trying to slow his pace down in an effort to aid Wide . Nurmi was furious at the Swedes and vowed never

to race Eklöf again . In October 1926 , he lost a 1500 m race along with his world record to Germany 's Otto Peltzer . This marked the first time in over five years and 133 races that Nurmi had been defeated at a distance over 1000 m . In 1927 , Finnish officials barred him from international competition for refusing to run against Eklöf at the Finland @-@ Sweden international , cancelling the Peltzer rematch scheduled for Vienna . Nurmi ended his season and threatened , until late November , to withdraw from the 1928 Summer Olympics . At the 1928 Olympic trials , Nurmi was left third in the 1500 m by eventual gold and bronze medalists Harri Larva and Eino Purje , and he decided to concentrate on the longer distances . He added steeplechase to his program , although he had only tried the event twice before , the latest being a two @-@ mile steeplechase victory at the 1922 British Championships .

At the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam , Nurmi competed in three events . He won the 10 @,@ 000 m by staying right behind Ritola until sprinting past him on the home straight . Before the 5000 m final , Nurmi injured himself in his qualifying heat for the 3000 m steeplechase . He fell on his back at the water jump , spraining his hip and foot . Lucien Duquesne stopped to help him up , and Nurmi thanked the Frenchman by pacing him past the field and offered him the heat win , which Duquesne gracefully refused . In the 5000 m , Nurmi tried to repeat his move on Ritola but had to watch his teammate pull away instead . Nurmi , looking more exhausted than ever before , only barely managed to keep Wide behind and take silver . Nurmi had little time to rest or nurse his injuries as the 3000 m steeplechase started the next day . Struggling with the hurdles , Nurmi let Finland 's steeplechase specialist Toivo Loukola escape into the distance . On the final lap , he sprinted clear of the others and finished nine seconds behind the world @-@ record setting Loukola ; Nurmi 's time also bettered the previous record . Although Ritola did not finish , Ove Andersen completed a Finnish sweep of the medals .

= = = Move to longer distances = = =

Nurmi stated to a Swedish newspaper that " this is absolutely my last season on the track . I am beginning to get old . I have raced for fifteen years and have had enough of it . " However , Nurmi continued running , turning his attention to longer distances . In October , he broke the world records for the 15 km , the 10 miles and the one hour run in Berlin . Nurmi 's one @-@ hour record stood for 17 years , until Viljo Heino ran 129 metres further in 1945 . In January 1929 , Nurmi started his second U.S. tour from Brooklyn . He suffered his first @-@ ever defeat in the mile to Ray Conger at the indoor Wanamaker Mile . Nurmi was seven seconds slower than in his world record run in 1925 , and it was immediately speculated if the mile had become too short a distance for him . In 1930 , he set a new world record for the 20 km . In July 1931 , Nurmi showed he still had pace for the shorter distances by beating Lauri Lehtinen , Lauri Virtanen and Volmari Iso @-@ Hollo , and breaking the world record on the now @-@ rare two miles . He was the first runner to complete the distance in less than nine minutes . Nurmi planned to compete only in the 10 @,@ 000 m and the marathon in the 1932 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles , stating that he " won 't enter the 5000 metres for Finland has at least three excellent men for that event . "

In April 1932 , the executive council of the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) suspended Nurmi from international athletics events pending an investigation into his amateur status by the Finnish Athletics Federation . The Finnish authorities criticized the IAAF for acting without a hearing , but agreed to launch an investigation . It was customary of the IAAF to accept the final decision of its national branch , and the Associated Press wrote that " there is little doubt that if the Finnish federation clears Nurmi the international body will accept its decision without question . " A week later , the Finnish Athletics Federation ruled in favor of Nurmi , finding no evidence for the allegations of professionalism . Nurmi was hopeful that his suspension would be lifted in time for the Games .

On 26 June 1932 Nurmi started his first marathon at the Olympic trials . Not drinking a drop of liquid , he ran the old @-@ style ' short marathon ' of 40 @.@ 2 km (25 miles) in 2 : 22 : 03 @.@ 8 ? on the pace to finish in about 2 : 29 : 00 , just under Albert Michelsen 's marathon world record of 2 : 29 : 01 @.@ 8 . At the time , he led Armas Toivonen , the eventual Olympic bronze medalist , by six

minutes . Nurmi 's time was the new unofficial world record for the short marathon . Confident that he had done enough , Nurmi stopped and retired from the race owing to problems with his Achilles tendon . The Finnish Olympic Committee entered Nurmi for both the 10 @,@ 000 m and the marathon . The Guardian reported that " some of his trial times were almost unbelievable , " and Nurmi went on to train at the Olympic Village in Los Angeles despite his injury . Nurmi had set his heart on ending his career with a marathon gold medal , as Kolehmainen had done shortly after the First World War .

= = = 1932 Olympics and later career = = =

Less than three days before the 10 @,@ 000 m , a special commission of the IAAF , consisting of the same seven members that had suspended Nurmi , rejected the Finn 's entries and barred him from competing in Los Angeles . Sigfrid Edström , president of the IAAF and chairman of its executive council , stated that the full congress of the IAAF , which was scheduled to start the next day , could not reinstate Nurmi for the Olympics but merely review the phases and political angles related to the case . The AP called this " one of the slickest political maneuvers in international athletic history " , and wrote that the Games would now be " like Hamlet without the celebrated Dane in the cast . " Thousands protested against the action in Helsinki . Details of the case were not released to the press , but the evidence against Nurmi was believed be the sworn statements from German race promoters that Nurmi had received \$ 250 ? 500 per race when running in Germany in autumn 1931 . The statements were produced by Karl Ritter von Halt after Edström had sent him increasingly threatening letters , warning that if evidence against Nurmi is not provided , he " will unfortunately have to take stringent action against the German Athletics Association . "

On the eve of the marathon , all the entrants of the race except for the Finns , whose positions were known , filed a petition asking Nurmi 's entry to be accepted . Edström 's right @-@ hand man Bo Ekelund , secretary general of the IAAF and head of the Swedish Athletics Federation , approached the Finnish officials and stated that he might be able to arrange for Nurmi to participate in the marathon outside the competition . However , Finland maintained that as long as the athlete is not declared a professional , he must have the right to participate in the race officially . Although he had been diagnosed with a pulled Achilles tendon two weeks earlier , Nurmi stated he would have won the event by five minutes . The congress concluded without Nurmi being declared a professional , but the council 's authority to disbar an athlete was upheld on a 13 ? 12 vote . However , due to the close vote , the matter was postponed until the 1934 meet in Stockholm . Finns charged that the Swedish officials had used devious tricks in their campaign against Nurmi 's amateur status , and ceased all athletic relations with Sweden . A year earlier , controversies on the track and in the press had led Finland to withdraw from the Finland @-@ Sweden athletics international . After Nurmi 's suspension , Finland did not agree to return to the event until 1939 .

Nurmi refused to turn professional , and continued running as amateur in Finland . In 1933 , he ran his first 1500 m in three years and won the national title with his best time since 1926 . At the IAAF meet in August 1934 , Finland launched two proposals that lost . The council then brought forward its resolution empowering it to suspend athletes that it finds in violation of the IAAF amateur code . With a 12 ? 5 vote , with many not voting , Nurmi 's suspension from international amateur athletics became definite . Less than three weeks later , Nurmi retired from running with a 10 @,@ 000 m victory in Viipuri on 16 September 1934 . Nurmi remained undefeated in the distance throughout his 14 @-@ year top @-@ level career . In cross country running , his win streak lasted 19 years .

= = Later life = =

While active as a runner , Nurmi was known to be secretive about his training methods . Always running alone , he upped his pace and quickly exhausted anyone who was bold enough to join him . Even his club mate Harri Larva had learned little from him . After ending his career , Nurmi became a coach for the Finnish Athletics Federation and trained runners for the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin . In 1935 , Nurmi along with the entire board of directors quit the federation after a heated 40

? 38 vote to resume athletic relations with Sweden . However , Nurmi returned to coaching three months later and the Finnish distance runners went on to take three gold medals , three silvers and a bronze at the Games . In 1936 , Nurmi also opened a men 's clothing store (haberdashery) in Helsinki . It became a popular tourist attraction , and Emil Zátopek was among those who visited the store trying to meet Nurmi . The Finn spent his time in the back room , running another new business venture ; construction . As a contractor , Nurmi built forty apartment buildings in Helsinki with about a hundred flats in each . Within five years , he was rated a millionaire . His fiercest rival Ritola ended up living in one of Nurmi 's flats , at half price . Nurmi also made money on the stock market , eventually becoming one of Finland 's richest people .

In February 1940 , during the Winter War between Finland and the Soviet Union , Nurmi returned to the United States with his protégé Taisto Mäki , who had become the first man to run the 10 @,@ 000 m under 30 minutes , to raise funds and rally support to the Finnish cause . The relief drive , directed by former president Herbert Hoover , included a coast @-@ to @-@ coast tour by Nurmi and Mäki . Hoover welcomed the two as " ambassadors of the greatest sporting nation in the world . " While in San Francisco , Nurmi received news that one of his apprentices , 1936 Olympic champion Gunnar Höckert , had been killed in action . Nurmi left for Finland in late April , and later served in the Continuation War in a delivery company and as a trainer in the military staff . Before he was discharged in January 1942 , Nurmi was promoted first to a staff sergeant (ylikersantti) and later to a sergeant first class (vääpeli) .

In 1952 , Nurmi was persuaded by Urho Kekkonen , Prime Minister of Finland and former chairman of the Finnish Athletics Federation , to carry the Olympic torch into the Olympic Stadium at the 1952 Summer Olympics in Helsinki . His appearance astonished the spectators , and Sports Illustrated wrote that " his celebrated stride was unmistakable to the crowd . When he came into view , waves of sound began to build throughout the stadium , rising to a roar , then to a thunder . When the national teams , assembled in formation on the infield , saw the flowing figure of Nurmi , they broke ranks like excited schoolchildren , dashing toward the edge of the track . " After lighting the flame in the Olympic Cauldron , Nurmi passed the torch to his idol Kolehmainen , who lighted the beacon in the tower . In the cancelled 1940 Summer Olympics , Nurmi had been planned to lead a group of fifty Finnish gold medal winners .

Nurmi felt that he got too much credit as an athlete and too little as a businessman , but his interest in running never died . He even returned to the track himself a few times . In 1946 , he faced his old rival Edvin Wide in Stockholm in a benefit for the victims of the Greek Civil War . Nurmi ran for the last time on 18 February 1966 at the Madison Square Garden , invited by the New York Athletic Club . In 1962 , Nurmi predicted that welfare countries would start to struggle in the distance events : " The higher the standard of living in a country , the weaker the results often are in the events which call for work and trouble . I would like to warn this new generation : ' Do not let this comfortable life make you lazy . Do not let the new means of transport kill your instinct for physical exercise . Too many young people get used to driving in a car even for small distances . ' " In 1966 , he took the microphone in front of 300 sports club guests and criticised the state of distance running in Finland , reproaching the sports executives as publicity seekers and tourists , and demanding athletes sacrifice everything to accomplish something . Nurmi lived to see the renaissance of Finnish running in the 1970s , led by athletes such as the 1972 Olympic gold medalists Lasse Virén and Pekka Vasala . He had complimented the running style of Virén , and advised Vasala to concentrate on Kipchoge Keino .

Although he accepted an invitation from President Lyndon B. Johnson to revisit the White House in 1964 , Nurmi lived a very secluded life until the late 1960s when he began granting some press interviews . On his 70th birthday , Nurmi agreed to an interview for Yle , Finland 's national public @-@ broadcasting company , only after learning that President Kekkonen would act as the interviewer . Suffering from health problems , with at least one heart attack , a stroke and failing eyesight , Nurmi at times spoke bitterly about sports , calling it a waste of time compared to science and art . He died in 1973 in Helsinki and was given a state funeral . Kekkonen attended the funeral and praised Nurmi : " People explore the horizons for a successor . But none comes and none will , for his class is extinguished with him . " At the request of Nurmi , who enjoyed classical music and

played the violin , Konsta Jylhä 's *Vaiennut viulu* (The Silenced Violin) was played during the ceremony . Nurmi 's last record fell in 1996 ; his 1925 world record for the indoor 2000 m lasted as the Finnish national record for 71 years .

= = Personal life and public image = =

Nurmi was married to socialite Sylvi Laaksonen from 1932 to 1935 . Laaksonen , who was not interested in athletics , opposed Nurmi raising their newborn son Matti to be a runner and stated to the Associated Press in 1933 , " [H] is concentration on athletics at last forced me to go to the judge for a divorce . " Matti Nurmi did become a middle @-@ distance runner , and later a " self @-@ made " businessman . Nurmi 's relationship with his son was termed " uneasy " . Matti admired his father more as a businessman than as an athlete , and the two never discussed his running career . As a runner , Matti was at his best in the 3000 m , where he equaled his father 's time . In the famous race on 11 July 1957 when the " three Olavis " (Salsola , Salonen and Vuorisalo) broke the world record for the 1500 m , Matti Nurmi finished a distant ninth with his personal best , 2 @.@ 2 seconds slower than his father 's world record from 1924 . Hollywood actress Maila Nurmi , best known as the horror icon " Vampira " , was often referred to as Paavo Nurmi 's niece . However , the kinship is not supported by official documents .

Nurmi enjoyed the Finnish sports massage and sauna @-@ bathing traditions , crediting the Finnish sauna for his performances during the Paris heat wave in 1924 . He had a versatile diet , although he had practiced vegetarianism between the ages of 15 and 21 . Nurmi , who identified as neurasthenic , was known to be " taciturn " , " stony @-@ faced " and " stubborn " . He was not believed to have had any close friends , but he had occasionally socialized and showed his " sarcastic sense of humour " among the small circles he knew . Acclaimed the biggest sporting figure in the world at his peak , Nurmi was averse to publicity and the media , stating later on his 75th birthday , " [W] orldly fame and reputation are worth less than a rotten lingonberry . " French journalist Gabriel Hanot questioned Nurmi 's intensive approach to sports and wrote in 1924 that Nurmi " is ever more serious , reserved , concentrated , pessimistic , fanatic . There is such coldness in him and his self @-@ control is so great that never for a moment does he show his feelings . " Some contemporary Finns nicknamed him Suuri vaikenija (The Great Silent One) , and Ron Clarke noted that Nurmi 's persona remained a mystery even to Finnish runners and journalists : " Even to them , he was never quite real . He was enigmatic , sphinx @-@ like , a god in a cloud . It was as if he was all the time playing a role in a drama . "

Nurmi was more responsive to his fellow athletes than to the media . He exchanged ideas with sprinter Charley Paddock and even trained with his rival Otto Peltzer . Nurmi told Peltzer to forget his opponents : " Conquering yourself is the greatest challenge of an athlete . " Nurmi was known to emphasize the importance of psychological strength : " Mind is everything ; muscle , pieces of rubber . All that I am , I am because of my mind . " Regarding Nurmi 's track antics , Peltzer found that " in his impenetrability he was a Buddha gliding on the track . Stopwatch in hand , lap after lap , he ran towards the tape , subject only to the laws of a mathematical table . " Marathoner Johnny Kelley , who first met his idol at the 1936 Olympics , said that while Nurmi appeared cold to him at first , the two chatted for quite a while after Nurmi had asked for his name : " He grabbed ahold of me ? he was so excited . I couldn 't believe it ! "

Nurmi 's speed and elusive personality led to nicknames such as the " Phantom Finn " , the " King of Runners " and " Peerless Paavo " , while his mathematical prowess and use of a stopwatch led the press to characterize him as a running machine . One newspaperman dubbed Nurmi " a mechanical Frankenstein created to annihilate time . " Phil Cousineau noted that " his own innovation ? the tactic of pacing himself with a stopwatch ? both inspired and troubled people in an era when the robot was becoming symbolic of the modern soulless human being . " Among the popular newspaper rumours about Nurmi was that he had a " freakish heart " with a very low pulse rate . During the debate over his amateur status , Nurmi was joked to have " the lowest heartbeat and the highest asking price of any athlete in the world . "

= = Legacy = =

Nurmi broke 22 official world records on distances between 1500 m and 20 km ; a record in running . He also set several more unofficial ones for a total of 58 . His indoor world records were all unofficial as the IAAF did not ratify indoor records until the 1980s . Nurmi 's record for most Olympic gold medals was matched by gymnast Larisa Latynina in 1964 , swimmer Mark Spitz in 1972 and fellow track and field athlete Carl Lewis in 1996 , and broken by swimmer Michael Phelps in 2008 . Nurmi 's record for most medals in the Olympic Games stood until Edoardo Mangiarotti won his 13th medal in fencing in 1960 . Time selected Nurmi as the greatest Olympian of all time in 1996 , and IAAF named him among the first twelve athletes to be inducted into the IAAF Hall of Fame in 2012 .

Nurmi introduced the " even pace " strategy to running , pacing himself with a stopwatch and spreading his energy uniformly over the race . He reasoned that " when you race against time , you don 't have to sprint . Others can 't hold the pace if it is steady and hard all through to the tape . " Archie Macpherson stated that " with the stopwatch always in his hand , he elevated athletics to a new plane of intelligent application of effort and was the harbinger of the modern scientifically prepared athlete . " Nurmi was considered a pioneer also in regards to training ; he developed a systematic all @-@ year @-@ round training program that included both long @-@ distance work and interval running . Peter Lovesey wrote in *The Kings of Distance : A Study of Five Great Runners* that Nurmi " accelerated the progress of world records ; developed and actually came to personify the analytic approach to running ; and he was a profound influence not only in Finland , but throughout the world of athletics . Nurmi , his style , technique and tactics were held to be infallible , and really seemed so , as successive imitators in Finland steadily improved the records . " Corder Nelson , founder of *Track & Field News* , credited Nurmi for popularizing running as a spectator sport : " His imprint on the track world was greater than any man 's before or after . He , more than any man , raised track to the glory of a major sport in the eyes of international fans , and they honored him as one of the truly great athletes of all sports .

Nurmi 's achievements and training methods inspired future track stars of many generations . Emil Zátopek chanted " I am Nurmi ! I am Nurmi ! " when he trained as a child , and based his training system on what he was able to find out about Nurmi 's methods . Lasse Virén idolized Nurmi and was scheduled to meet him for the first time on the day that Nurmi died . Hicham El Guerrouj was inspired to become a runner so that he could " repeat the achievements of the great man of whom his grandfather spoke . " He became the first man after Nurmi to win the 1500 m and the 5000 m at the same Games . Nurmi 's influence stretched further than running on the Olympic arena . At the 1928 Olympics , Kazimierz Wierzyński won the lyric gold medal with his poem *Olympic Laurel* that included a verse on Nurmi . In 1936 , Ludwig Stubbendorf and his horse Nurmi won the individual and team gold medals in eventing .

A bronze statue of Nurmi was sculpted by Wäinö Aaltonen in 1925 . The original is held at the art museum Ateneum , but copies cast from the original mould exist in Turku , in Jyväskylä , in front of the Helsinki Olympic Stadium and at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne , Switzerland . In a widely publicized prank by the students of the Helsinki University of Technology , a miniature copy of the statue was discovered from the 300 @-@ year @-@ old wreck of the Swedish war ship *Vasa* when it was lifted from the bottom of the sea in 1961 . Statues of Nurmi were also sculpted by Renée Sintenis in 1926 and by Carl Eldh , whose 1937 work *Löpare* (*Runners*) depicts a battle between Nurmi and Edwin Wide . *Boken om Nurmi* (*The Book about Nurmi*) , released in Sweden in 1925 , was the first biographical book on a Finnish sportsman . Finnish astronomer Yrjö Väisälä named the main belt asteroid 1740 Paavo Nurmi after Nurmi in 1939 , while Finnair named its first DC @-@ 8 Paavo Nurmi in 1969 . Nurmi 's former rival Ville Ritola boarded the plane when he moved back to Finland in 1970 .

Paavo Nurmi Marathon , held annually since 1969 , is the oldest marathon in Wisconsin and the second @-@ oldest in the American Midwest . In Finland , another marathon bearing the name has been held in Nurmi 's hometown of Turku since 1992 , along with the athletics competition Paavo Nurmi Games that was started in 1957 . Finlandia University , an American college with Finnish roots , named their athletic center after Nurmi . A ten @-@ mark bill featuring a portrait of Nurmi was

issued by the Bank of Finland in 1987 . The other revised bills honored architect Alvar Aalto , composer Jean Sibelius , Enlightenment thinker Anders Chydenius and author Elias Lönnrot , respectively . The Nurmi bill was replaced by a new 20 @-@ mark note featuring Väinö Linna in 1993 . In 1997 , a historic stadium in Turku was renamed the Paavo Nurmi Stadium . Twenty world records have been set at the stadium , including John Landy 's records on the 1500 m and the mile , Nurmi 's record on the 3000 m and Zátopek 's record on the 10 @,@ 000 m . In fiction , Nurmi appears in William Goldman 's 1974 novel Marathon Man as the idol of the protagonist , who aims to become a greater runner than Nurmi . The opera on Nurmi , Paavo the Great . Great Race . Great Dream . , written by Paavo Haavikko and composed by Tuomas Kantelinen , debuted at the Helsinki Olympic Stadium in 2000 . In a 2005 episode of The Simpsons , Mr. Burns brags that he once outraced Nurmi in his antique motorcar .

== Career summary (1920 ? 34) ==

=== Seasons ===

=== Events ===

=== Olympics ===

== World records ==

=== IAAF @-@ ratified ===

=== Unofficial ===