



## KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

### Legendary Kansas Milers

**Glenn Cunningham, Wes Santee, Jim Ryun**

Glenn Cunningham was the first of what would be three dominant mile runners from the state of Kansas. Born in Elkhart, Kan., in 1909, Cunningham was close to having his track and field glory taken away at the age of 13. A school stove exploded, killing Cunningham's brother and severely burning Cunningham's legs. It was unclear as to whether Cunningham would ever walk again.

Cunningham recovered, first with the use of crutches, and then through time spent running. He became a miler in high school, breaking an interscholastic high school record with a mile time of 4:24.7 his senior year. Cunningham attended the University of Kansas, where he won the 1,500-meter NCAA championships in 1932 and finished fourth in the Olympic event in Los Angeles. The following year, he set the world record for the mile at 4:06.7 and received the Sullivan Award as the nation's outstanding amateur athlete.

Cunningham went on to break the world indoor record for the 1,500-meter three times. In 1936, he earned a silver medal at the Berlin Olympics for the 1,500-meter race. He won 22 indoor miles at Madison Square Garden and garnered the nickname the "Kansas Flyer" for his outstanding performances. Cunningham was elected to the USA Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1974. After retiring from running in 1940, Cunningham went on to serve in the Navy, teach at Cornell College, and return home with his wife to open Glenn Cunningham Youth Ranch in Kansas for underprivileged youth.

Wes Santee, an Ashland, Kan., native, was born in 1932 where he ran for play. Although his father didn't think it would do much for him in life, Santee had other plans. He attended the University of Kansas where, as a sophomore, he earned a spot on the 1952 Olympic team. However, he was only allowed to compete in the 5,000-meter race and finished a disappointing 13<sup>th</sup> in his qualifying heat. He came back to the states and boldly announced he would be the first runner to break the four-minute mark in the mile run.

Santee, along with Roger Bannister of Great Britain and John Landy of Australia, competed to take the legendary title, but it was Bannister who won. Regardless, Santee went on to take numerous national and world record titles. He won the NCAA outdoor mile and 5,000-meter, the USA indoor mile, and the USA outdoor mile. In 1956, Santee broke Cunningham's world record for the indoor 1,500-meter race.

Santee was a versatile runner and a true team player who also ran anchor legs for many Kansas relay teams. He often ran several races in the same meet, which may have contributed to his downfall in the race to break the four-minute mile. Santee was named the recipient of the United States Sports Academy's Distinguished Service Award in 2005, the same year he was inducted into the Kansas Relays Hall of Fame, the Kansas Hall of Fame, and the USA Track and Field Hall of Fame. Santee is retired from the insurance business and resides in Eureka, Kan.

Jim Ryun was the last of the three Kansas runners to dominate his era in track and field. Ryun was born in Wichita, Kan., on April 29, 1947. As a junior at Wichita East High School, Ryun began building his legacy as an incredible runner. He became the first high school athlete to run the mile in less than four minutes. From this amazing feat, he earned a spot on the 1964 Olympic team.

The following year, Ryun broke the U.S. mile record with a time of 3:55.3, and he remains one of only three high school runners to break the four-minute mark. Ryun attended the University of Kansas where he continued to set records. In 1966, at age 19, he set the world record in the 800 and the mile, for which he was chosen Sportsman of the Year by "Sports Illustrated" and recipient of the Sullivan Award as the nation's top amateur athlete. The following year came his world record in the 1,500-meter race.

Ryun ran in the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico City, where he won the silver medal in the 1,500. He also competed in the 1972 Olympics in Munich but was tripped in the qualifying heat. Ryun became a professional athlete in 1973 and was elected to the USA Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1980.

With his athletic career behind him, Ryun turned to politics. He was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1996, and won re-election in 1998, 2000, 2002 and 2004. Ryun has a home in Lawrence, Kan., with his wife; they have four children and four grandchildren.

