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# TRACK & FIELD

NEWS


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El Guerrouj  
On Fire

The Mile's  
New King







El Guerrouj had Gebrselassie for company when he broke the 1500 record, but when he crunched the mile standard he was on his own.



## TWO WORLD RECORDS

# El G: 3:31.18, 3:48.45

from Ed Gordon

Stuttgart, Germany, February 2 & Ghent, Belgium, February 12—After Hicham El Guerrouj's 3:31.18 crushed the 1500 World Record, one had to wonder what he could run after he had a square meal. The answer to that question came 10 days later, as the 22-year-old Moroccan—freed from religious fasting—claimed the mile WR, running 3:48.45.

But if El Guerrouj lacked nourishment in Stuttgart—as part of the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims cannot eat or drink from dawn to dusk—Haile Gebrselassie must have found the 3:31.18 hard to believe. Ethiopia's Olympic 10K champ ran a superb 3:32.39 of his own, almost two seconds under Nouredine Morceli's '91 standard of 3:34.16—yet finished better than a second behind the Moroccan.

The pair ran crisply in the early laps (56.0, 1:52.6) in the Schleyer Halle, with Gebrselassie right on El Guerrouj's shoulder. Only after he passed the kilo post (2:21.0) was El Guerrouj able to assert himself. He powered away over the final 400, clocking the same 56.0 as he had for the opening segment.

El Guerrouj thought there was more there. "I could have run under 3:30 today," he said. "But my trainer told me to ease up if the record was sure. He shouted to me with two laps remaining. We have more races planned indoors, so there's no point in doing too much damage to the record at once."

He had originally planned to run the 1500 again in Ghent. But after his boggling Stuttgart record, he decided to go after Eamonn Coghlan's mile standard of 3:49.78, the oldest individual men's World Record on the books, with the potential of lowering the 1500 mark en route.

The Moroccan broke with the pack of real racers before the first lap of the Expo Hall's 200m oval was complete, so intent was he to attack the record.

He stuck faithfully with his pacers, San Francisco-based Australian Peter Stubbs and German Rüdiger Stenzel. Stubbs carried him through opening quarters of 56.3 and 57.4 (1:53.7). "The start was incredibly fast, perhaps too fast," he analyzed later.

Then, after Stenzel continued through the kilo (2:21.42), El Guerrouj became dissatisfied with the sagging pace. So, he struck out on his own, passing the 1320 mark in 2:50.7. As he passed through the 1500 he logged a 3:33.01, not a WR, but still the No. 3 time ever.

Finishing a far-back 2nd was

Belgium's Christophe Impens at 3:54.13, easily a national record in a distance now infrequently run in Europe.

El Guerrouj claimed a slew of "firsts" with his pair of records: the first man to hold both the indoor 1500 and mile WRs since American Glenn Cunningham in '38; the first indoor mile record ever set outside the United States; the first indoor recordsetter not to hail from the U.S. or Ireland in 42 years.

When Coghlan learned of the demise of his long-standing mile record (see p. 46), the Irish legend said, "It's about time. After El Guerrouj ran that 3:31, I knew a mile record was on the cards. I knew his setting a mile mark was just a matter of time."

El Guerrouj admitted, "After two World Records like this, I am totally exhausted." He said he won't defend his World Indoor 1500 title in Paris in March.

But virtually regardless of what he does or doesn't do for the remainder of the indoor campaign, El Guerrouj has confirmed his status as one of the brightest stars from distance-strong Morocco.

His star might have become huge last year, when he produced the year's fastest 1500, but he had an unfortunate disaster in Atlanta. Primed by his training for a prominent Olympic showing, he lurked behind Morceli just before the bell in the final. But then he tripped, fell and struggled home last.

His tumble was a bitter let-down, but El Guerrouj rebounded to go undefeated in post-Olympic races and ran 3:29.05. Most pleasing was going head-to-head with Morceli in the GP Final, exacting revenge over the Algerian and handing the Olympic champ his only loss of the season.

Running first captivated El Guerrouj before he was 10, when he watched hero Saïd Aouita's victory in the '84 Olympic 5000. He was winning school races by '87, regional contests by '89 and he made Morocco's national junior squad in '91.

At the '92 World Juniors, El Guerrouj won the 5000 bronze—behind Gebrselassie and Kenya's Ismael Kirui. He made a major decision in '94—moving down to concentrate on the 1500. That summer, still just 19, he PRed at 3:33.61.

The '95 campaign saw El

— continued on p. 46 —

### Mile WR Progression

4:32.6	Walter George (GB)	NY City	5/15/86
4:26.0	A.J. Walsh (US)	?	..... /98
4:25.2	Mel Sheppard (US)	NY City	1/26/06
4:24.0	Frank Nebrich (US)	NY City	6/ / 06
	James Lightbody (US)	Chicago	..... /07
4:23.0	Tad White (US)	NY City	..... /08
4:19.8	Harold Trube (US)	NY City	2/13/09
	Oscar Hedlund (US)	?	..... 2/22/12
4:18.8	Hedlund	NY City	2/12/13
4:18.2	Abe Kiviat (US)	NY City	2/15/13
4:16.0	John Overton (US)	Philadelphia	3/10/17
4:14.6	Joie Ray (US)	Chicago	4/12/19
4:13.6	Paavo Nurmi (Fin)	NY City	1/ 6/25
4:13.4	Lloyd Hahn (US)	NY City	2/14/25
4:12.0	Nurmi	Buffalo	3/ 7/25
	Ray	NY City	3/17/25
4:11.2	Gene Venzke (US)	NY City	2/ 6/32
4:10.0	Venzke	NY City	2/17/32
4:09.8	Glenn Cunningham (US)	Chicago	3/25/33
4:08.4	Cunningham	NY City	3/17/34
4:07.4	Cunningham	NY City	3/12/38
	Charles Fenske (US)	NY City	2/ 3/40
	Fenske	NY City	2/17/40
	Les MacMitchell (US)	NY City	2/15/41
	Walter Mehl (US)	NY City	2/15/41
4:07.3	Gil Dodds (US)	NY City	3/11/44
4:06.4	Dodds	Chicago	3/18/44
4:05.3	Dodds	NY City	1/31/48
4:04.9	Wes Santee (US)	E Lansing	2/15/54
4:03.8	Santee	Boston	1/29/55
4:03.6	Gunnar Nielsen (Den)	NY City	2/ 5/55
4:03.4	Ron Delany (Ire)	Chicago	3/14/58
4:02.5	Delany	NY City	2/21/59
4:01.4	Delany	NY City	3/ 7/59
3:58.9	Jim Beatty (US)	Los Angeles	2/10/62
3:58.6	Beatty	NY City	2/15/63
3:56.6	Tom O'Hara (US)	NY City	2/13/64
3:56.4	O'Hara	Chicago	3/ 6/64
	Jim Ryun (US)	San Diego	2/19/71
3:55.0	Tony Waldrop (US)	San Diego	2/17/74
3:54.93	Dick Buerkle (US)	College Park	1/13/78
3:52.6	Eamonn Coghlan (Ire)	San Diego	2/16/79
3:50.6	Coghlan	San Diego	2/20/81
3:49.78	Coghlan	E Rutherford	2/27/83
3:48.45	Hicham El Guerrouj (Mor)	Ghent	2/12/97



## EL GUERROUJ — continued from p. 7:

Guerrouj establish himself among the world's elite milers. He won the World title indoors, then claimed silver behind Morceli at the outdoor Worlds in Sweden. He PR'd in Cologne with 3:31.16 and earned his first World Ranking, a No. 3. Last year brought No. 2, and the next logical step is No. 1, a position held for a record seven years in a row by Morceli.

But is Morceli such a good judge of talent that he won't be around for No. 8? After the Olympics, Morceli said of the fallen El Guerrouj, "He is a great athlete. He has a good future."

But rumor has it that Morceli will move up to the 5000, with some observers wondering if it's because the Algerian realizes the Moroccan's future is more than just "good."

### Gebrselassie Just Misses His Own 3K Record

It's likely that some of the world's distance stars shook in their shoes when they saw the PR 3:32.39 in the 1500 by Gebrselassie behind El Guerrouj's WR. As if the Olympic 10K champ had to again display his improved speed, a week later he clocked 1:49.35 for 5th in an 800 in Dortmund.

But the Ethiopian star returned to a more normal distance at Karlsruhe (February 14) in a stated attempt on his own WR of 7:30.72 in the 3000. A large field of 13 wasn't advantageous—but he didn't give them the chance to get in his way.

Gebrselassie followed pacer Stubbs through a 58.3, well ahead of the 62.1 tempo of the record effort. The margins remained ahead of record pace at 800 (1:59.1-2:01.6), 1000 (2:29.3-2:31.6) and on through 1800m (4:31.7-4:32.6).

But it wasn't fast enough for Gebrselassie. He gave a slight shove in the back to the other pacer, Kenyan Moses Kegan, around 1200m, hoping for a speedup. But there was only a slight increase before the pace throttled back again. The WR holder took command near the 1700m mark and the pace continued to slip by the 2K post (5:02.12-5:01.92).

With 400 to go, Gebr's 6:32.8 trailed the 6:31.2 of last year by 1.6 seconds. Even though his last pair of 200s (29.9, 28.6) were easily faster than in '96 (30.2, 29.4), he fell 0.55 short of his mark.

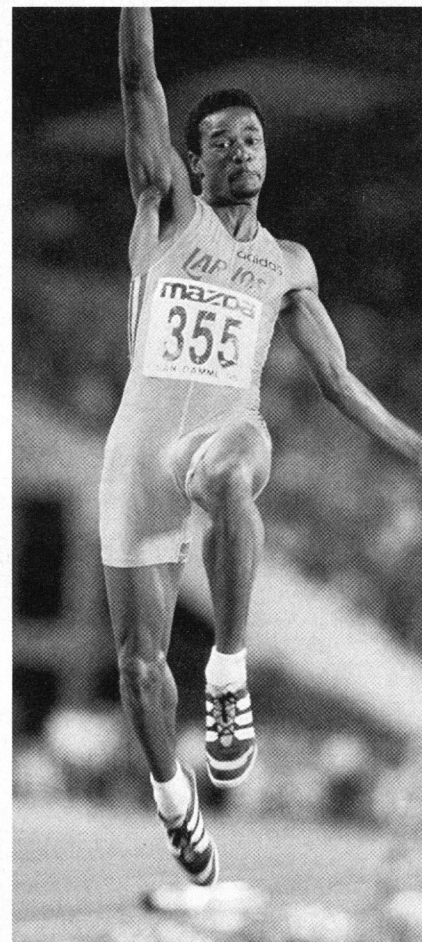
"I came here to break the World Record," he said, diplomatically placing no blame for the erratic pace. "From that standpoint, I'm disappointed with my race."

### Pedroso Soars Again

Ivan Pedroso easily has been the long jump's best so far, the 24-year-old Cuban duplicating his strong showing of last winter, when he had five 27-foot meets in January and February.

This year Pedroso opened with 27-6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in Moscow (February 8) to turn back Russia's Kiril Sosunov (27-1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>). He admitted, "I'm really happy with this performance."

Pedroso led the '96 indoor season at 27-9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, but missed much of the outdoor campaign



Chasing Lewis's WR, Pedroso will look for a third straight Worlds gold.

after surgery on torn thigh muscles in late March. He was able to return in time for the Olympics, but managed only 10th in Atlanta at a mere 25-5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>.

After his Moscow win, he added, "I don't feel my injury anymore. I'm no longer apprehensive. I want to forget that cursed year of 1996. Moscow has reassured me."

Pedroso promptly tacked on another half-inch to his season-pacing mark when he spanned 27-6<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in Ghent. That mark lasted only four days as the world leader, until Pedroso spanned a big 28-2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in Liévin (February 16).

That's the No. 2 indoor leap ever, trailing only Carl Lewis's 28-10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of '84, which after the fall of Coghlan's mile mark is the longest-standing men's indoor WR. Said Pedroso, "I knew I was fit, but I'm still surprised. I didn't expect to do so well."

Pedroso actually had to come through with the big mark on his last attempt to win. He had opened with a foul, taken the lead at 27-1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>, then fouled three times, while Sosunov hit 27-3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> to lead after the fifth round.

Erick Walder (26-10), Kareem Streete-Thompson (26-5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>) and James Beckford (26-4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>) followed.

### Coghlan's Long Reign Ends

After Hicham El Guerrouj set his 1500 record, Millrose meet director Howard Schmertz called mile recordman Eamonn Coghlan. "Isn't 3:31.1 roughly equal to a 3:48 mile, faster than your record [of 3:49.78]?" Schmertz joshed his longtime friend.

"Maybe," the Irishman replied. "But he didn't run the mile."

Ten days later, though, El Guerrouj collared Coghlan's record, ending the longest reign ever by a holder of the indoor mile WR.

Coghlan set his first mile best of 3:52.6 on February 16, 1979. He lowered it to 3:50.6 on February 20, 1981, then to his fabled 3:49.78 on February 27, 1983.

So the Irishman held the record for just four days short of a full 18 years. The only other to hold the mile mark longer than a decade was the event's first: the 4:32.6 by Britain's fabled professional, Walter George, stood 1886-'98.

"Sometimes I felt like I held the record for a lifetime," Coghlan said a few days after El Guerrouj's performance. "As the years went by, the longer it stood, the prouder I felt."

"I admit I came to feel very possessive of the

record. My daughter Suzanne was only three months old when I ran 3:49. Now she is in her first year of college in Dublin."

Coghlan was a master of the rhythm of running on tighter, smaller U.S. indoor tracks. "I always felt it was possible to run faster indoors than outdoors," he said. "The 200m tracks can be faster than outdoor tracks. You can get a really nice spring from them."

"El Guerrouj was 4 seconds faster than me at the 1320. But I ran a faster last 440. With a faster last quarter, I could see him running 3:46."

One aspect of indoor racing in his heyday, Coghlan pointed out, was that "all the milers put themselves on the line week after week. John Walker, Steve Scott, Ray Flynn, Thomas Wessinghage; we met twice every weekend and ran in the 3:55-3:58 range."

Two days before his 3:49.78, Coghlan won the U.S. indoor title at 3:58.5 from Scott and Flynn. He added, "It's probably not as lucrative to race like that now."

Added Coghlan, "I think Europeans now realize the mile is a great competitive event. I hope this new record will rekindle keen interest in the mile." //Jon Hendershott/