

# Jack Lovelock 1910-1949

*Olympic champion, doctor*



John Edward Lovelock, 1936. (Alexander Turnbull Library, Ref: ½-044673-F)

Jack Lovelock is known to New Zealanders as the athlete who won New Zealand's first Olympic gold medal for athletics in 1936. Less well known is the role the Rhodes scholarship played in his development.

Lovelock started to develop into a dedicated athlete as a student at Timaru Boys' High. He continued running during his medical studies at Otago University, and his athletic ability helped him to win a Rhodes scholarship. But when he left New Zealand for Oxford, Lovelock had never won a national title.

Oxford had an immediate impact on Lovelock's running. He became a member of the exclusive Achilles club (open only to athletes from Oxford and Cambridge), which dominated British athletics at the time. In 1932, under the instruction of the Club coach, Bill Thomas, and in the company of some of the best middle-distance runners in the world, Lovelock broke the British mile record. The following year he broke the world record in America. He

was now an international sports star and huge crowds watched his races against the leading British, European and American runners.

At Oxford Lovelock also became good friends with Arthur Porritt, an earlier New Zealand Rhodes scholar and Olympic medallist, who was working in Britain as a surgeon. According to Porritt it was he who advised Lovelock to run the 1500 metres, instead of the 5000 metres at the Berlin Olympics in 1936.

'Jack was a great worrier. He ran on nervous energy. Physically he was very fit, but mentally he was very fragile, jumpy even ... After the race in Berlin, Jack was absolutely delighted. I'd never seen him like that before and never again. He was human. He was overjoyed, and grateful. He said to me, "You made the right decision."'

Lovelock had set a new world record and won New Zealand's first Olympic gold medal in athletics. In his diary he wrote, 'It was undoubtedly the most beautifully executed race of my career. A true climax to years of steady work, an artistic creation.'

After his Olympic victory he retired from running and completed his medical training. He married and moved to New York where he died when he fell under a subway train.



Jack Lovelock after his victory over rivals Glen Cunningham and Bill Bonthron in the 'mile of the century', at the Princeton Invitational meeting, New York, 15 June 1935. (Alexander Turnbull Library, Ref: ½-051288-F)

*'Look at Lovelock – quite an ordinary man in NZ, but now one of the world's best and simply because he has had the opportunity of running with champions ...'*

Harry Amos, chairman of the New Zealand Olympic Committee in a letter to Arthur Porritt, 10 December 1932. Original letter held by the Olympic Museum, Wellington.