

# Glenn Cunningham

## The Iron Man From Kansas



*Photo courtesy of  
Kansas Athletics*

When he was 7 years old, Glenn and his older brother Floyd had the chore of starting a fire in the rural schoolhouse stove every cold morning. One February morning in 1916, the kerosene container had accidentally been filled with gasoline. The stove exploded and both Glenn and Floyd were terribly burned. There was no phone and no ambulance, so they ran two miles home before receiving treatment. Floyd died, and Glenn's legs were so badly burned, his doctors told him he would never walk again. He was bed-ridden for months. Showing a fierce determination and with a great deal of agony, he slowly began to recover and was able to walk on crutches. Finally, he got rid of the crutches but, as he said later, "It hurt like thunder to walk, but it didn't hurt at all when I ran. So for five or six years, about all I did was run."

Glenn became a miler in high school in Elkhart, Kansas, and set a high school record of 4:24.7 in his last race. He entered the University of Kansas in 1931 and won the NCAA 1500-meter title in 1932. Glenn went on to finish fourth in the 1932 Olympic 1500 meters. In the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, he put on a burst of speed in the third lap to try to break away from the field, but took a silver medal behind New Zealand's Jack

Lovelock, who ran a world record 3:47.8.

Because of circulation problems caused by his childhood accident, Glenn needed nearly an hour to prepare for a race. He first had to massage his legs and he then required a long warm-up period. He overcame the odds and was the fastest American miler during the 1930's, setting a world record in 1934 of 4:06.8, and also an 800-meter world record of 1:49.7.

### Questions for Thought:

1. How did Glenn Cunningham overcome his adversity?
2. Think of an adversity that you have had. How did you overcome it?
3. What do you think is the most important factor in overcoming a challenge?