

Tiger Track Men Crack World's Record

They didn't get to practice on the old shale track. The rain and sleet falling through the new seats at the south end of Faurt Field had ridged the surface. And there hadn't been time to roll it anyway: The baseball diamond and football practice fields had to be done first.

But the members of Mizzou's sprint-medley relay team didn't let that bother them. They practiced their handoffs indoors and roared to a world's record time in the Baylor Invitational Relays April 20 at Waco, Texas.

World's records, quite naturally, are hard to come by. No Missouri relay team ever had held one, and the Tigers' only individual world champion was Bob Simpson, who hurled his way to track immortality in 1916.

The sprint-medley is a 1,600-meter event consisting of two legs of 200 meters, one of 400, and an anchor of 800 meters.

Junior Dan Lavitt of Kansas City is an all-America hurdler who holds Missouri records in both the 60-yard highs and lows and the outdoor 120-yard high hurdles. Running the first leg, Lavitt passes the baton to Nigerian Ed Ofili, who holds the Tiger mark of 10.19 in the 100-meter dash.

His fellow countryman, Dele Udo, is the Big Eight record holder in the 400-meter dash. Both Ofili and Udo were members of the 1976 Nigerian Olympic team. Anchorman Scott Clark is another all-America performer and holds the Mizzou mark in the 800-meter run. A native of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, Clark is the son of a former Tiger 60-yard champion who also was a teammate of current Missouri Coach Bob Teel.

"We never talked about it as a group," says Teel. "I never said, 'Guys, let's get the world record.' But all of us knew we had a chance when we came so close last year at Baylor."

Then, Mizzou ran a 3:15.85, the fastest sprint-medley time recorded anywhere in the world in 1978. And Udo had a sore foot. This year at Baylor, Udo was suffering from a recurrence of chronic malaria and hadn't practiced all week.

Lavitt opened up with a 21.6, but a bobbled handoff between him and Ofili had the Tigers in trouble. Ofili posted a time of 20.6 and gave the baton to Udo with Missouri in third place, behind Lamar and Baylor. A great 45.4 quarter by Udo, malaria and all, opened up a seven-yard lead for Clark.

When Clark ran the first quarter in 51.5, Teel knew the Tigers had a good shot at the record. But for a while, it looked as if Rice's great runner, Bruce Gingrich, might overtake Clark. The field announcer, in fact, commented on Gingrich's "tremendous kick."

"As we hit the backstretch, he started his kick," remembers Clark. "But I laid back and waited to make my move. Once we hit the curve, I buried him. It was one of the best kicks of my life." Clark had a 1:46.1 for the 800 meters.

The Missouri time of 3:13.7 was more than a second faster than the former world mark of 3:14.8 set by North Carolina Central in 1972 at the Penn Relays.

This has been a good year for Missouri track. The Tigers won the Big Eight indoor crown and were clearly the outstanding team in the Drake Relays.

Just think what they can do when Mizzou gets up-to-date track and field facilities. — Steve Shinn



Lavitt



Udo



O'fili



Clark