Glenn Cunningham
by Guy Belleranti

When his legs were severely burned in a schoolhouse fire, doctors told Glenn Cunningham he would never walk again. His brother Floyd had died in the fire and Glenn was lucky to even be alive. However, Glenn refused to accept the doctor's pronouncement. For months, his parents took turns massaging his legs and he forced himself to first walk and then run. In fact, Cunningham found it was less painful to run than to walk. His arduous and almost miraculous recovery continued. Finally, in 1921 at age twelve, when he won a race against schoolmates he became determined to pursue running in competitive form.

But Glenn Cunningham was only getting started. He enrolled at the University of Kansas. Here he went on to star in the Big Six Conference, winning multiple NCAA track titles and setting records. One former University of Kansas track coach, Brutus Hamilton, was enthralled with Cunningham "the strongest miler ever to step on a track". Cunningham became America's top middle distance runner over the next decade. The Kansas Flyer, the Iron Horse of Kansas and the Kansas Ironman were a few of the nicknames people gave him. He became a member of the 1932 U.S. Olympic track team. In 1933, he won the Sullivan Award as the nation's top amateur athlete. In 1936 he was in the Olympics again, winning a silver medal in the 1500-meter run. And throughout the 30's he set both new national and world records in events such as the 1500 meters and the mile.
Glenn Cunningham also captured the hearts of many. He had overcome extreme physical adversity. He was also modest, practiced good sportsmanship and neither drank nor smoked. Fans and sports writers alike loved him. Even though it was an era when many smoked, it is said fans would put out their cigarettes when Cunningham raced out of respect for him. After graduating from the University of Kansas Cunningham moved on to earn a Masters degree in Physical Education from the University of Iowa. And after the 1936 Olympics he continued competing in Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) track events even though he was now married and a new father. He also started working toward his PHD. In 1938 he set a new world record in the indoor mile. He also earned his Doctorate from New York University.

Cunningham hoped for the chance to compete in another Olympics and a possible gold medal. Unfortunately, however, when World War II broke out in Europe he knew this dream wasn't to be. He retired from running in 1940 and served in the Navy, establishing new physical fitness training programs at Navy training stations. Later, in civilian life he worked several years as director of physical education at Cornell College in Iowa. After this he and his wife opened the Glenn Cunningham Youth Camp in Kansas where they helped underprivileged children.

Years later, Glenn Cunningham was honored with several awards. In 1974 the Athletics Congress (now called USA Track and Field) established its Hall of Fame in Charleston, West Virginia. They included Cunningham as one of the first inductees. And in 1978 Madison Square Garden in New York City honored him as the most outstanding track and field athlete in its first 100 years.

When Glenn Cunningham died in 1988 he left behind a legacy of accomplishment. And Kansas University continues to honor this man every year when it presents its annual Glenn Cunningham Award to the track athlete who best demonstrates triumph over adversity.
Glenn Cunningham

1) How does paragraph one succeed in catching readers' attention instantly?

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2) What factors, as mentioned in the text, helped Cunningham win people's hearts?

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3) Narrate an instance from your own experience which demonstrates "triumph of determination over adversity".

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Glenn Cunningham

4) a. Write the meanings of the words given below and frame sentences using these.

arduous - 

miraculous - 

b. A person who doesn’t smoke is called a non-smoker. What do we call a person who doesn’t drink alcohol?

5) The central message of the text is “if you have a never-say-die attitude and strong will, you can defy any odds in life.” Write a secondary message that we draw from the text.
Glenn Cunningham

1) How does paragraph one succeed in catching readers' attention instantly?

   The author starts by saying that Glenn Cunningham was badly injured in a fire and doctors said he won't be able to walk again let alone become an athlete. The second half of the paragraph talks about how Glenn refused to give in, and thanks to his strong determination and his parents' unwavering support, he proved the doctors wrong. The author has skillfully used juxtaposition in this paragraph to arouse immense interest and enthusiasm in readers.

2) What factors, as mentioned in the text, helped Cunningham win people's hearts?

   First of all, people knew of his indomitable will which helped him survive the hardest times in life and become a celebrated athlete. He practiced modesty at all times. Not only did he abstain from smoking, but also he refrained from drinking.

3) Narrate an instance from your own experience which demonstrates "triumph of determination over adversity".

   Answers may vary.
Glenn Cunningham

4) a. Write the meanings of the words given below and frame sentences using these.

arduous - It means something hard to accomplish.

It took Tom years of arduous training to reach this position.

miraculous - It means something very surprising and difficult to believe. Ms. Eliza's recovery from her illness was miraculous.

b. A person who doesn't drink alcohol is called a non-drinker. What do we call a person who doesn't drink alcohol?

Teetotaler

Answers may vary.

It took Tom years of arduous training to reach this position.

5) The central message of the text is "if you have a never-say-die attitude and strong will, you can defy any odds in life." Write a secondary message that we draw from the text.

Answers may vary.