

Track and Field



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The Man in the Seven-League Boots

The intense specialization that has become the hallmark of contemporary track and field has made back-to-back victories a rare occurrence in international competition. Yet, even before the stunning performance of Finland's Lasse Viren, Alberto Juantorena of Cuba managed a double victory at Montreal. In four days' time he set a world record for the 800 m (1:43.5) and won the 400 m in 44.26, the best time at sea level in the world. Although the Cuban had been a favorite for the shorter distances, his 800 m victory came as a shock. Before the 1976 Games, Juantorena had run that event only five times in major competitions.

This double triumph by "The Locomotive", as he was dubbed by his teammates, is not without precedent in the history of track and field. Paul Pilgrim of the USA won both events at the unofficial Olympic Games of 1906 in Athens. And no doubt, Rudolf Harbig would have repeated this achievement, if his career had not been cut short by World War II. In 1940, the year of the Olympics, Harbig held the world-

record times for the 400 m and for the 800 m.

But Juantorena, a basketball player and a Johnny-come-lately runner, did bring something new to the world of track and field—an extraordinary smooth and effortless style. Watching him run, purists were reminded of the stride of Michel Jazy, the Frenchman who dazzled television viewers in the 1960s.

His rugby-player's physique (6' 2" and 184 lbs) allows Juantorena to make sudden increases in his naturally long stride, and makes him look as if he's wearing seven-league boots.

ALBERTO JUANTORENA

Born Dec. 3, 1951, in Oriente, CUB

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1976 OG: gold medal in the 400 m and 800 m;
and a world record of 1:43.5 in the 800 m

The triumphant winner in the 400 m finals at the 1976 Montreal Olympics