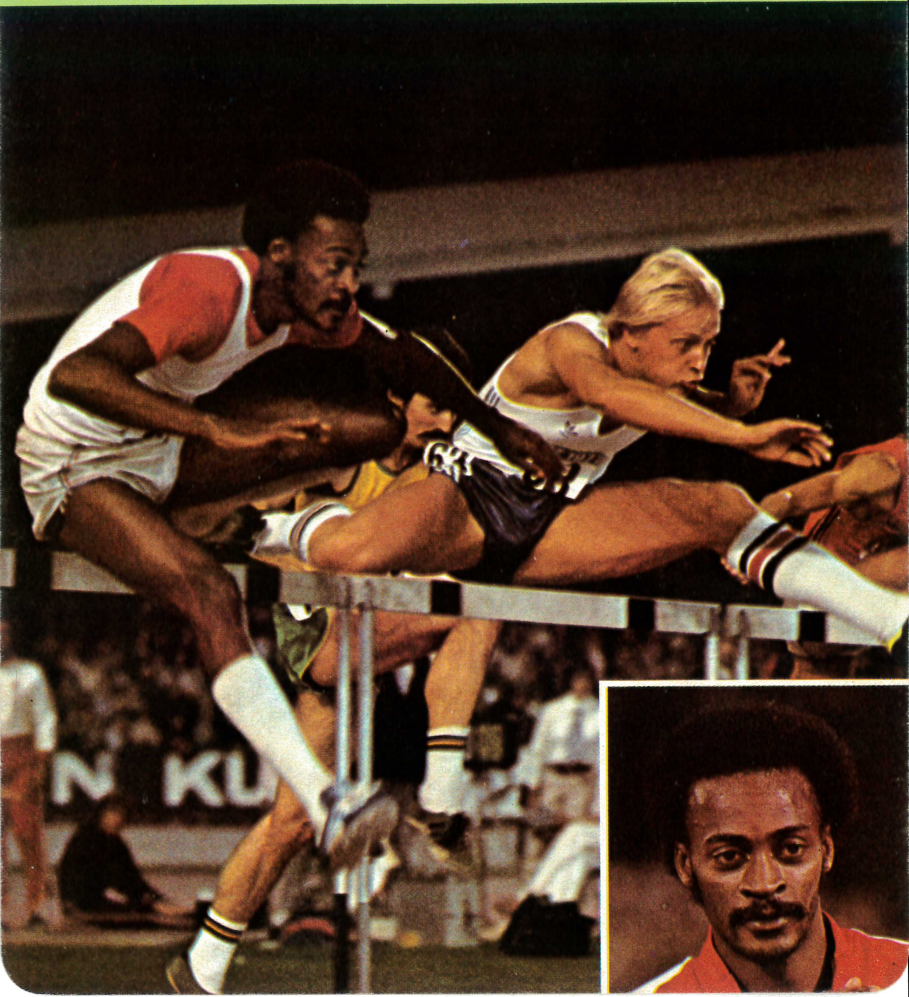


Track and Field



Alejandro Casanas



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Successor to Guy Drut

Casanas' astonishing ability was revealed during the Cuban national schools games of 1969. On that occasion, Alejandro, then aged 15, ran the 110-m hurdles in 15.9 sec. Two years later, when he took part in the Pan-American Games at Cali (Colombia), he finished fourth. His own personal best performance stood at 13.3 sec and by the time he was 19 he already looked like an Olympic medallist. Unfortunately, he was seriously injured during his heat of the Munich Games, an injury which kept him out of competition for eighteen months. But thanks to his determination and the dedication of his coach, Irolan Hechevarria, he quickly returned to the forefront of world hurdlers.

He is very fast (he has already won a flat 100 m in 10.1 and the 200 m in 20.8) and has a good technique over the hurdles, but the start is his weak point. This was clear on the occasion of the final of the Montreal Games, where he was beaten by a very determined Guy Drut who was far from his best form. Official timings showed that the Cuban had started 88 thousandths of a second behind the Frenchman; in other words, no more than the time it

took both of them to react at the start of the race. By the finish, only 30 thousandths separated the two men and everyone agreed that Drut had won by the minutest margin.

Alejandro Casanas at least had the consolation of knowing that he had a good future ahead of him. Soon after Drut retired, the Cuban set up a new world record of 13.21 sec in Sofia, in August 1977. Even the American Rod Milburn had been unable to do as well during his most brilliant phase. However, the prestige of this exploit, achieved under favourable circumstances and without great opposition, was tarnished two weeks later by his easy defeat by the East German Thomas Munkelt during the first World Championships. It was also Munkelt who deprived him once more of a gold medal in the 1980 Olympics.

ALEJANDRO CASANAS

Born Jan. 29, 1954, at Guanabacoa, Cuba

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1975: gold medal at Panamerican Games in Mexico City, in 13.44

1976 OG: silver medal in 13.33

1980 OG: silver medal in 13.40

1977: world record breaker at Sofia, on Aug. 21, in 13.21; 2nd in the World Cup in 13.50

1979: silver medal at Panamerican Games in 13.46

University Games in Sofia (1977): Casanas (foreground) winning the 110-m hurdles