

Track and Field



Alexander Barishnikov



Track and Field



Alexander Barishnikov

A Difficult Technique

Contrary to popular belief, Alexander Barishnikov did not invent a new technique by putting the shot like a discus-thrower. Czech technical experts had in fact already tested this method in the early 1960s with a thrower called Malek. They had been quick to abandon it, thinking it had no future. It is true that when the Russian Barishnikov, on the advice of his trainer Viktor Alexeiev, took it up again, he caused considerable amusement.

A giant at 6' 7" and weighing 280 lb, Barishnikov felt somewhat hampered with the traditional technique when he had to move in a 2.135-m diameter circle. He had never in fact managed to throw further than 17 m (55 ft 9 in). As he was a discus-thrower with a good technique, Alexeiev suggested that he should spin round before putting the shot. The first results were rather comical. But after patient efforts, the tall Russian came second with 19.28 m (63 ft 3 in) at the national indoor championships in 1972. At that stage he had not, though, perfectly mastered the finer points of his new style.

He was conspicuous at the 1972 Munich Olympics where, regarded as a

curiosity of little interest, he did not manage to qualify for the final being eliminated with a throw of 18.65 m (61 ft 2 in). However, just before the European Championships in Rome in 1974, Barishnikov threw 21.70 m (71 ft 2 in). At the Championships proper, he finished only fourth. The doubts expressed about his technique redoubled. It was the same story at the 1976 Montreal Olympics where he went as the new world record-holder, having thrown 22 m (72 ft 2 in) in Paris on 10 July 1976. He obtained only a disappointing bronze medal. In actual fact, the technique of a spinning throw, though difficult to master, is potentially a great step forward. The throw of 22.84 m (74 ft 11 in) achieved by the American professional Brian Oldfield, bears witness to this.

ALEXANDER BARISHNIKOV

Born 11 November 1948.

AWARDS AND RECORDS

EC 1974: 4th with 20.13 m (66 ft 0₂ in)
EC 1978: bronze medallist with 20.68 m (67 ft 10 in)
OG 1976: bronze medallist with 21 m (68 ft 11 in).
ER: 21.70 m (71 ft 2 in) on 25 August 1974 in Moscow.
WR: 22 m (72 ft 2 in) on 10 July 1976 in Paris.

The flag in one hand and the shot 22 meters away