

Track and Field



Carlos Lopes



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A Revolutionary Champion

No matter how talented an athlete may be, he will never become a champion unless the right opportunities are there. For Carlos Lopes the turning point came on 1 November 1975. Originally discovered by trainer Mario Moniz-Pereira, he had been dragging his feet for nine long years when a new scheme for preparing Olympic athletes was officially launched. Portugal's seven top athletes were affected by this new program which was the result of increased importance being placed on sporting achievement as a direct outcome of the recent political revolution. Carlos Lopes and his fellow athletes were encouraged to train two or even three times a day and the 28-year-old long-distance runner began at last to hope that the years of training would eventually pay off.

He was right to hope. Early in 1976 Lopes ran a brilliant cross-country race in Chepstow, in Wales and left the opposition way behind. He was not a particularly fast finisher, though he covered the 1,500 m in 3 min 44.3 sec, and he intended being right up with the head of the field in Montreal. With this in mind he set about a rigorous training program,

much tougher than his normal runs across the golf course. The change of style gave him a severe case of tendinitis and threatened to put paid to his career altogether, but he recovered and won the silver medal in Montreal.

Between the 5th and 9th kilometers Lopes maintained a steady rhythm of between 2 min 43 sec and 2 min 44 sec per km, with Finland's Lasse Viren always at his heels, who 400 m from the end, put on a sudden spurt, leaving the Portuguese to take second place. Viren's victory was looked upon as not particularly moral, but a great victory nonetheless. Meanwhile, Portugal had never before achieved such a high result in the Olympic Games and this result ensured Lopes' future as an athlete. For this part-time bank clerk from Viseu (a town situated in the north of Portugal some 3,300 ft above sea-level) and the son of a peasant, this meant a great deal.

CARLOS LOPES

Born Feb. 18, 1947, in Viseu, Portugal

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1976 Olympic Games: silver medal in the 10,000 m in 27' 45" 17

Carlos Lopes leading the field with Lasse Viren (fifth) the eventual winner, still firmly boxed in