

# Track and Field



*Colette Besson*



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### *Tears in Mexico*

People in France will not easily forget Colette Besson's tears in Mexico, 1968, as she stood on the highest step of the rostrum as the notes of the 'Marseillaise' rang out. Neither will they forget the declarations she made eight years later to bring to people's notice her penniless existence. In the meantime, she had been given everything: a sports car, an hour-long television program, the Legion of Honor. However, her fame eventually waned, and with it disappeared everyone who had flocked round the champion. When Colette's way of life reverted to what it had been before, she found it difficult to forget her years as a heroine.

In Mexico, Colette Besson, who had just won the French 400 m title for the first time, began with a performance of 53.8 secs. This time put her in tenth place among the qualifiers. However, in the final the French girl ran a stupendous last straight which enabled her to overtake the ill-fated British girl, Lilian Board, to win by 32 inches (82 cm). How the French sportswriters reacted! They discovered that the Olympic champion had made her debut in 1960, that she had run her first 400 m in a time of between 64 and

66 seconds, that she had a pulse rate of 44 beats per minute, and that she trained intensively.

The turning point in her career came in the following year when she met another French girl, Nicole Duclos, who beat her three times, including once in the European Championships in a world-class time. It is true that she changed her style of running and now started off very, very fast. Yves Durand-St-Omer, her coach, was thus able to claim that she would again become a world-class runner. None of this trainer's prophecies (he said she would beat all the French records from the 100 m to the 3,000 m) came true and Colette's fortunes gradually declined. In the end, perhaps it does not matter too much. She still goes running, seems to enjoy it a great deal, and had her great moment.

#### COLETTE BESSON

Born April 7, 1946, in Saint-Georges-de-Didonne, France

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1968 OG: gold medal in the 400 m in 52.0

1969 ECH: silver medal in the 400 m in 51.7

World records:

51.7 in the 400 m on 18 Sept. 1969 in Athens

3:30.8 in the 4 x 400 m relay on 20 Sept. 1969 in Athens, with Bernadette Martin, Nicole Duclos and Eliane Jacq

*Colette Besson: a stupendous final straight in Mexico*