

# Track and Field



*Emile Puttemans*



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## Emile Puttemans

### *A Great Temperamental Frailty*

Since he began racing in 1965 at the age of 18, the Belgian Emile Puttemans has broken a large number of world records in his career. But he never had the satisfaction of laying his hands on an official title at the Olympic Games or at the European Championships. This was caused by his temperamental frailty rather than by the weight of his national responsibilities. It was because of this that, although a 3 min 40.4 sec 1,500-m man, he was constantly obsessed by the fear of being beaten in the final sprint of a 10,000 m. The extent of his gifts (he ran the marathon in 2 hr 16 min 58 sec and the 3,000-m steeplechase in 8 min 27.8 sec) only added to his indecisiveness. Selected for the Mexican Olympics three years after his first competitions, Puttemans, to the surprise of his compatriots, qualified for the 5,000 m final, in which he finished twelfth.

He was in superb form at the time of the Munich Olympic Games in 1972, but nevertheless he conceded the 10,000-m gold medal to the Finn Lasse Viren, before throwing in the towel in the 5,000 m. Scarcely had the Games ended than he beat two outstanding records, which were so good that they had seemed safe for years; the 3,000 m set

up by the Kenyan Kip Keino in 1965 and the 5,000 m, established by Ron Clarke in 1966. From that time, the shy little Louvain gardener was caught up in a whirlwind which complicated his life. Tied to the scheming of a not particularly scrupulous manager, in trouble with the Royal Belgian Athletics League, entangled in love-affairs and thrust into the foreground of international publicity for which he was not cut out, he still achieved his finest exploit by running an indoor 2 miles, in Berlin, in 8 min 13.2 sec, passing the 1,500 m mark in 3 min 43 sec. This was in 1973. At the Montreal Olympic Games, injured and once more demoralized, Puttemans failed again.

#### EMILE PUTTEMANS

Born, Oct. 8, 1947, in Vossem, Belgium

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1972 OG: silver medal for the 10,000 m in 27 min 39.6 sec

World records:

7 min 37.6 sec in the 3,000 m on 14 April 1972 in Helsinki

8 min 17.8 sec in the 2 miles on 21 Aug. 1971 in Edinburgh

12 min 47.8 sec in the 3 miles on 20 Sept. 1972 in Brussels

13 min 13 sec in the 5,000 m on 20 Sept. 1972 in Brussels

*Emile Puttemans: a superb stride, but a temperament which was not equal to it*