

Track and Field



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Unlucky at Montreal

As they approached the last hurdle in the 3000 m steeplechase at the Montreal Olympics with only 68 m (75 yards) to go Anders Gärderud of Sweden and East Germany's Frank Baumgartl were neck and neck. Baumgartl should have won—he was a faster sprinter than Gärderud, and had steadily worked his way up the field despite the gruelling pace of the race. He attempted to leap the last hurdle, caught his ankle and went bowling to the ground like a shot rabbit. Gärderud, more cautious, put his foot on the hurdle, was over it and breasted the tape in the new world record time of 8 min 08.2 sec. Though Baumgartl picked himself up immediately, he was overtaken by Bronislaw Malinowski of Poland and had to be content with the bronze medal.

What did Baumgartl think about in those fatal few seconds? "About Lasse Viren of Finland in the final of the 10,000 m in Munich. He fell, but he won. That's what put me back on my feet so quickly." Asked what would have happened if he had not fallen he replied, with the objectivity one might expect of a physics

student, "There are no if's in athletics, or in physics." He knew all about falling bodies! In all probability his fall was not pure chance, but the result of fatigue. Until Baumgartl, East Germany was not a noted producer of steeplechasers. Baumgartl first entered the limelight at the 1973 European Junior Championships in Duisberg, setting a new junior record in the 2000 m. He combined, despite only one year of competition experience, excellent hurdle negotiating ability and an impressive turn of speed in the final straight. That same year he turned in a time of 8 min 36 sec in a 3000 m steeplechase, which, for health reasons, he failed to better in 1974 (8:44.2). However in 1975 he made up for lost form with a decisive personal best of 8 min 17.6 sec.

FRANK BAUMGARTL

Born May 29, 1955, in Schlema, East Germany

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1976 OG: Bronze medal in 3000 m steeplechase,
8:10.36 (East German record)

Frank Baumgartl: bronze medallist at Montreal