

# Track and Field



*George Woods*



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## George Woods

### *Unlucky at the OG*

In the annals of athletics, the American George Woods will be noted as the first man to have put the shot farther than 22 m. This he did during the evening of 8 February 1974, in the Los Angeles covered stadium. He will also be spoken of as an eternal victim of bad luck who never obtained results which bore any relation to his enormous physical powers. First there was the incomparable Randy Matson to bar his way to the Olympic title at the OG in Mexico in 1968. Four years later, he again let the gold medal escape him by just a tiny centimeter: 21.17 m against the 21.18 m of the Pole Vladyslav Komar. It is true that he had thrown with an injured finger. After that he wanted to give up shot-putting, but then regained confidence, and gave up the idea of becoming a professional in order "to show the East Germans and Komar that they were not the best".

Komar was no longer around at the OG in Montreal, but the East German Udo Beyer took the title, and things went even less well for Woods. In the qualifying rounds, he obtained the twelfth and last place reserved for the finalists. Woods had just scraped in with a throw of

19.35 m, as only 11 competitors had succeeded in reaching the qualifying distance (19.40 m). "That was the most terrible day in all my career," he declared, "I just wanted to go home and put a bullet through my head." However, the worst was yet to come. Tortured by nerves which had not left this very emotional athlete since his debut, Woods in fact came only seventh in the final. Counting more on his speed than on his strength (he had reduced his weight from 141 kg to 131 kg), he had doubtless been on the wrong track. And the modification which he had brought to the classic "O'Brien" style, taking his weight on both feet at the moment of flexion and twisting outwards, was not very successful.

#### GEORGE WOODS

Born Feb. 11, 1943, Edwardsville, Ill.

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1968 OG: silver medal with 20.12 m

1972 OG: silver medal with 21.17 m

1976 OG: 7th with 20.26 m

World indoor record:

22.01 m on Feb. 8, 1974, in Los Angeles

*George Woods: pounds of muscles but also great emotion*