

Track and Field



Ivo van Damme



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Killed on the threshold of glory

At 11 o'clock in the morning of 29 December 1976, a young man was driving back to his native Belgium. He had just spent ten days or so training in the south of France and was no doubt looking forward to being home in time for New Year's Eve. Just outside Orange, the car crashed and Ivo Van Damme, silver medallist in both 800 and 1,500 m races during the Montreal Olympics was killed.

This Belgian athlete died at the age of 23, when the prospect of a wonderful career lay before him. All interested observers, including former runners, trainers and journalists, agreed that this ex-footballer, who had not turned to athletics until the age of 17, would go far. Ivo Van Damme had taken up running at the time when most others are thinking of leaving it. And yet within five years he had reached second place in the world hierarchy! His rapid rise continued a fine Belgian tradition set by men like Gaston Reiff, Roger Moens and Emile Puttemans.

His first important competition was the junior European championship at Duisburg, where he finished 4th in the 800 m

and was ranked 49th in Europe over that distance in a time of 1:48.2. Advice from Roger Moens and expert coaching by Van den Eydde worked such a transformation in him that by February 1976 he had won the European indoor championship in Munich. He went on to break the Belgian 800 and 1,500 m records before adding the European 1,000 m to his list of victories, just before the Montreal Olympics. And in Canada, only the Cuban Alberto Juan-torena (800 m) and the New Zealander John Walker (1,500 m) were able to get the better of him.

IVO VAN DAMME

Born Feb. 21, an 1954, in Louvain, BEL
Died Dec. 29, an 1976, in Orange, FRA

AWARDS AND RECORDS

ER holder in 1,000 m with 2:15.5
Best personal performances:
800 m: 1:43.9 (WR:1:43.5)
1,500 m: 3:36.3 (WR: 3:32.2)
1976 OG: silver medal in 800 and 1,500 m

1976 OG: 1,500 m semifinal; Van Damme (103), R. Wohlhuter (970) and P. Wellmann (446)