

Track and Field



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The First Woman to Throw beyond 60 m

Blonde, powerfully built, with muscles worthy of one of Wagner's Valkyries, Liesel Westermann looked just like the traditional stereotype of a German woman. However, in fact she much preferred grilled steak to knuckle of pork with red cabbage, Mozart and Chopin to military marching music, and was neither bossy nor over-ambitious. In addition, she greatly appreciated beauty, and this led her to take up throwing the discus after she had done swimming and rhythmic dancing. "The discus has always inspired me," she would say, "largely because of the beauty of the movements, which the Greek sculptors had discovered before me." However, it is clear that one does not become a world record-holder by listening to Chopin and contemplating statues. It is much better to train from the start. This is just what Liesel did from 1967.

In that year, when she was 22 and had been throwing the discus for eight years (30.06 m in 1959), she lifted 325 tons of cast iron by wielding small dumb-bells and did some 5,000 throws. The results were rapid; on 5 November 1967, in São Paulo, she beat the last world record of

the legendary Tamara Press (59.70 m in 1965), and at the same time became the first woman to throw the discus over 60 m. Nonetheless, she did not win this event in the Olympics in the following year, when the pouring rain handicapped her and Lia Manoliu of Rumania got in what was, perhaps, a lucky throw. In 1969, her best year, the whole West German delegation withdrew from the Athens European Championships as a protest against the non-qualification of the refugee from East Germany, Jurgen May. And in 1971, Liesel found the unbeatable Faina Melnik of the Soviet Union in her way.

LIESEL WESTERMANN

Born on Nov. 2, 1944, in Sulingen, Germany

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1968 OG: silver medal with 57.76 m

1972 OG: 5th with 62.18 m

1966 ECH: silver medal with 57.38 m

1971 ECH: silver medal with 61.68 m

1974 ECH: 7th with 57.40 m

World records:

61.26 m on 5 Nov. 1967 in São Paulo

62.54 m on 24 July 1968 in Werdohl

62.70 m on 18 June 1969 in Berlin

63.96 m on 27 Sept. 1969 in Hamburg

Liesel Westermann: her star declined just when Faina Melnik's began to shine