

# Track and Field



*Luciano Susanj*



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### *A Page of History in Rome*

Luciano Susanj suddenly appeared to be an athlete to shake the world in Rome in 1974. His last bend in the final of the 800 m in the European Championships was truly stunning. His surge was irresistible. The then world record-holder, Marcello Fiasconaro of Italy, had run the first lap at an infernal pace, but had subsequently slowed down. After 600 m of the race, everything was still possible. It was then that Susanj appeared to leave everyone standing and shot out in front of Steve Ovett of Great Britain.

People thought that the Yugoslav, formerly a 400-m specialist, was about to revolutionize the 800 m. However, he never managed to improve on the time (1 min 44.1 sec) which had enabled him to register such an outstanding win in Rome, and in the end it was Alberto Juantorena of Cuba who, by winning the 400 and 800-m double at the Montreal Olympic Games, overthrew all the accepted views of these two distances. At the end of 1975, Luciano Susanj was in fourth place in the world rankings with a time of 1 min 45.2 sec. Before the 1976 Olympic Games, he started with the same chances as Mike Boit of Kenya and Rick Wohlhuter of the USA. The

Yugoslav could not turn the withdrawal of the Africans, which disposed of one of his main rivals, to his own advantage and at no time lived up to the experts predictions. In Montreal he won his heat in 1 min 47.8 sec, but in the semi-final had to be satisfied with third place. In the final, which was dominated by Alberto Juantorena, he finished in sixth place in 1 min 45.8 sec, with the only consolation of having improved by two tenths of a second his best performance of the season (1 min 45.8 sec rather than 1 min 46 sec).

This 6 ft 1 in (1.85 m) and 165 lb (75 kg) runner with an angular face and a very long stride had had only one previous defeat in 1974 (against Mike Boit of Kenya). In his victorious 800 m in Rome, he ran the last 200 m in 26.4 sec and the last 100 m in 13.1 sec.

#### LUCIANO SUSANJ

Born Nov. 10, 1948, in Rijeka, Yugoslavia

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1974 ECH: gold medal in the 800 m in 1 min 44.1 sec

1976 OG: 6th in the 800 m in 1 min 45.8 sec

European Indoor Championships: silver medal in the 400 m in 1973 (46.4 sec), gold medal in the 800 m in 1974 (1 min 48.1 sec)

*Luciano Susanj (1992) in the extraordinary 800 m of the 1974 European Championships in Rome*