

Track and Field



Marcello Fiasconaro



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A Meteor over 800 m

Born in South Africa, of an Italian father taken prisoner during the Second World War who had become a band leader in Cape Town, and of a Belgian mother, Marcello Fiasconaro came to athletics rather late in life and by sheer chance. The passion of his youth was rugby. He was excelling in the position of wing three-quarter, where his speed produced wonders, when Stewart Banner, an athletics trainer of Scottish origin, spotted him in 1970. Banner suggested to him that he should do a test run on a track, and thus it was that Fiasconaro ran the first 100 m of his life in 11.2 sec and the first 400 m, a few minutes later, in 48.5 sec! In a few races, this beginner of genius did so well that he was catapulted to world class running. He almost beat the British star David Jenkins in the final of the European Championships in Helsinki in 1971. It had already been observed that, as he was slow to get going, he would excel even more over 800 m.

Having twisted his ankle on a golf course, he missed the Munich Olympics and then began his adaptation to the greater distance. This switch was extremely quick and led him to the highest peak of his achievement on 27 June

1973. This took place on the track in Milan, the very same one where, in 1939, the legendary Rudolf Harbig had run the distance in 1 min 46.6 sec, a world record which stood for sixteen years. Competing with the Czech Josef Plachy, who scarcely troubled him, Fiasconaro passed the 200 m mark in 25 sec, the 400 m in 51 sec and the 600 m in 1 min 16.5 sec to finish in 1 min 43.7 sec. The record established by Peter Snell, against which Ralph Doubell and Dave Wottle had struggled in vain, was finally beaten. There was general delirium in Italy and Fiasconaro became a national hero.

Injured again at the end of the year, he entered the European Championships at Rome, in 1974, insufficiently prepared. Nevertheless, with superb panache, he led up to the 650 m mark before dying in sixth place. His time to the 400 m mark: 50.1 sec.

MARCELLO FIASCONARO

Born July 19, 1949, in Cape Town, South Africa

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1971 ECH: silver medal in 400 m in 45.49 sec
World 800 m record in 1 min 43.7 sec on 27 June 1973 in Milan

Marcello Fiasconaro: it took Alberto Juantorena to beat his world 800 m record