

Track and Field



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Under 49 Seconds in the 400 m

Irena Szewinska of Poland, who was 11 years her senior, had again beaten Koch in Düsseldorf in 1977 within the framework of the first World Cup (49.52 sec against 49.76 sec). However, at the time one got the impression that a long reign was coming to an end. Following in the footsteps of one of the very great women of athletics, Marita Koch of East Germany was to strip her of her two world records in the following year. At first in Erfurt she ran the 200 m in 22.06 sec. Then she ran one lap of the track in Leipzig in 49.19 sec. However, greater things were still to come. After that effort, Marita in fact improved her world record to 49.02 sec. Two weeks later, the 49-second "barrier" was broken in Prague, at the European Championships, in a final where Szewinska finished in third place.

Marita Koch continued running in the 400 m, which before Szewinska appeared on the scene, had been dominated by athletes who were renowned more for stamina rather than speed, those not quite fast enough to do well in sprinting events. By turning the women's 400 m into a sprint race, the Polish woman had shown others the way. She could not have wished for a more mag-

nificent heiress, since, where speed was concerned, Marita Koch was far from being a nonentity.

She would doubtless have made the headlines earlier if a torn muscle had not brought her down in the semi-final of the Montreal Olympic Games. This young woman who seems to have all the physical attributes (as a teenager she had excelled in the long jump and in the pentathlon), also has her share of intellectual gifts. She already has a very decided personality and is doing well in her medical studies at the Rostock Faculty and never misses an opportunity for studying on her various trips abroad.

MARITA KOCH

Born Feb. 18, 1958, in Wismar, East Germany

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1980 OG: gold medal in the 400 m in 48.88
silver medal in the 4 x 400 m

World records in the 400 m:

49.19 sec on July 2, 1978, in Leipzig
49.02 sec on Aug. 19, 1978, in Potsdam
48.94 sec on Aug. 31, 1978, in Prague
48.89 sec on July 29, 1979, in Potsdam
48.60 sec on Aug. 4, 1979, in Turin

World records in the 200 m:

22.06 sec on May 28, 1978, in Erfurt
22.03 sec on June 3, 1979, in Leipzig
21.71 sec on June 10, 1979, in Karl-Marx-Stadt

Marita Koch: she was a worthy successor to Irena Szewinska