

# Track and Field



*Martti Vainio*



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## Martti Vainio

### *The Fourth Finnish "V"*

Having arrived in Prague in August 1978 with a personal best of 27 min 59.7 sec, he left as the European champion in the 10,000 m with a time of 27 min 31 sec. He was as short-sighted as a mole, and offered the following explanation for this prodigious feat: "I could not read the times along the track. That's why I went so fast." This was the rise to fame of the very tall 6 ft 3 in (1.91 m) Martti Vainio, the fourth Finnish prototype of modern running, after Juha Vaatainen, Pekka Vasala and Lasse Viren.

Until then, Vainio had been a rather poor runner. He had been uncomfortably criticized for a defeat, in 1976, during a France-Finland meeting, by Jean-Paul Gomez and Lucien Rault, who were themselves nothing special. It is true that the giant Martti came to athletics rather late, in 1971 when he was already 21 years old. Before then, he had been content to do a little cross-country skiing and study hard to become a naval construction engineer. Leaving the north of Finland for Turku, where the snow is scarcer, there he met Autis Potinkara, the

man who trained him and in whom he has complete confidence.

At first, his height appeared a handicap, as he was poor at the start and found himself getting into awkward positions in the race. However, he worked on his changes of pace on sand dunes and gradually learnt the ropes. A keen angler, this versatile man, who himself built the house where he lives with his mother, also got down to running 160 miles a week, 230 miles during peak periods. The Montreal Olympic Games, where he was eliminated in the 10,000 m heats, came too soon for him. However, Vasala had told him: "If you want to become a great runner, you'll need to train hard for seven years." He was right on time for his appointment with fame.

#### MARTTI VAINIO

Born on Dec. 30, 1950, in Vekhalati, Finland.

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1978 ECH: gold medal in the 10,000 m in 27 min 31 sec; 6th in the 5,000 m in 13 min 29.7 sec

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*Martti Vainio; in Prague he beat the record which Lasse Viren had set in 1972*