

Track and Field



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To be Young at 33

Success beckons, greets, and then deserts some athletes in a few short years. From others perhaps it demands a decade of dedication before bestowing its reward. Mary Peters was tested more thoroughly than most before she became a superstar. Her road to Olympic fame took no less than 17 years.

In the Olympic stadium in Munich, Heide Rosendahl was the darling of the crowd. She held the world long jump record and had already won a gold medal in that event. The vociferous West German fans expected more of her in the pentathlon where she confronted Mary Peters. But Mary was more than ready after 17 years of preparation. In the first event, the 100 m hurdles, she clocked a personal best which earned her 7 points more than Heide. In the shot, Heide's weak event, Mary hurled within inches of her own British record to gain a bold 130 points. In the high jump, the Irish girl again surpassed her best to forge even further ahead, finishing the first day with a lead of 301 points.

She needed the advantage desperately because the German girl's best day was ahead. And Heide was not to be easily

overcome. Her long jump, better even than her gold medal effort, pulled back 180 points.

Then it all depended on the 200 m. Drawn together in the fourth heat, the two girls sprinted with Heide clocking easily the fastest time of the competition. But it was not enough. Mary Peters still held a solid 10 points lead. After 17 years she had reached the pinnacle—an Olympic gold medal bracketed with a world record performance.

Born in England, Mary Peters has spent most of her life in Northern Ireland and the prestige of her achievements is reflected in her life there. She is, beyond dispute, Northern Ireland's most illustrious sportswoman.

MARY PETERS

Born July 6, 1939 in Halewood, Lancs., GB

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1972 OG gold medal pentathlon 4,801 points
1970 CG gold medal pentathlon 5,148 points (old tables)
gold medal shot 52 ft 3 ¼ in (15.93 m)
1974 CG gold medal pentathlon
World record
pentathlon 4,801 points
100 m hurdles 13.29; shot 53 ft 1 ¼ in (16.2 m);
high jump 5 ft 11 ½ in (1.82 m); long jump 19 ft
7 ½ in (5.98 m); 200 m 24.1 secs.

Mary Peters, winning the pentathlon again in 1973