

Track and Field



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"Smiler's" Bright Flash

Born in Odessa on the shores of the Black Sea, Nikolai Avilov has the charm and grace of the Latins. In Italy, where he went frequently for competition or training, he was nicknamed "Smiler".

Dark-skinned and black-haired, this stylish beanpole made his debut in athletics at the age of 13, in the hope of emulating his countryman, Valeri Brumel. In 1966, aged 18 and thought of as a future high jump champion, he discovered the decathlon. Obviously, he would be a decathlete relying more on speed and spring than strength. But concealed beneath a happy nature was an iron will. He worked very hard and attained proficiency even in the throwing events. So that, aged just 20, in the Mexico Olympic Games, he took fourth place overall in the decathlon, with a total of 7,909 points, a new personal best performance.

Although hindered in 1969 and 1970 by a leg injury and a stomach ulcer, his progress continued during the four years leading to the Munich Olympics. Applying himself to polishing his technique rather than to developing his physical qualities, he withdrew from the 1971 European decathlon championship in

Helsinki at the end of the seventh event, before the pole vault.

The following year he was back for Olympic competition. In the ten events he improved his personal best in seven, equalled his personal best in an eighth, and in the final count, despite unfavorable atmospheric conditions and the handicap of electronic timekeeping (about 100 points), set a magnificent new world record.

From 1973 to 1975 he competed little, devoting himself to his law studies, but he worthily defended his title in the Montreal Olympics.

NIKOLAI AVILOV

Born Aug. 6, 1948, in Odessa, USSR

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1972 OG: gold medal with 8,454 pts

1976 OG: bronze medal with 8,369 pts

World record:

8,454 pts on 7 and 8 Sept, 1972, in Munich (11 sec; 7.68 m; 14.36 m; 2.12 m; 48.50 sec; 14.31 sec; 46.98 m; 4.55 m; 61.66 m and 4 min 22.8 sec).

Nikolai Avilov: although long-jumping 7.76 m, he could only take third place in Montreal