

Track and Field



*Olympic Hammer
and Javelin*



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Foreign Domination

Except for a period when bulky and personable Harold Connolly was the reigning champion, the hammer throw has received only moderate attention in America, while the javelin never has been the focus of undue popularity.

The hammer weighs 16 pounds and is 4 feet long and contains a handle connected to a metal ball by a steel spring. According to Connolly, who won his gold medal in 1956, the hammer requires quick reflexes, a good sense of balance and the will to work. To prepare for the throw, the competitor stands with legs apart, facing away from the target area, with the ball of the hammer in the circle behind him. The handle of the hammer is hooked low on the fingers of the left hand, with the right one placed over the left. At the start of the first turn, the contestant shifts on the heel of the left foot and the ball of the right. Then the body weight is shifted to the outside of the left foot with the right off the ground. At the end of the first turn, both feet are planted firm again. All turns are performed similarly, and after the final turn the thrower lifts with his legs and releases the hammer. The javelin is a pointed spear-shaped

stick weighing slightly over 28 ounces for men and 21 ounces for women. It is at least 8.53 feet in length and must be thrown from behind a start line. The key to the javelin is to convert an effective transfer of running speed into useful throwing force. The surge of power created by the legs should drive upward to the chest and shoulder muscles, resulting in a sharp release.

Since Connolly's victory, Russians have captured the men's hammer throw four of five times, with Yuri Sedych setting an Olympic record of 254 feet 3.9 inches in 1976. The only American javelin champion was Cy Young in 1952, and the gold medalist at Montreal was Hungarian Miklos Nemeth with a world record 310 feet 4 in.

There is no competition for women in the hammer throw and, after Babe Didrikson won the first Olympic javelin for women in 1932, no American woman has been successful. Ruth Fuchs of East Germany was the gold medalist in both 1972 and 1976, the last time with an Olympic record of 216' 4". On each occasion, Kathy Schmidt of the U.S. earned the bronze medal.

Tossing the spear