

# Track and Field



*Pekka Vasala*



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## Pekka Vasala

### Day of Glory at Munich

The Finn Pekka Vasala had his day of glory on 10 September 1972 at the Olympic Stadium in Munich, when in the 1,500 m final he got the better of the holder of the Olympic title and the great favorite, the Kenyan Kipchoge Keino. Even if it was not repeated, even if it was obtained in the absence of the American Jim Ryun, the world record-holder in 3 min 33.1 sec, the success of Vasala was indisputable. He had found his best form at the right moment. Many people think he would have beaten Ryun in the final (the American had been eliminated after falling in the qualifying round).

Vasala won his heat in 3 min 40.9 sec. He then qualified for the final in 3 min 37.9 sec (2nd in the same time as the New Zealander Rod Dixon). In the final, he began to accelerate the pace two laps from the end and no-one could catch him. "Kip" Keino, Rod Dixon and Mike Boit had to settle for places behind the Finn, who brought his personal record to 3 min 36.3 sec.

Four years earlier, Vasala, then aged 20, had taken part in the Olympics in Mexico. He had secured his place in the team by beating the Norwegian Arne Kvalheim in a Norway-Finland match in Oslo. He had

then been given a time of 3 min 41.8 sec. In Mexico, he did not manage to go below 4 minutes and was eliminated.

In 1969 at the European Championships in Athens, he was scarcely any more successful (9th in 3 min 44.1 sec). But when, two years later, he beat Keino in the Olympic Stadium in Helsinki in 3 min 38.6 sec, he became the great favorite for the European Championship 1,500 m title. Once again he was disappointed.

But the pleasure was only deferred for Vasala, who could have taken part in the 800 and the 1,500 m at Munich (before the Olympics, he had beaten the European 800 m record in 1 min 44.5 sec). In the end, he preferred not to take part in too many events and to concentrate on the 1,500 m. Which he did with a success which is well-known.

#### PEKKA VASALA

Born April 17, 1948, in Riihimaeki, Finland

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1972 OG: gold medal in the 1,500 m in 3 min 36.3 sec

Personal records:

1 min 44.5 sec over 800 m, European record (1972)

3 min 36.3 sec over 1,500 m (1972)

*Munich 1972: Vasala winning ahead of K. Keino (576), R. Dixon (688) and M. Boit (573)*