

# Track and Field



*Pietro Mennea*



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## Pietro Mennea

### *The Arrow of the South*

His right arm raised, his forefinger pointing heavenwards, Pietro Mennea was able to make his sign of victory twice in the 1978 European Championships in Prague, confirming his position as the new European sprint champion. This glory, though it had been long awaited, did not bring a smile to his sad clown's face. Pietro Mennea has never had the exuberance of the people of the South. Whenever he has been first to cross the finishing line or when he is on the highest step of the podium, it is very rare for him to show his satisfaction, unless it is the quiet air of duty performed.

After having lived for a long time in the shadow of Valeri Borzov, in the 100 m at least, Pietro Mennea missed the 1976 Olympics due to an injury. The 1977 World Cup at Dusseldorf was to give him a new opportunity to prove himself. In the 100 m, the East German, Eugen Ray, proved himself the best runner, however, and he had to be content with fourth place. He got his revenge on Ray in the 200 m, but victory escaped him, by 2 thousandths of a second, and the race was won by the American Clancy Edwards.

Thus it was only in 1978, at the age of 26, that he was at last able to get clear in the

100 m as well as in the 200 m. Born in Barletta, in Puglia, Mennea is a child of the sun. His dual success in Prague is all the more remarkable because it was achieved in the cold and rain.

His sporting longevity is rare for a sprinter. In 1979 he was in his ninth season in top level athletics and was still able to take advantage of the climatic conditions of Mexico-City to beat the European 100 m record of Valeri Borzov in 10.01 sec and the world 200 m record of Tommie Smith in 19.72 sec. A surveyor by profession, and also a qualified sports teacher, Pietro Mennea is one of the rare protégés of Fiat, along with Sara Simeoni.

#### PIETRO MENNEA

Born June 28, 1952, in Barletta, Puglia, Italy

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1974 ECH: gold medal in the 200 m, silver medal in the 100 m and the 4 x 100 m relay

1978 ECH: gold medal in the 100 and 200 m

1972 OG: bronze medal in the 200 m (4th in 1976)  
World university champion in the 200 m in 1973, 1975 and 1979

European indoor champion in the 400 m in 1978

Best performances: 10.01 sec in the 100 m (1979/ER)  
19.72 sec in the 200 m (1979/WR)  
45.87 sec in the 400 m (1978)

*Pietro Mennea: a Southerner who adapted himself perfectly to the Prague climate*