

Track and Field



Renaldo Nehemiah



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A Pure Genius over Hurdles

At the beginning of 1975, the American Renaldo Nehemiah had never jumped a single hurdle or even worn spikes. At that time he played American football and without the knock which caused one of his ribs to float, this little virtuoso of hurdles would perhaps have lived in ignorance of his talents.

On the football pitch, Renaldo moved very fast. As there was no longer any question of touching a ball for a time, he tried himself out on the track. There he found people faster than himself. Not liking to be beaten, he moved on to hurdles. Thus the American trainers discovered with delight the man who, unless something happened in the meantime, seemed destined to give them the Olympic 110-m hurdles title.

The first time he tried hurdling, it became in fact obvious that Nehemiah was born for this: his height of over 6 ft (1.84 m) his weight of 165 lb (75 kg), his speed (9.4 sec over 100 yards), his suppleness, and rhythm, he had absolutely everything in his favour. In 1976, he ran the 110-m hurdles in 13.6 sec with, admittedly, hurdles only 1 m high instead of the usual 1.07 m. In 1977, still over the same hurdles, he ran three tenths of a second faster than the Olympic champion of the

1972 OG, his compatriot Rod Milburn, had run at the same age. Finally, in 1978, he was timed at 10.18 sec over 100 m, 20.24 sec over 200 m and 46 sec over 400 m, won 19 of the 24 competitions in which he took part in the 110-m hurdles (the other five he was second), five times had a time below 13.30 sec and became junior world record-holder in the event, with a time less than two hundredths of second more than the senior record. It was no surprise that in his first open-air race in 1979 he improved the world record of the Cuban Alejandro Casanas (13.16 sec against 13.21 sec). He was to do better still (13 sec) three weeks later at Los Angeles, leaving no chance whatsoever to even Casanas (13.23 sec).

RENALDO NEHEMIAH

Born March 23, 1960, at Scotch Plains, New Jersey, USA

AWARDS AND RECORDS

World records: 110-m hurdles: 13.16 sec on Jan. 1979, at San Jose

13 sec on May 6, 1979, at Los Angeles

Best indoor world performance in the 60-yards hurdles: 6.88 sec on Jan. 20, 1979, at New York

Renaldo Nehemiah: football nearly deprived athletics of one of the best hurdlers in the world