

Track and Field



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The Agility of a Cat

In that nursery of 110-m hurdles runners which the United States has been since the beginning of the century, Rod Milburn occupied a place apart, almost unique. A six-footer in height, this athlete was, however, rather small for a specialist in high hurdles. And his speed on the flat was not phenomenal. As for the man, he was from very humble origin, and he had a gentle, timid nature. But Milburn was like a cat. He had the muscular strength, the suppleness, the power and the spontaneous aggression of wild beasts. All of which made him unbeatable.

Having begun by playing American football at school, he was timed at 13.7 sec (13.4 sec with a wind blowing at more than 2 m per sec) at the age of 19. The following year he went to the University of Southern California, where Willie Davenport, another great hurdler, also studied, and he followed an intensive training program which included continuous sprints, exercises with weights and dumb-bells and cross-country runs. This paid off twelve months later. In 1971, Milburn beat Davenport for the first time at the Martin Luther King Memorial Competition. Better still, at the United

States Championships, beating the world record by 2 tenths of a second, he ran a 120-yards hurdles in 13 sec dead (12.94 sec according to electronic timing), with a favorable wind of 1.95 m per sec.

Shortly before the Munich Olympics, a defeat put an end to a series of 66 consecutive victories. But Milburn had had a long flight which had upset his concentration, and he had no difficulty in becoming Olympic champion, establishing a new world record (electronic timing). One last achievement (13.1 sec by manual timing) and he sunk into the obscurity of professionalism.

ROD MILBURN

Born May 8, 1950, in Apalouzas, Louisiana

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1972 OG: gold medal in the 110 m-hurdles in 13.24 sec

World records:

120-yards hurdles: 13 sec on 26 June, 1971 at Eugene, Oregon

110-m hurdles: 13.24 sec on 7 Sept, 1972 at Munich

13.1 sec on 6 July, 1973 at Zurich

Rod Milburn (here in front of Guy Drut): a place apart in the history of the 110 m-hurdles