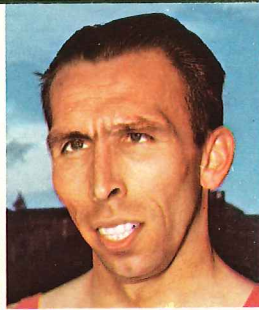


Track and Field



Roger Moens



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A Champion Without a Title

There are some athletes who make you wonder how they ever managed to win a particular event; others seem to ooze talent yet never win a major competition. Among the latter category comes Roger Moens. Today he is still ranked among the unlucky ones, those who seem to manage to slip on the only banana skin for miles around... True, Roger Moens won an occasional national title, but he was good enough over 800 m to have done much better. For instance, on 3 August 1955, in Oslo, he beat the Norwegian Audun Boysen and bettered the world record of 1:46.6 set up sixteen years earlier by the famous German Rudolf Harbig with a new time of 1:45.7.

No matter that the previous year Moens had failed in the European championships in Berne, where he finished only fifth in the 800 m. In 1956, he was the favorite for the Melbourne Olympics but was forced to withdraw from the race after injuring his knee while jumping over some fencing. A really unfortunate accident. In 1958, he had an argument with his Federation, which meant he was not allowed to take part in the European

Championships—another lost opportunity.

By the time of the Rome Olympics in 1960, for which he had meticulously prepared, he was ready to seize his last chance to get to the top. On 2 September, Moens was the super-favorite to win the final of the 800 m. In good form, he had had plenty of time to recover from the ordeal of three other heats run within two days.

Round the last bend, Moens overtook the Swiss Christian Waegli who had led for the first 600 m, and streaked towards what seemed like certain victory. Then, suddenly, out of the blue appeared the New Zealander Peter Snell, who beat Moens by 8 inches. It was the end of a dream, and Moens collapsed in tears on the ground. He ended his career in 1961 after rupturing an Achilles tendon.

ROGER MOENS

Born April 26, 1930, at Erembodegem, Belgium.

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1960 OG: silver medal in 800 m
World record breaker in 800 m in Oslo on Aug. 3, 1955, with 1:45.7
Personal best times: 47.3 over 400 m
2:19.2 over 1,000 m

R. Moens (5), here in second position, leading Michel Jazy (6)