

Track and Field



Sara Simeoni



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An Orderly Progression

Like Rosemarie Ackermann, the Italian girl Sara Simeoni wanted to become a prima ballerina when she was twelve. But she was too big for her age and was dissuaded from it. This was all the better for athletics. For on 4 August 1978, succeeding the East German girl, who was the first woman to clear 2 m, the beautiful Sara leapt 2.01 m (6 ft 7 in), to take her place in the history of athletics.

To be sure, other Italian girls (Trebisonda Valla in 1936 and Claudia Testoni in 1939 in the 80-m hurdles, as well as Paola Pigni, more recently, in the 1500 m and 3000 m) had already broken world records. But this was the first time that an athlete from south of the Alps obtained such a prestigious and widely talked-of record. Now at last the peninsular newspapers reduced soccer to the level of tiddly-winks, and the bells of Rivoli, Simeoni's birthplace, rang out tumultuously.

In order to clear a height 23 cm (9 in) greater than her own height, Sara followed a very orderly progression: 1.25 m (4 ft 1 in) when 12, 1.55 m (5 ft 1 in) when 15, the age at which she discovered the Fosbury flop under the guidance of her coach Walter Bragagno-

lo, up to 1.90 m (6 ft 3 in) when 21 in 1974. Indeed, apart from one exception (in 1975 when she failed to get beyond 1.89 m), a year has not passed without her improving on her personal best. Similarly, she has not ceased to achieve better and better results at major international meetings. A further proof of her consistency is that, since grabbing the Italian national record for the first time in 1970 at 1.70 m (5 ft 7 in), she has improved upon it seventeen times.

The decisive steps that make a woman world record holder, Sara has accomplished thanks to Erminio Azzaro, a former top-class high jumper (2.18 m in 1971), who since quite recently has become her coach and fiancé. Her improvement she owes principally to significant muscle work.

SARA SIMEONI

Born April 19, 1953, at Rivoli, Verona, Italy

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1972 OG: 6th with 1.85 m (6 ft 1 in)
1976 OG: silver medal with 1.91 m (6 ft 3 in)
1980 OG: gold medal with 1.97 m (6 ft 5½ in)
1971 ECH: 9th with 1.78 m (5 ft 10 in)
1974 ECH: bronze medal with 1.89 m (6 ft 2½ in)
1978 ECH: gold medal with 2.01 m (6 ft 7 in) on 31 August (to equal world record)
World record
2.01 m (6 ft 7 in) on Aug. 4, 1978, at Brescia

Sara Simeoni: the "Fosbury" more effective than the "straddle" of Rosemarie Ackermann