

# Track and Field



*Tessa Sanderson*



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## Tessa Sanderson

### *Britain's Top Girl Athlete*

When the British Athletics Writers voted for their Athletes of the Year in 1977, there was little doubt that Steve Ovett would take the male crown. Equally Tessa Sanderson, by then ranked third in the world of all time, was a natural for the women's title. It was a fine achievement, made against the handicaps which assail all field events athletes in Britain where facilities are not of the best.

In an event—in this case, throwing the javelin — dominated for some time by East European performers and where Britain had not boasted a really world class thrower since 1960, Tessa Sanderson had arrived. She had been personally responsible for stretching the United Kingdom record from 57.20 m (187 ft 8 in) to 67.20 m (220 ft 6 in), a truly prodigious advance. Her improvement in the 1977 season alone was a vast 10 m. The magic month was July. She started on the first day of that glorious month with a victory at Düsseldorf over both Kate Schmidt (USA) and Marion Becker (West Germany), both of them Olympic medallists. Then at Dublin less than three weeks later she accomplished the seemingly impossible by

upsetting the double Olympic gold medallist, Ruth Fuchs of East Germany in the European Cup semi-final round. In the final in Helsinki she had to be content with second place to Fuchs. The East German girl, favourite for the World Cup in Düsseldorf was nearly upset again. Only in the final round did she pull out her winning throw with Sanderson third. Fourth in that rather muted contest was Schmidt, who only a week later was to capture the world record from Fuchs.

The Commonwealth Games in Edmonton saw Tessa claim her first gold medal. She followed this with a silver in Prague, again conceding premier honours in the European Championship to Fuchs. But the promise of immense natural endowment and technical fluency means that Sanderson has only just opened the important phase of her career.

#### TESSA SANDERSON

Born March 14, 1956, in Jamaica

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1978 CG: gold medal in javelin, 61.34 m, Edmonton; also runner-up European Cup and third in World Cup 1977

*Javelin gold medal winner—and more to come*