

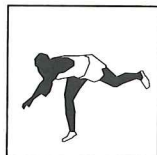
Track and Field



The Javelin



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The Saga of the Circling Basques

In 1956, new rules concerning the throwing of javelins were introduced which stipulated that "the implement must not be thrown with a rotating movement" and that the "competitor is not permitted to turn his back on the arc" or run-up area while preparing to throw.

This new ruling came just in time to stop the javelin finals of the Olympic Games at Melbourne from being turned into a farce by the performance of Felix Erazuquin, a stout Spaniard aged 49 and weighing 114 kg.

The two months which preceded these Olympic Games had given the world's top javelin throwers nothing but nightmares. They had seen their records threatened by new competitors using an unorthodox but frighteningly effective style. Among the newcomers on the international scene was the above-mentioned Basque Felix Erazuquin, who was a champion thrower of the Spanish lance, an iron implement weighing over 4 kg. When competing in javelin events, he grasped the implement correctly, by the cord grip, but then turned three times while moving across the arc. He corrected the

javelin's natural lack of precision by wetting it so that he was better able to guide it while it slid through his hand. With a throw of 83.40 m, Erazuquin came to within 26 cm of the world record held by the Pole Janusz Sidlo. Another Basque, Manuel Clavero, did even better: his throw of 90.30 m was a new world record.

At this point the IFAA decided to step in and tighten up their ruling by forbidding all circling movements in the run-up area. This modification, which was decided upon there and then, was contested by the Spanish who did not want to lose their chance of winning a gold medal. Owing to political events (notably those in Hungary) Spain was not represented at the Melbourne Olympics and the "circling Basques" became a thing of the past. It is worth mentioning that the Norwegian Egil Danielsen, who broke the world record at Melbourne with a throw of 85.71 m in the traditional style, had formerly used the Spanish style and had thrown 93.70 m. The Finn Pentti Saarikoski had for his part come very near the 100 m mark with a throw of 99.52 m.

Speed, strenght and technique: qualities which earned Nemeth his olympic title in 1976