

Track and Field



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Small but Menacing

Only 5 ft 6 in (1.67 m) in height, Tony Simmons is the kind of runner everybody wants to win. Arms pumping, his legs seemingly too short for his body, he never stops trying, and for the last 16 years he has made his mark on track, road and country by sheer hard work and refusal to give up.

It was in 1963 that he first aroused interest, when at the age of 14 he set a world mile best of 4 min 29.8 sec. At 16 he ran a world age best for 6 miles. In 1977 he finished fourth in the 10,000 meters behind record breaker Samson Kimombwa when the Kenyan shattered Dave Bedford's world mark in Helsinki. Simmons was timed in 27 min 43.6 sec, a time up to then only bettered by one British runner, Bedford himself. In between his boyish debut and his senior prime he has kept popping up, never a man to be discounted whatever the disadvantage he appeared to suffer compared with taller, longer striding rivals. He may well have been right when he claimed: 'I think I'm the most consistent 10,000 metres runner Britain has ever had.' Yet he has run a mile in only half a second over four minutes and even covered the marathon in a world class 2 hr 12 min 33 sec.

It was, of course in the 10,000 metres that Simmons came closest to his gold medal dreams. The heat in the Olympic Stadium in Rome ruled out any possibility of record attempts in the European 10,000 metres final in 1974. Seven of the 31 starters in fact dropped out. In a somewhat low-tempo race, the fastest finisher was the likely victor. With a lap to go Simmons was well down on the powerful East German, Manfred Kuschmann. With astounding acceleration Simmons cut down the German's lead, his short legs generating an extraordinary cadence. At the line he was close enough to share Kuschmann's winning time, a truly glorious race.

Born in Wales, Simmons has represented the Principality in the Commonwealth Games, finishing sixth in the 10,000 metres in Edmonton in 1978. His coach Harry Wilson, who also advises Steve Ovett, said of his running at Montreal in 1976: 'For a man of his size to come fourth in the Olympic Games is outstanding in anyone's language.'

TONY SIMMONS

Born, Oct. 6, 1948, in Maesteg, Wales

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1974 ECH: silver medal, 10,000 m in 28 min 25.8 sec

Tony Simmons leads Sviridov of USSR and Liardet of France in the Europa Cup, 1973