

# Track and Field



*Ulrike Meyfarth*



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## Ulrike Meyfarth

### *The Young Olympic Champion of 1972*

The high jumper Ulrike Meyfarth was the most precocious athlete there has ever been. She had just had her fifteenth birthday when she took part in the European Championships at Helsinki. Eliminated at 1.71 m in the qualifying round, where the standard to reach the final was 1.73 m, she none the less raised her personal best in that year, 1971, to 1.80 m. Twelve months later, the Olympic Games were held in her home country, West Germany, at Munich. As she had brought the national record to 1.85 m a fortnight before the opening ceremony, she was selected. But this was more through a desire to train her in anticipation of the 1976 Games than in the hope of seeing her mount the rostrum. One man did not see it that way. He was Herbert Hopf, the girl's trainer.

During the last fortnight of preparation, he took Ulrike to a little village in Bavaria and spent his time convincing her that the Olympic contest was a competition just like any other. There, in the greatest secrecy, she cleared 1.90 m in training. She was perfectly ready. From 1.71 m to 1.88 m, jumping 1.76 m,

1.79 m, 1.82 m and 1.85 m on the way, she cleared the bar at her first attempt. At 1.90 m she had to have two more tries. Then the judges would not accept the third attempt of the Bulgarian Yordanka Blagoeva—the bar could not make up its mind, but finally fell after Blagoeva had begun to celebrate the clearance. It was victory to Meyfarth, but was it to be marred by doubt? No, it was not, for Ulrike cleared 1.92 m at her first attempt, equalling the world record and becoming the youngest Olympic champion in athletics. She had discovered the Fosbury Flop three years before, jumping 1.57 m at 13 years of age, and this prodigious success was the turning point of her career.

#### ULRIKE MEYFARTH

Born May 4, 1956, in Frankfurt, WGE

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1973 Junior ECH: bronze medal with 1.80 m  
1972 OG: gold medal (world record with 1.92 m)  
1974 ECH: 7th with 1.83 m  
1976 OG: did not qualify for the final

*One of the most surprising victories in the 1972 Olympics in Munich*