

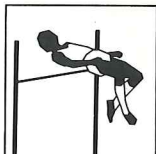
Track and Field



Valeri Brumel



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A Miraculous Champion

Although two Americans, John Thomas and Dwight Stones were the first to clear respectively 2.20 m and 2.30 m in the high jump, the name of the Soviet high jumper Valeri Brumel will nonetheless remain firmly inscribed in the history of athletics. Not only did this Siberian raise the world high-jump record in spectacular fashion, but he also had that extra something which made him one of the all-time greats in the world of sport.

Valeri Brumel was known and loved for his simplicity, kindness and modesty, qualities which were linked to the very great purity of his style. He jumped with the classical dive roll, a style which he raised to truly artistic levels. Another reason for his astonishing popularity was that Brumel first came before the public at the Rome Olympic Games, which were the first to be televised direct. And so, at a stroke, on Sept. 1, 1960, sports fans the world over discovered this 18-year-old jumper and silver medal winner. He beat John Thomas, who was the then record holder with 2.22 m, but came second to the surprise winner Robert Chavlakadze.

From then on, Brumel literally played leap-frog with the world record, breaking it six times and bringing it to 2.28 m in Moscow's Lenin Stadium, on cinders, before 100,000 spectators. Valeri Brumel was able to clear heights of 2.20 m over 23 times during the course of his short career. And this was in spite of his height (6' 1") and weight (174 lbs), relatively low for a high jumper.

Paradoxically, the accident he suffered on Oct. 6, 1965, merely enhanced his reputation. The motorcycle he was riding skidded on a wet road outside Moscow, and Brumel was seriously injured in the legs. For a while, there was talk of amputation, but the miracle occurred: after 31 operations his "golden legs" were saved. Four years later, he jumped again, and reached 2.07 m indoors.

VALERI BRUMEL

Born Apr. 14, 1942, in Tolbuzino, Siberia, USSR

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1960 OG: silver medal

1964 OG: gold medal

1962: European champion in Belgrade

Raised the world high-jump outdoor record from 2.20 m to 2.28 m

His left arm folded, Valeri Brumel is the classical exponent of the forward dive roll