

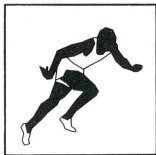
Track and Field



Waldemar Cierpinski



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Fifth Time Lucky

The son of a farming family consisting of three boys and three girls, Waldemar Cierpinski began his sporting career kicking a football, before he turned to boxing.

But added to the distance he already had to cover, on foot, between home and school, the extra walk to the nearest boxing ring was too much and he found it easier to go to the small local athletics stadium.

The first time his physical education teacher entered him for a cross-country race, Cierpinski did not even bother to turn up. The next time he finished second, with no training whatever and that was what made him decide to become a runner.

In 1966 he took part in a road race over 7.5 km (4.5 miles), an event designed for budding marathon runners of the finals of the Spartakiades, extremely popular mass events in East Germany. He finished second in front of Manfred Kuschmann, future European 10,000-m champion in Rome in 1974.

Despite this encouraging result, he tried in vain to obtain good performances over 3,000 m in the steeplechase (personal best: 8 min 33:8 sec in 1972). He was injured several times

and frequently had to abandon races before deciding to try the 10,000 m (28:28.2 in 1975), but he was still not fast enough, so he had a try at the marathon. At his first attempt, in 1974, he clocked up 2 h 20:28.

He became Olympic champion in Montreal two years later to the surprise of everyone, since this was only his fifth marathon, and it was the first time an East German had won the event. This victory, obtained for the first time in the history of the Olympic Games in less than 2 hours and 10 minutes, earned him the title of "Sportsman of the Year" in East Germany. Waldemar Cierpinski is married to Marita Politz, who was the second East German woman athlete to run the 800 m in under 2 minutes.

WALDEMAR CIERPINSKI

Born Aug. 3, 1950, at Neugattersleben, East Germany

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1976 Olympic Games: gold medal in 2 h 9:55
3rd in Fukuoka (JPN) marathon some months later in 2 h 15:56

Montreal OG: Waldemar Cierpinski winning the marathon in less than 2 h 10