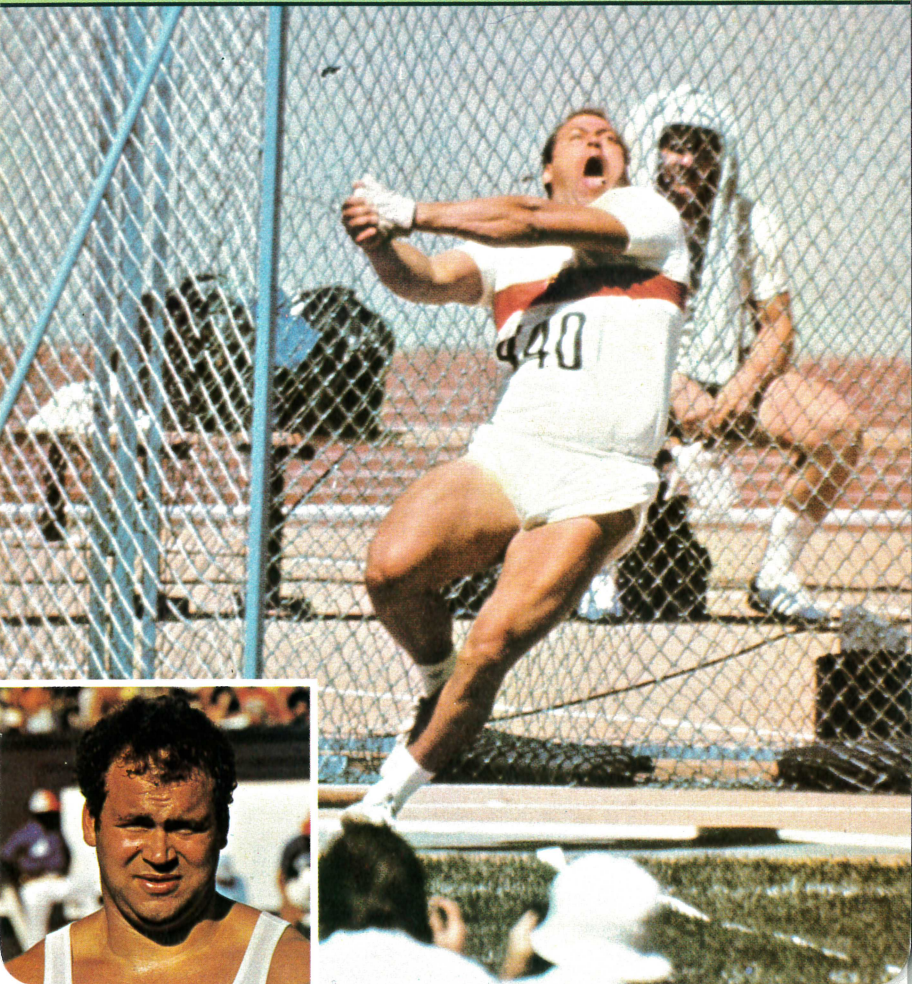


Track and Field



Walter Schmidt



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A Curious Record-holder

He is called Schmidt, like thousands of Germans, and yet he is unique. "When he flexes his muscles," said one of his teammates, "the windows open." The problem is to know where this strength comes from. The West German Federation, which disqualified him at the end of the 1977 season, has given its answer: from the use of anabolic steroids. Whatever one may think of that opinion, Schmidt's case remains disturbing. Here is an athlete who seems to have a constitution of iron and who, in actual fact, is a chronically sick man with, in particular, a congenital malformation of the spinal column. A psychological case? An impostor? It has to be said, though, that Walter Schmidt, in spite of two world records, has never obtained good results in the big competitions. His obsession has always been to put on weight in order to be able to throw further. "When I weigh 150 kg (330 lb)," he said before he was disqualified, "I will send the hammer farther than 80 m (262 ft)." And medicine has always interested him more than the technical side, to the extent that when he left the University of Darmstadt, where he had studied geography with the idea of becoming a junior-school teacher,

he said without hesitation: "I ought to have studied medicine."

A curious man, Walter Schmidt, who attributed his long absence from the athletic scene, between 1972 and 1974, to an injury. He held the world record at the time of the 1972 Olympics and again in 1976, but could not take part in the Munich Olympic competition and had to be content with fifth place at the Montreal Games four years later, when he could have been the first man to throw further than 80 m. He always wanted to put on dangerously more weight and was "deflated" opportunely by a sports federation concerned for his health. The irony is that he was never particularly powerful and that speed was probably his most valuable asset.

WALTER SCHMIDT

Born Aug. 7, 1948, at Lahr, West Germany

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1971 ECH: 5th with 70.54 m

1976 OG: 5th with 74.72 m

World records:

76.40 m on Sept. 4, 1971, at Lahr

79.30 m on Aug. 14, 1975, at Frankfurt

Walter Schmidt: he has never been successful in the big competitions