

Track and Field



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Eight Inches Above Her Head Height

It was at school, when she was 15 years old, that Yordanka Blagoeva's career took a turn towards the high jump. At the time she was doing cross-country running, playing basketball and was beginning to prepare for sky-diving (her great love). However, her performance, 1.30 m (4 ft 3 in) was not at all exceptional for her age.

In the following year she was the national junior champion. In 1964, she cleared 1.64 m (5 ft 4 1/2 in) with a scissors jump; In 1967, 1.70 m (5 ft, 7 in) with the Western Roll used by Yolanda Balas of Rumania. She definitely found her style with the straddle jump which she developed to as high a degree of perfection as her model Valeri Brumel, when in 1968 she was eliminated in the qualifying round at the Mexico Olympic Games. Her personal best then stood at 1.79 m (5 ft 10 1/2 in).

She gave birth to a son, Blagoy, and immediately afterwards returned to the high jump. Three months after the birth she went up to 1.78 m (5 ft 10 in). In 1978 she was at the peak of her art and her form, not having missed more than two training sessions in ten years.

Unfortunately, on the day of the Olympic finals she experienced problems, and the

German judges declared her third attempt at 1.90 m (6 ft 3 in) invalid, when many thought it was valid. The Games were held too early for her. In fact, 20 days later, in Zagreb, she set a new world record by clearing 1.94 m (6 ft 4 1/2 in). By the same token she became the only woman to clear a height 20 cm (8 in) above her head height. However, she had let her opportunity slip, and did not find it again in Montreal where, at the age of 29, she could not prevent the victory of the rising star, Rosemarie Ackermann.

She even had to make do with third place, being beaten on the countback by the Italian Sara Simeoni, a future world record holder. However, she confirms the progress of women's athletics in Bulgaria, which amount to four medals at the last Olympic Games. Only East and West Germany and the USSR have done better.

YORDANKA BLAGOEVA

Born Jan. 19, 1947, in Tzerovene, Bulgaria

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1972 OG: silver medal with 1.88 m (6 ft 2 in)

1976 OG: bronze medal with 1.91 m (6 ft 3 in)

World record: 1.94 m (6 ft 4 1/2 in) on Sept. 24, 1972, in Zagreb

Yordanka Blagoeva: world record-holder 20 days too late