

# GUY DRUT

**P**ut Guy Drut of France and American Charley Foster together in a high hurdles race last year and you'd have better odds with your money on the American. Foster won both their meetings and claimed top global ranking.

But 1975 has been a different story. The 24-year-old Drut (his name is pronounced like "Ghee Drew") has been the preeminent force in world high hurdling—despite falling at the first hurdle of the AAU final after brilliant running in the preliminaries. By mid-July, Drut had won all three meetings with Foster, taken his national title in 13.28 (the second-fastest automatic time in history) and matched Rod Milburn's manual world record of 13.1 (see p. 20.)

The tousle-haired Olympic silver medalist and '74 European champion is straightforward when he says he expects the Montreal Olympic final to be between Foster and himself. He also frankly states he is the best high hurdler in Europe and one of the top two or three in the world.

He says such things honestly, as statements of fact, rather than as egotistical boasting. He is an open man, with an excellent command of English, who enjoys talking about the high hurdles.

**T&FN:** You said at Eugene you thought racing in the US is like running in the Olympics.

**Drut:** Just before the heats of the AAU, I was talking with Willie Davenport and I told him I think that almost any big race in the United States is as tough as an Olympic final. He agreed with me and said American guys have to do this every week. This is one big reason to explain why there are so many American guys who are so fast in the highs.

**T&FN:** There are maybe two or three Europeans who can even come close to you, Frank Siebeck from East Germany and the Wodzynskis from Poland?

**Drut:** In Munich, the first European after me was Siebeck, about four meters behind. Last year at Rome, second was three meters behind. It seems to me that high hurdlers in Europe will often run one very good race, but then not so good in the next one. Like Siebeck ran 13.46 in his semi-final at Rome, but then hit the hurdles in the final and finished last [in 14.79].

**T&FN:** Because you are so dominant in Europe, is it hard to find the motivation to train and compete?

**Drut:** Oh no, because I find my motivation in the Olympics and European Championships, the big Games. Outdoors I haven't lost to another European since 1970, except at Helsinki in the '71 European Championships when I fell down.

I need to fight now, I need the good competition to prepare for Montreal. That is why I came to the United States. In France, I am alone. In Europe, there are others, but they are not as good as the Americans.

*Bible of the Sport*



Peter Probst

**T&FN:** Is it almost a disadvantage to be far ahead of everyone else at home and in Europe?

**Drut:** I used to think so. In France, where there isn't good competition, I will run against a record, the European or even world record. But when there is someone close to me, I think first about running well technically.

Like my heat of the AAU [which he won in an easy-appearing 13.52] I truly think was my best race ever. Ever. It was too easy. I was not concentrating, my legs were in the race but my head was not. It was so nice and relaxed and fast, a wonderful race.

Before the final, though, I had too many things on my mind. I wanted to win and beat Foster. I thought that if I could run in the final like I did in the heat, only faster, I could beat the world record [13.24 by Milburn in winning the Olympic final over Drut's 13.34]. If I won, I would be the first Frenchman ever to win the American championship and that would make the French people very happy. So I had too many things in my head.

**T&FN:** It seems that in Europe track athletes are national heroes and the public demands a great deal of them in terms of performance. Do you find this in France?

**Drut:** Yes, sure. There have not been that many of the very top athletes from France—since Michel Jazy there has been only Roger Bambuck in the sprints, Jean-Claude Nallet in the 400 and hurdles and me. It is hard to bear sometimes. If you win, you are a good guy, but if you lose, you are ignored and that is hard to accept.

**T&FN:** What was the reaction in '71 after Helsinki, when you were the strong favorite?

**Drut:** Not too bad, because I was young and it was just a sad thing, they said, and it won't happen again with experience.

But if I fall in Montreal, well, they wouldn't like it at all.

**T&FN:** Before Munich, did you feel a lot of pressure to succeed?

**Drut:** Yes, but before Munich, everyone said—me, too—if I placed fourth, it would be very good because I would be just behind the three Americans. If I placed third, wonderful: "You beat one American. If you placed second, it is unbelievable." I placed second, so it was a miracle.

I was able to go into the final very relaxed. But Montreal won't be the same at all, because the French want me to be second at least and many feel I must win.

**T&FN:** You have demonstrated you can be first.

**Drut:** Yes, but so has Foster. He is the best in the US. After we ran 13.3 on dirt in Berkeley, he said both of us can run 13-flat and I think so, too.

For the final at Montreal, we have to run our own races. It might be him or it might be me. In Munich, Milburn had two meters on the field before the race. I ran a very good race and was just a meter behind him. But it is very even between Foster and me. So it will be matter of luck on that day—and neither of us will fall then.

**T&FN:** Because you fell in the '71 European meet, did you feel pressure to win in Rome?

**Drut:** I was very afraid before that final; ooh, very afraid. I knew I could win easily but I remembered Helsinki, and Rome was my last chance to be European champion in the hurdles and I wanted to take it.

**T&FN:** Why your last chance?

**Drut:** Because I want to be serious about the decathlon after Montreal. I have pole vaulted 17- $\frac{3}{4}$  and I scored 7565 when I was just 20. That was only 15 points behind the French record at the time. The 1500 killed me. Whew! I think I will ask the IAAF if I can have just nine events.

**T&FN:** How did you begin running?

**Drut:** I played soccer originally, goalie. I was small and thin and my mother asked the track coach if there was a sport which could build me up. He took me and my first event was the discus. In my club, the athletes did everything.

**T&FN:** When did it become important to you to do well?

**Drut:** Always. My dream was to be an international in soccer and after I started running, it was to be an international in track. I always told myself I could do better. I was greedy, ambitious.

**T&FN:** Did you ever see yourself finishing second in the Olympic Games?

**Drut:** No, never. In Munich, Milburn was really the best, but now I think I can be first. I will try. If not, it is—how do you say?—the breaks of the game.□