

HENRY REBELLO - TRIPLE JUMPER PAR EXCELLENCE

A brilliant triple jumper who was ahead of his times and achieved national recognition at the age of 17, Rebello emerged on the international scene as a sure-shot medal winner in the 1948 London Olympics in the next couple of years. But, great lives often go through tragic pain, and Rebello's fate was sealed in the finals due to an injury which struck him just when he was about to take flight. Old-timers still rue how India was robbed off a medal in the first Olympics, post Independence.

That year, Rebello was in peak form and he retained the national triple jump title with a new national record of 50 feet 2 inches, in January, a record which stood unchallenged for nearly a decade. Recalling his performance, a modest Rebello had said, "That performance was not only the best triple jump in Asia, it was also the best effort in 1948 by any triple jumper in the world." Coaches and commentators also hailed Rebello as the athlete to watch-out for in the Olympics. John Metcalf who won the bronze medal in the 1936 Olympics and Olympic gold medallist Harold Abraham were sure that Rebello's form would be unbeatable in London.

The script was running fine till about a fortnight before the Olympics in the Motspur Park meet, held in London, where Rebello took centre stage. The cream of the world's best athletes was there and the Indian triple jumper ended up beating the rest of the field.

It was cold and damp on August 3, the day the Olympics finals were scheduled. Rebello warmed up for his jump but the officials stopped him and ordered him to postpone his jump due to a victory ceremony taking place. After some time, the officials called for his first jump. The coaches should have insisted on some more time for a warm-up again but the die was cast. Young Rebello elected to jump without a warm-up and the result was tragic for all to see. Instead of sailing in the air as he had done so many times previously, he was suddenly thrown off balance and fell on the ground, writhing in pain. The stretcher was called for and a sad day had unfolded in the history of Indian athletics. On his return to India, Rebello joined the Indian Air Force and later proved to be a successful sports administrator with the Sports Authority of India.

Rebello's luck had deserted him when he needed it the most, but his unforgettable achievements and strong belief in perseverance and hard work continues to inspire generations of athletes and coaches.