

Trebisonda Valla

*20 May 1916 in Bologna †16. October 2006 in L'Aquila



Trebisonda "Ondina" Valla has passed away on October 16, 2006, at 90 years of age. She was the last of five children and the only female. A binding name: Trebisonda. She said: *"I had the competitive spirit in the blood, at 14; I was already in the National team. Other times, the specialization didn't exist."*

It was the Italy of the thirties, when women and sport were incompatible worlds. Yet they were also the years when the city of Bologna became the Italian female sport capital thanks to the talents of Ondina (the nickname given to her by the trainer Marina ZANETTI) and Claudia TESTONI, two extraordinary girls with parallel careers and from a marked rivalry that only mellowed in the old age.

These two girls, VALLA and TESTONI, both twenty year-old, were introduced by Italy to the Games in Berlin. The *"azzurre"* almost arrived unnoticed; even though both were ranked in fifth place in the world ranking of the 80 meters hurdles. The newspapers considered them to have little chances (what do you want, they are only women!). But on 6 August 1936, Ondina won the Olympic gold medal, the first woman in the history of the Italian sport. The second time an Italian woman would win a gold medal came in Helsinki in 1952 with Irene CAMBER (in fencing), but for the sport of athletics the second gold medal had to wait until Moscow 1980, when Sara SIMEONI stepped on the podium to receive hers.

We return to the Olympic Games of 1936 in Berlin, to the arrival of that 80 m hurdles. On the finishing line there are five athletes: there is little discussion about the victory of VALLA, she is number 343; while

TESTONI according to the photofinishing (the special developed "Ziel-Film-Gerät" showed times in one-thousands of a second) was later classified to the fourth place. From the first to the fifth place the athletes were separated by only 0.22 milliseconds. The jury originally awarded TESTONI the second place, but according to the photo finish, she was demoted to fourth place. The German newspaper *Der Leichtathlet* (published every day during the Games) narrated of an extremely charming run, from the starting line to the finish line. Of that event, there is as a valuable memory some television images filtered from the great movie by Leni RIEFENSTAHL: the explosive and impeccable start, the almost simultaneous arrival of the five at the finish.

Thursday, 6 August 1936.

1. Trebisonda "Ondina" Valla	ITA	11,75
2. Anni Steuer	GER	11,81
3. Elizabeth Taylor	CAN	11,82
4. Claudia Testoni	ITA	11,82
5. Kitty ter Braake	NED	11,84
6. Doris Eckert	GER	12,19

(wind: +1,4)

Note: The Official Report of the Olympic Games in Berlin 1936 give the time of 11,7 to all three medallists!

The gold changes her life, at least for a certain period of time.

The playing of the "Marcia Reale" (the Italian national anthem), interviews, a reception by MUSSOLINI in the "Palazzo Venezia" (site of the Council of ministers), together with the other stars.

Ondina VALLA: "All wanted to be next to Mussolini, but he said 'I want Valla next to me'".

From that meeting, she left home with a medal and 5,000 Lira (equal to around € 4,500 of today).

The Olympia Stadion gave her the greatest emotion in a splendid career.

In December 1978, thieves broke into her home and took away her gold medal from Berlin. Six years later the Italian Athletic Federation (with president Primo NEBIOLO) with permission of the IOC presented her with a replica.

But the medal of Trebisonda "Ondina" VALLA will remain for ever in our memory, an indelible moment in the never easy walk of women. She was an unforgettable woman.

Giuseppe Odello