

# McKenley hailed as the perfect role model

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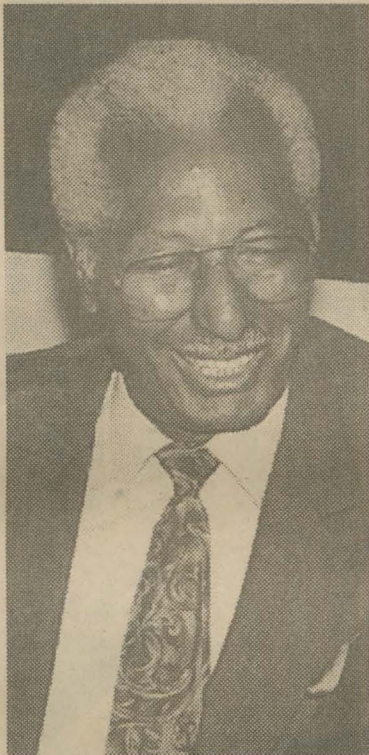
THE convivial atmosphere which pervaded the Wyndham Ballroom Friday evening epitomised the occasion. Tributes poured in like a sustained shower of rain, and through it all, His Excellency, Herb McKenley O.J., C.D., Hon. LL.D., Ambassador at Large, remained a giant of a man.

"An Evening with Herb", a gala dinner in tribute to Jamaica's premier Olympian, lived up to expectations, as hundreds of well-wishers - from former team-mates to former rivals; from Ministers of Government to proteges of the great man - bore testimony to an elegant affair which some say might very well be the social event of the year.

## Greatest athlete

Highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Diplomatic Passport to, and the conferring of the award of Ambassador-at-Large upon the man of the moment, Herb McKenley - known the world over as perhaps the greatest athlete to have ever participated in the modern Olympics - by Prime Minister P.J. Patterson.

Based on the deafening roar from the packed house, and the words which emanated from the many, this was a timely honour that could never have happened to a more



Herb McKenley

deserving candidate. And through it all, McKenley took it in typical stride.

In tracing the early athletics career of the Olympic legend since 1941, former Prime Minister Michael Manley, himself a sports enthusiast, noted the phenomenal improvement McKenley made in schoolboy athletics while representing Calabar High School. He suggested it was a sign of things to come.

Yet, according to Manley, "McKenley's real greatness came after his athletics years, as mentor to the young, coach,

and exemplary patriot...the man remained the same throughout his life," he said.

Meanwhile, Opposition Leader Edward Seaga in his tribute, said it might be difficult for the present generation to fully appreciate the magnitude of the accomplishments of Herb and his colleagues: "They were the beginning of a contingent of Jamaican athletes who won the acclaim of winning the most medals outside the United States," he reminded.

"Herb is gracious, good-natured, easy to approach, and is the perfect role model for youngsters," he concluded.

And in keeping with the unselfish nature of the man,, the tributes were not confined to the shores of Jamaica, as demonstrated by the message sent by International Amateur Athletic Association (IAAF) President, Primo Nebiola, who extolled the numerous accomplishments of the Jamaican, and who ended by saying "Herb has moved with the times".

## Helsinki Quartet

Similarly, the United States Track and Field Federation made its contribution by presenting McKenley with a citation, fittingly moved by Byron LaBeach, a representative of the Olympic Committee. LaBeach was a reserve for the famous Helsinki Quartet (McKenley, Arthur Wint, Les Laing, and George Rhoden)

which mined gold in the 1600 metres relay at the 1952 Olympic Games.

Not to be out-paced, Laing said: "As one who was part of this team, I want to attest to the greatness of this man." The Puerto Rico-based Agriculturist commended McKenley "for sticking with the sport all his life", adding that what Herb has done "is beyond my comprehension."

In his reply, an overwhelmed Herb McKenley expressed surprise at the tremendous support the occasion had generated. Often times moved almost to tears, he modestly said he was very lucky to have had good examples to follow as a youngster, citing his principal at Calabar as one who was instrumental in the moulding of his life from the formative years.

Also paying tribute were: Olympians Dennis Johnson, Vilma Charlton, and Dr. Una Morris-Chung; Raymond Sharpe, Sports Editor of the Jamaica Herald; Jamaica Amateur Athletic Association (JAAA) President Neville McCook; former track star Dennis Anderson; Barbara McCalla-Lee; and Lindy Remegino, the American who pipped McKenley for the gold medal in the 100 metres at the Helsinki Olympics in 1952.

Masters of Ceremony were Mike Fennell, President of the Jamaica Olympic Association (JOA), and former INSPORTS Chairman Howard Aris.