

Herb McKenley — *the living legend*

●
By Fay Davidson and Hector Wynter
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NOTE: This is the second in a new series by Miss Fay Davidson of the National Library and the Hon. Hector Wynter, O.J. Last week they recalled the pride of the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, and looked in some detail at Dr. Arthur Wint, the Captain of the Four. Today, they look at Herb McKenley, and next week they will look at George Rhoden and Les Laing.

“**H**ERB SORTS OF floats along ... spikes barely brushing the ground... like a golf bag down a concrete road” — **Leo Johnson, former Track Coach at the University of Illinois.**

Herb McKenley has the best record overall in Olympic history and has a relay leg matched only perhaps by Bob Hayes, anchorman in the shorter race in 1964.

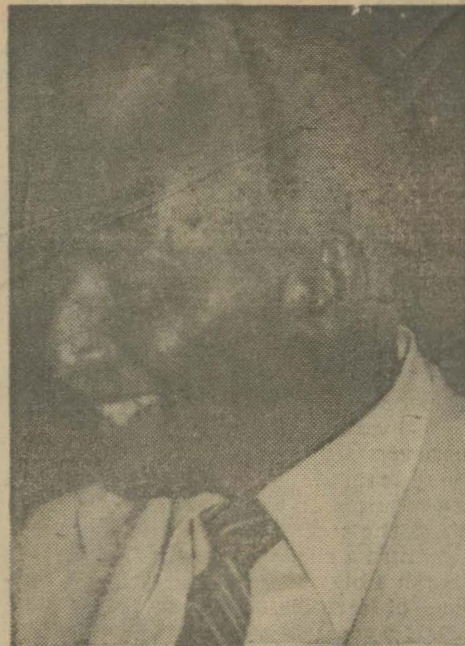
He was the first man to run the 400 metres in less than 46 seconds. He was also the first man to have accomplished the feat in 46 seconds and his performance was a display of class and style. Athletics history records him as a revolutionary — he revolutionised the 400m. from a middle distance run into a sprint, and becoming the first Jamaican to establish a world record in Track Athletics. In the history making 1952 Helsinki Olympics Relay, he completed

his third leg of the 1600m. relay in 44.6 seconds. He was the first to run 400m. in a relay under 45 seconds.

Herb McKenley has held five world records; he has won four Olympic medals — one Gold and three Silver (one Silver in 1948 400m; Silver in 10m. and 400m. Helsinki; Gold in 1600m. relay in Helsinki).

As far as Jamaica's track history is concerned, not only has his speed been phenomenal, but he has also been the first and only athlete to reach the finals in all three individual sprint events (100, 200, 400) in the Olympics. McKenley has been the only Jamaican to win 3 medals in one Olympics and has the record of holding the world's 400m. and quarter mile record simultaneously.

Herb's athletic career stretched over 11 years. After his high school years at Calabar, he was granted a scholarship, through the influence of Abe Issa, who sponsored the Business House.



McKENLEY

... an insurance executive in Jamaica

Championships in 1940. The scholarship took him to Boston College. He soon moved to the University of Illinois which offered greater opportunities for him to exercise his athletic skills.

Perfect match

There he encountered Leo Johnson — the right athlete meeting the right coach at the right time. They made a perfect match. Herb had an

'unquenchable thirst for excellence and was dedicated to achieving greatness' and Leo Johnson spurred him on to fulfil his dream. McKenley won his first major title in New York on June 30, 1945. In the Big 10 Championship in 1946, he broke the World Record and received a five-minute standing ovation. He ran the 400m. in under 46 seconds in the A.A.U. Championships in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on July 5, 1948 (45.9 seconds).

He held the record for the 300 yards, 400 yards and 400 metres from 1946 to 1948. He held the 440 yards world record from 1946 to 1953. Herb contested the A.A.U. events 11 times, 1943 to 1953, finishing less than second only twice. He won three times.

Added to his list of first, Herb McKenley has the honour of being the first (and only) athlete to be a finalist in the 100m, 200m and 400m in an Olympic Competition. Despite his record-breaking performances, however, Herb did not win his Olympic Gold Medal until the Helsinki Relay of 1952.

In 1953, he signed a contract with Australia to compete in World Professional Sprint Championships. In those professional races he learnt that losing races could be profitable. Herb needed the money at this time for he had already decided to marry and settle down.

Return to Jamaica

On his return to Jamaica in 1954, McKenley was appointed Supervisor of

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Athletics. He undertook the establishment of Athletic Clubs in different parts of the island so as to keep the interest of Track Athletics alive and to foster the competitive spirit. He also recommended the establishment of different branches of the Jamaica Amateur Athletic Association to lessen the work of the parent body. He was made the Jamaican Team Coach in 1958.

McKenley was the principal speaker at the first International Track Coaches Association Clinic in 1956. The track star spoke on the subject he knew best, "The Quarter Mile", to over 750 of the world's foremost track coaches.

Coach McKenley has been responsible for developing several Olympic stars, George Kerr being the most notable protegee; he has also coached victorious teams with our latest athletic hero, Donald Quarrie.

On an international level, McKenley managed and coached the America's team to the Inaugural World Cup Track and Field Championships in Dusseldorf, Germany, in 1969. He was Assistant Manager/Coach of the Western Hemisphere team against Russia, and Coach of the Rest of the World Team in a three-way track and field athletic game with Russia and the U.S.A. in California in 1971. In 1977, he was appointed to the Pan American Commission, the group responsible for overseeing the affairs of track and field athletics in the Western Hemisphere. Along with Cuba's Olympic Gold Medallist, Alberto Juatorena, and Trinidad & Tobago's Olympic Gold Medallist, Hasely Crawford, McKenley received the Keys to the City of Xalopa in Mexico.

Early life

Herb was not the typical schoolboy star athlete of his day. He represented Calabar at football and cricket, topping the bowling average in the Sunlight Cup Competition, and playing with distinction for the All-Sunlight Team.

One main source of inspiration at the time of his debut in the Schoolboy Athletic Competition in 1938 was Arthur Wint's visit to Calabar, his Alma Mater. Herb was impressed with his smart dress and his overall demeanour.

For his first four years of participation in Boys Champs, he was not a victor, but he always finished in the first three. During this time, he was known as L. Coco Brown's mango, because he was beaten several times by his greatest

opponent, Leroy 'Coco' Brown of Wolmer's Boys. After school, Herb trained with Arthur Wint, Hugo Fuller, Al Brown, Hugh and Carl March on the grounds of Bellevue.

Herb's earliest training at Sprint and Relay baton carrying was unprecedented. He started violin practice at 12 years old, and his violin teacher lived 2½ miles away. Herb, more a lover of bananas than the violin, spent his bus fare on bananas and ran the distance with violin in hand three days a week for three years. His grandfather also provided material encouragement. He matched Herb's speed with visitor's to the house and Herb was paid three pennies for each victory.

Honours and awards

In later years, McKenley's rewards were much greater. In 1975, he received the O.D. and in the same year he was inducted in The America's Black Hall of Fame (Sports): "In recognition, honour and appreciation of his outstanding contribution and achievement in the world of sports".

The Customs Tourers of Jamaica honoured him in 1983 for his 'outstanding contribution to athletics.

He was born in Pleasant Valley, Clarendon on July 10, 1922, the son of the late Dr. and Mrs. Alexander McKenley. In 1934, he attended Mico Practising School in Kingston, and in 1937 he started at Calabar, where it was compulsory for all boys to be involved in sports.

Employment

After his fulltime involvement in athletics, he became an Insurance Salesman in Jersey City, and has stuck to that profession for many years. At present, he is an Insurance Company executive in Jamaica.

Sporting tip

"Cohesion and perfect understanding between the four members of a spring relay team are very important. The first leg requires an athlete with an explosive start, the second leg calls for a fighter, the third a curve specialist and the fourth a big occasion man"... this is the view of Herb McKenley, one of the world's greatest athletes, and certainly Jamaica's most versatile sprinter.
NEXT SUNDAY: George Rhoden and Leslie Laing

*At the University of Illinois, he
encountered Leo Johnson -- the
right athlete meeting the right
coach at the right time...*

B/N - HERBERT
MCKENLEY

HELPING TO BUILD THE NATION

H/N - ATHLETIC
COMPETITIONS, GENERAL



HERB MCKENLEY (left) passes the baton to George Rhoden for the final leg of the famous race -- the 1,600 metre relay won by Jamaica in world record time at the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, Finland.

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