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Herb McKenley 1910-1999

SENIOR *Life*

Herb McKenley:

Herb McKenley ■

A lion in

WINTER

THE REPORT last year that Herb McKenley had suffered a heart attack sent shock waves across Jamaica.

For 60 years this man has stood tall on the mountain top of athletics. He never won an individual gold medal at the Olympics, yet the athletes of his time all walked in his shadow and those who came after have measured their performances with the standards of excellence he set on the tracks of the world.

Sometimes we forget that the modern tracks now laid in stadiums were not there long ago. As level and as clean as they were prepared, there were always little pebbles in the grass-covered lanes which could be felt by the athletes through their shoes, fleetingly and minusculely affecting their strides.

Herb McKenley is now 76. Because of his heart attack and the subsequent operation, he could have accepted his mortality and retired from active participation in athletics. He is now a little

slower physically, but he is still leading the track and field coaching team for his old school, Calabar. And he will be at the National Stadium in another few weeks, guiding, coaxing, leading and motivating the young boys of his alma mater as they seek to take the Championships title to Red Hills Road once again.

McKenley was the first Jamaican athlete to get a track scholarship to attend a university in the United States. The late Abe Issa was then the president of the Jamaica Amateur Athletic Association.

Before leaving, Herb paid a visit to Mr. Issa.

"I went to tell him thanks for his efforts to get me this scholarship," Herb reflects.

"And what I've never forgotten was his admonition. 'The thanks you can give me and the JAAA is to remember that wherever you are and whatever you do, you are representing Jamaica,'" he said.

McKenley says over the years he has been provoked to anger on many occasions, but he always remembered Issa's advice.

"Someone could see me or hear me and it would reflect on Jamaica," he states.

Because of that scholarship and the push start in life which it gave him, he decided to show his thanks by

helping young people, moulding them to become better athletes and better citizens of the world.

What motivates this athletic colossus to continue?

"The heart attack," he says, "has given me the opportunity to reflect on my life and it reinforced a feeling I've had for a long time, that love is a very great

instrument of unity among people. It is one of the things which kept me actively involved in sports long after I stopped running and more and more I've developed a love for it. Most important, too, is that I've developed a love for the participants - the athletes, the coaches and officials.

McKenley was the first Jamaican athlete to get a track scholarship to attend a university in the United States.

"And what it has done for me, especially, is that although I might disagree with somebody, the disagreement is always about something and not about the person."

And what is this love he speaks about with such passion?

"I don't have the words to describe it," he replied.

"But I felt it last year while I recuperated from my operation." It was a soft cushion of comfort formed by the prayers and messages of the thousands of people who were with him in spirit, caring for him and willing him to recover to continue his work for a better Jamaica.

P.T.O