

B/N McKenley, Herb

Goodbye Herb!

BY HUBERT LAWRENCE

Jamaica said goodbye to Olympic hero Herb McKenley yesterday at the National Arena at an official funeral attended by luminaries from public life and sport. In the presence of a modest gathering, McKenley was praised as much for his service to the nation after his retirement from running as for his Olympic achievements.

Among those paying tribute to the double Olympic 400-metre silver medallist was Prime Minister Bruce Golding. Golding

announced that a statue will be commissioned by the Government and mounted on the Independence Park campus to celebrate McKenley's life. The statue is to an acknowledgement not only to McKenley's work as an athlete, but also to his unstinting service as a coach and administrator.

The announcement was loudly applauded.

Former Prime Ministers Edward Seaga, PJ Patterson and Portia Simpson were also present.

Stirring tributes also came from his daughter Laura Bryce, Bernie Panton on

behalf of the Calabar Old Boys Association, JAAA president Howard Aris, JOA president Mike Fennell and Patterson.

Speaking on behalf of Jamaican athletes, Don Quarrie, the 1976 Olympic 200 metre champion, said that Herb was an inspiration to him. He recounted an instance where McKenley helped him to triumph over adversity. As they journeyed to an indoor meet in the US, flight delays curtailed Quarrie's usual preparation routine. Herb had him change into his running gear before they arrived at the meet and start warming up early. This advice spurred Quarrie to victory.

After the service, several Jamaica sports stalwarts shared their personal recollections of Herb with the Sunday Herald. Former top ranked quartermiler Bert Cameron said his 1983 victory in the 400 metres at the first World Championship was a gift to Herb.

"As soon as I crossed the finish line, the first person I looked for was Herb. He looked, shook his head and gave his little smile, that said 'Well done'," Cameron said.

McKenley had won an Olympic relay gold medal in the same Helsinki stadium 31 years before Cameron's success.

Fitz Coleman, one of Jamaica's national coaches, said Herb inspired him to get involved in athletics.

"To be honest with you, I got involved

because of Herb. The manner in which he approached the sport, it impressed and I felt I could do likewise," Coleman said, who McKenley coached as a schoolboy at Calabar and later, was McKenley's assistant coach at Calabar. "His passion, his vision, it has impacted me in a major way."

Gerry Holness, head at Manchester High School, said the hero was a model for young coaches.

"I've always admired and observed the way in which he goes about, especially, motivating young athletes," said Holness. "As a young coach growing up, being especially in the warm-up area, I always tended to admire Herb, watching the way he moved around and how easily he could get his charges in gear to go out there on the day and do exactly what is expected of them."

Ambassador-at-large Courtney Walsh called Herb an icon and a hero.

"It's a sad day. He's a Jamaican icon. As far as I'm concerned, he's a hero in Jamaica, so his passing is always going to be sad. Knowing the man, he'd want us to remember the happy times, what he believed in and how he carried himself," Walsh stated.

The former West Indies cricket captain said, "For me, he will always be around. His

name will live on."

Molly Rhone, president of the International Federation of Netball Associations IFNA, voiced a note of disappointment at the modest turnout.

"I would have loved to have seen more schools", she pointed out, "and a lot of the associations in uniform because Herb was so much bigger than track and field. He was just sport in general."

"It's a very sad day but we think we should just not mourn his passing, but really learn from his life", the IFNA president noted.

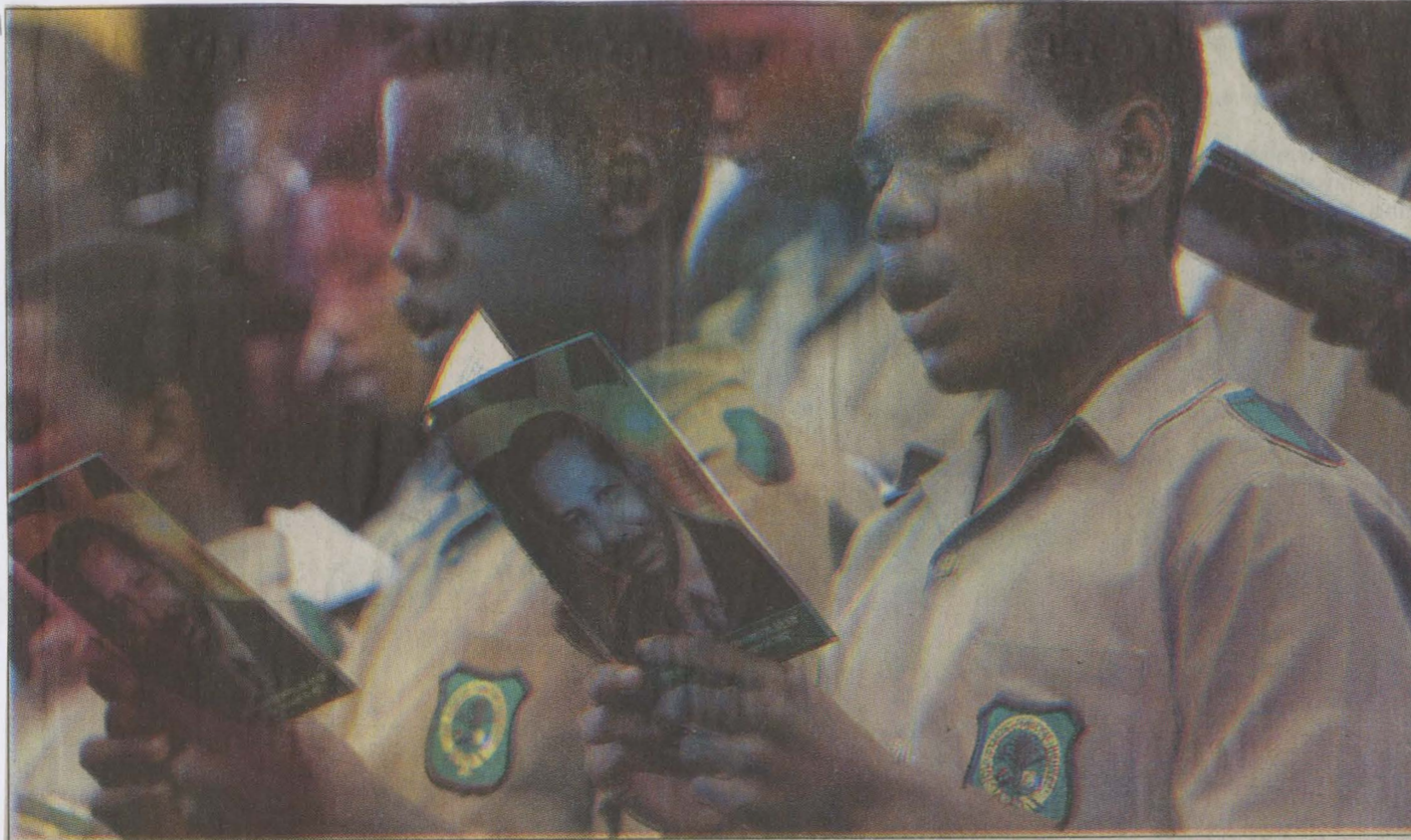
She recommended that his life be documented for circulation to young sportsmen "just to show them what perseverance can do and the approach you should have, not just to sports, but to life in general".

Observer Reporter Dana Bogle was the last reporter to interview McKenley before his death. At the funeral service she struggled to keep her composure.

"I'm here now and trying not to cry because I'm a reporter and you're not supposed to fall a part but it's kind of hard", said Bogle. The interview was published in the Observer newspaper a few weeks ago.

McKenley died on November 26 after an ongoing illness.

National Library of Jamaica



Students of Calabar High School sing during the ceremony at the National Arena yesterday. McKenley attended Calabar and coached the track and field team for three decades.



- MICHAEL SLOLEY PHOTOS

Jamaica's Olympic 200-metre runner Usain Bolt, lays a wreath on the casket of track and field great Herby McKenley during the ceremony at the graveside at National Heroes Circle yesterday. During his heydays, McKenley participated over the 100-metre, 400-metre and 200-metre. Bolt the world junior record holder over the 200-metre. Also sharing in yesterday's event are sprinter Sherone Simpson (left) and Deon Hemmings-McCatty, who won the 400-metre hurdles gold medal at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. McKenley won three silver medals and one gold during his Olympic career.



Olympian Grace Jackson (centre) laughs uncontrollably, after being told about one of the humorous moments during the life of Herb McKenley. Also sharing in the moment are IAAF Regional Representative Neville 'Teddy' McCook (left) and president of the Jamaica Olympic Association, Mike Fennell. The service was held at the National Arena.