

# THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HERB MCKENLEY

## Extracts from <sup>Herb's</sup> McKenley's diary

B1N

**July 10, 1922:** I was born a short while ago in Pleasant Valley, a small village in Clarendon. My parents are Dr. Alexander McKenley and his wife, Zilpha.

**April 6, 1938:** Competing for Calabar High School, I came second in the 220 yards Class Two race at the Inter-Secondary Schools Championship Sports held at Sabina Park in Kingston. It is the only time I placed in an event in these sports. I was beaten by L.B. Jones, also of Calabar. Third place was won by Wilson Chung of St. George's College.

**August 4, 1948:** Can you imagine? Little, little Jamaica has three athletes – Arthur Wint,

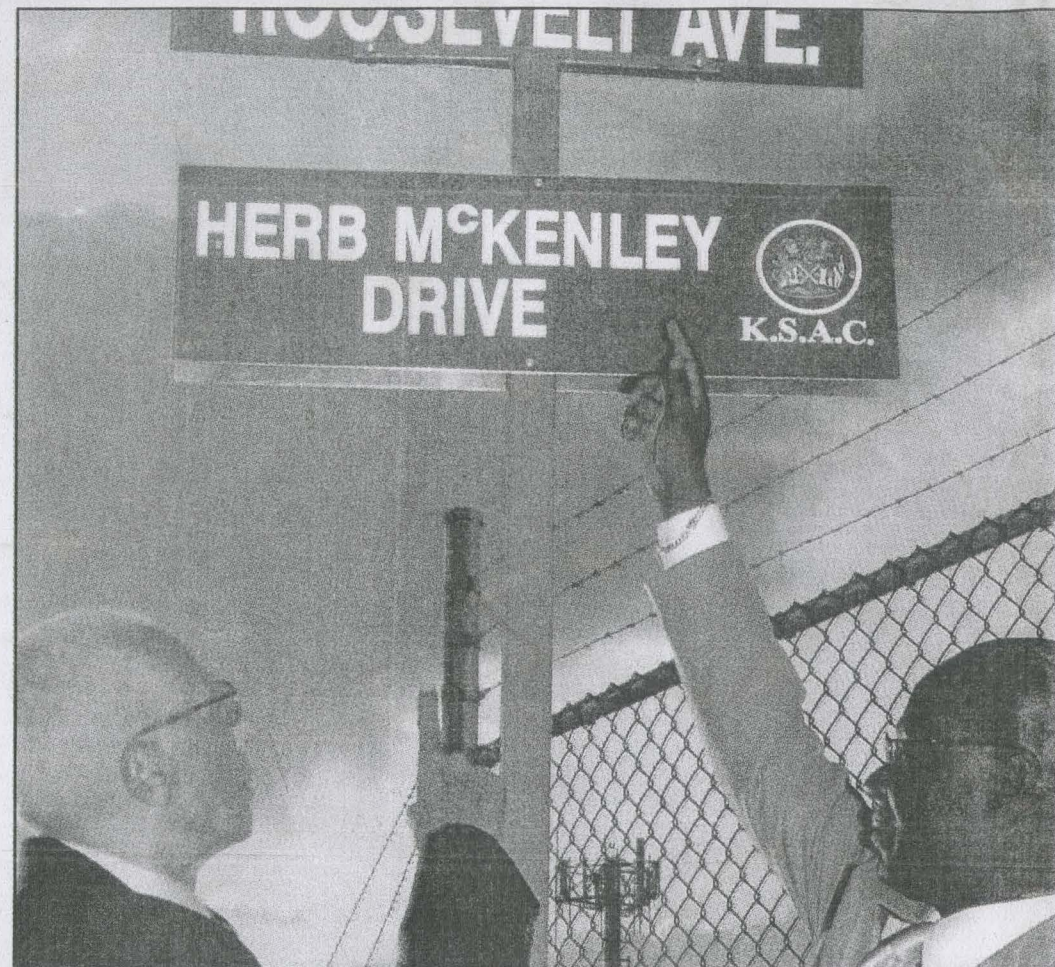
George Rhoden and I – who have qualified for the semi-finals of the 400 metres in the Olympic Games taking place at Wembley, London. We are so proud – and hopeful. A year earlier, I had celebrated getting one of my first awards, the Athlete of the Year for Central and South America, after setting a world-record 46.3 seconds. I was the first Jamaican to set a time or distance measured world record in any sport.

**August 5, 1948:** It is Arthur Wint who won the gold medal when he ran the 400 metres in 46.2 seconds at the Olympic Games in London. Jamaica is participating in these Games for the

first time. Not only does he win, but he equalled the Olympic record. I won the silver.

**August 6, 1948:** The Jamaica team of Arthur Wint, George Rhoden, Basil McKenzie and I is victorious in the Olympic relay 1,600 metres semi-finals on what is a rain-soaked track. We did so with the greatest ease, beating France and Canada who are our main rivals.

**August 7, 1948:** A cramp seized Arthur Wint after 150 metres on the third leg of the Olympic relay 1,600 metres finals at the Wembley Stadium in London, depriving our team of



**November 27, 2004:** Herb McKenley (left) was honoured with the Key to the City and the renaming of Roosevelt Avenue to Herb McKenley Drive.

Wint, Rhoden, Les Laing and I of winning the gold for Jamaica. Les Laing replaced Basil McKenzie.

**March 1, 1950:** I won the 200 metres in 20.9 seconds at the sixth Central American and Caribbean Games in Guatemala, breaking the

**July 27, 1952:** It is another great day for Jamaica when our relay team of Arthur Wint, George Rhoden, Les Laing and I, won the gold medal for the 4x400 metres relay in 3:03.9 seconds at the Helsinki Olympic

and third in the 400 metres. And guess what? Dillard met Jamaican beauty Joy Clemetson, one of our national softball representatives. They fell in love and subsequently got married.

**January 3, 1953:** The baton





**October 18, 2004:** Herb McKenley (left) receives his Order of Merit from Governor-General Sir Howard Cooke.

National Library of Jamaica

Wint, Rhoden, Les Laing and I of winning the gold for Jamaica. Les Laing replaced Basil McKenzie.

**March 1, 1950:** I won the 200 metres in 20.9 seconds at the sixth Central American and Caribbean Games in Guatemala, breaking the record of 21.2 seconds which was set by Cuban Jaceno Ortiz at the Panama Games.

**March 2, 1950:** It was my turn to defeat George Rhoden in the 400 metres at the 6th Central American and Caribbean Games taking place in Guatemala. I also cut two-tenths of a second from the previous record which was set by Arthur Wint at the Panama Games.

**May 14, 1951:** Today was a good day for me. First, I set a new British all-comers record when I won the international 300 yards race in 30.3 seconds in the British Games at the White City Stadium in London, England. Then to add more cheese to my sandwich, I later won the international 100 yards dash in 10 seconds.

**July 25, 1952:** This was Jamaica's first great day in Olympic history, with three Jamaican athletes, Arthur Wint, George Rhoden and I, in the 400 metres finals at the Olympic Games in Helsinki, Finland. George Rhoden won the gold medal and set a new Olympic record of 45.9 seconds. I finished just a shade behind George and was clocked in the same time.

**July 27, 1952:** It is another great day for Jamaica when our relay team of Arthur Wint, George Rhoden, Les Laing and I, won the gold medal for the 4x400 metres relay in 3:03.9 seconds at the Helsinki Olympic Games to establish a new Olympic record.

**August 6, 1952:** I received a telephone call from Jamaica telling me that **The Daily Cleaner** had published a photograph of the 1,600 metres Olympic relay team of Wint, Rhoden, Laing and I huddled together and with our heads bowed in prayer, just before we ran the record-winning Helsinki relay race. I remember that moment very well. There we were in the middle of the arena giving thanks to God for having given us the strength and opportunity to compete in that World Festival of Sport. And the glory was that the entire Stadium became silent.

**December 25, 1952:** Four months after our Olympic triumphs, Jamaica felt confident to invite three of the U.S.A.'s leading athletes to a Jamaica Olympic Association-sponsored International athletic meet at Sabina Park in Kingston. I felt proud when I won the 100 metres in 10.4 seconds and the 400 metres in 48 seconds. The Americans Harrison Dillard placed second in the 100 metres and his countrymen Reginald Pearson and Mal Whitfield placed second

and third in the 400 metres. And guess what? Dillard met Jamaican beauty Joy Clemetson, one of our national softball representatives. They fell in love and subsequently got married.

**January 3, 1953:** The baton used by the Jamaican Olympic 4x400 metres record-breaking team of Wint, Rhoden, Laing and I at the Olympics last year was presented to Hal Lake, chairman of the Board of Governors of the Institute of Jamaica for permanent display. Also presented was the shell of the cartridge which started the 400 metres race which was won by Rhoden at the Games. Later in the day, a pitcher autographed by the members of the entire Jamaican team to the Olympics was presented to the Governor, Sir Hugh Foot, to be used at meetings of the Executive Council.

**1954-73:** National track and field coach of Jamaica.

**February 19, 1954:** I have been in Australia since last December on a five-month professional tour as a member of the Victoria League and today I won the all-comers world professional sports title when I came first in the 220-yards championship at Melbourne in 21.5 seconds. I am being paid a fee of five thousand dollars and ten pounds each week during this tour.



# THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HERB MCKENLEY

## DIARY

CONTINUED FROM C2

**July 5, 1956:** Through my contacts with the coaches and other professionals on the staff of schools in the U.S.A., I have been able to obtain six scholarships for our athletes at prominent universities. George Kerr and Leroy Keane will now go to the University of Illinois, Ernie Haisley, Roy Greenland and Paul Foreman to the University of Michigan, and Louis Seaton to the North Carolina College.

**October 15, 1957:** By the way, I have interests other than athletics. I am now managing the Olympic Sluggers in the Women's Knockout Softball competition. And guess what? The Sluggers won the competition when they defeated the Dodgers in the finals. Winning pitcher Jean Ballentine conceded six hits and had one strikeout. She also hit a home run in the bottom of the sixth innings with one on base.

**November 19, 1960:** I am not getting old and I proved it when I won a special 100 yards race for the JAAA executives. 'Old men Pat McGlashen and George LaBeach' trail me for second and third places.

**February 6, 1966:** Vilma Charlton left Jamaica to take up a one-year scholarship at the Los Angeles State College. This is another scholarship I have been

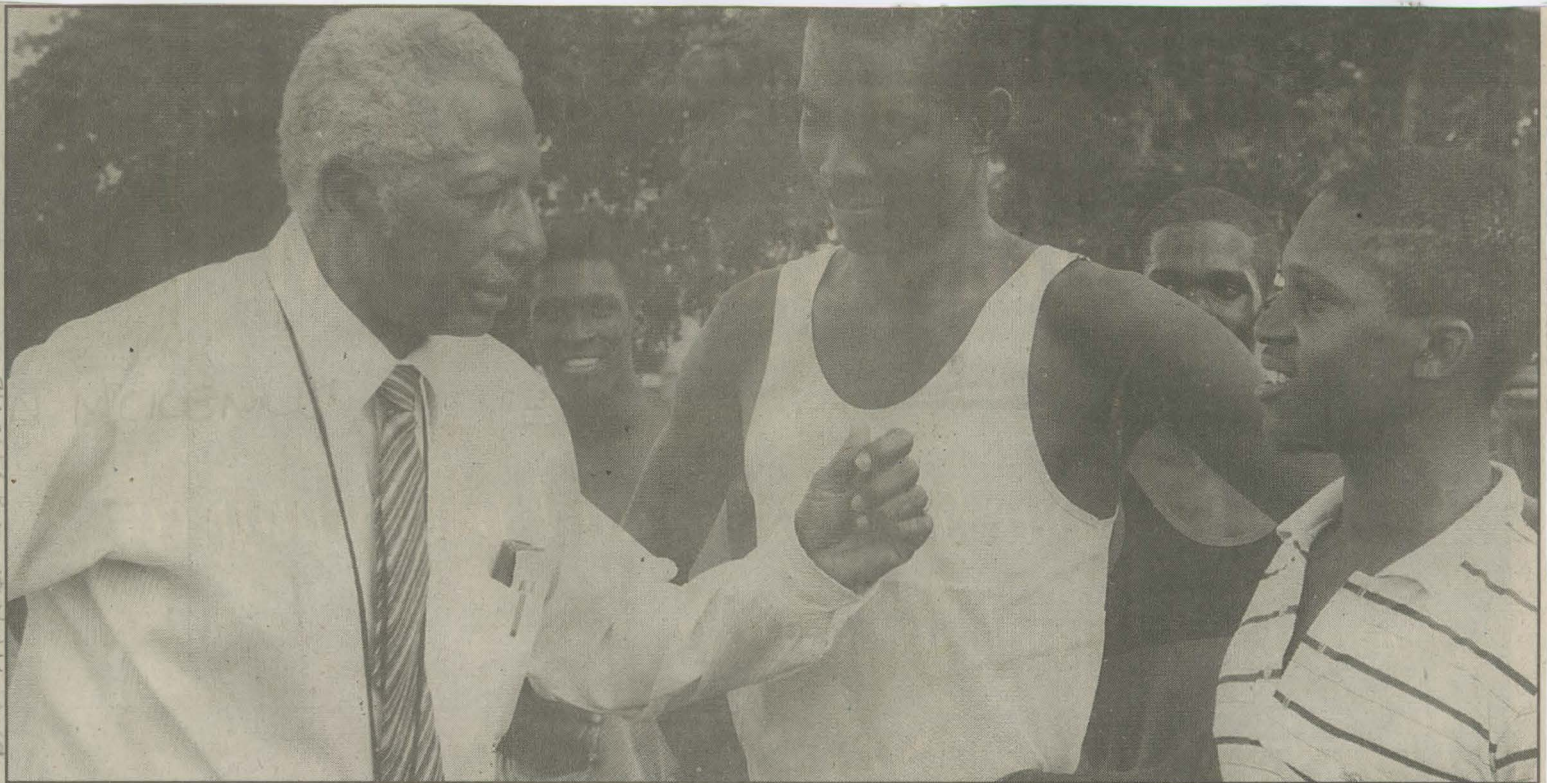
able to arrange through my contacts. Vilma is a former St. Andrew High School and Island schoolgirls champion and has already represented Jamaica at the Tokyo Olympics.

**July 30, 1971:** Eighteen-year-old Rosie Allwood, one of Jamaica's most promising athletes, became the first beneficiary of a special programme I started to pursue to assist athletes to realise their potential. I persuaded West Indies Pulp and Paper Company to sponsor her by providing employment as a clerk/typist in their Kingston offices to enable her to come to Kingston from her home in Portland to obtain the specialised training not available in that parish. The company also agreed to provide long-term assistance to help her plan for a career of her choice.

Allwood is a Titchfield High School athlete and won the 100 and 200 metres in the last Inter-Secondary School Girls' Championships.

**August 19, 1972:** The Jamaican Olympic team, of which I was a coach, stopped at Kempton in West Germany on the way to the Berlin Olympiad. However, we discovered that Rhodesia which pursued an apartheid policy would be participating in the Olympics. And with other black athletes from Barbados, Bermuda, Trinidad, Senegal, the U.S.A. and Venezuela, we voted to boycott the Kempton track and field meet to protest the presence of Rhodesia in Berlin. In a state-





**1987:** Herb McKenley (left) passes on a few hints of Dexter Facey (centre) and Christopher Stewart, members of Calabar High School's track team, as they prepare for the school's all-island relay.

ment to the news media, I said, "It's a matter of principle."

**May 28, 1976:** I am now training the Calabar High School track team and the results of that work showed when the team won four of the seven relays and dominated the fourth running of the Gibson Relays at the National Stadium. Highlight was their record run for the 4x400 metres, setting a new time of 3:14.1, bettering last year's 3:15.9 set last year by Camperdown High School.

**October 2, 1975:** Along with George Headley, Lindy Delapenha and Arthur Wint, I was inducted to the Black Athletes Hall of Fame of the U.S.A. during the ATP Nations Cup Tourney at the National Arena in St. Andrew.

**November 30, 1978:** I was flattered when the track and field stars of yesterday and today, and other members of the Jamaica Amateur Athletic Association elected me unopposed and vociferously as president of this body.

**August 1, 1988:** Can you imagine this little country boy from Pleasant Valley in Clarendon being awarded the Order of Jamaica? Well, it happened today and I am now the Honourable Herbert McKenley, O.J. Fantastic, isn't it!

**October 18, 2004:** Today, I was decorated with another honour when I was awarded the Order of Merit 'for distinguished service to athletics locally and internationally'. As such I join such legends as Bob Marley, Rex Nettleford and Edna Manley.

**November 27, 2004:** Today I was blessed. First, I was presented with the Key to the City of Kingston, and later Roosevelt Avenue, the road leading to the entrance of the National Stadium on Arthur Wint Drive was renamed the Herb McKenley Drive.

**November 26, 2007:** And so I say farewell. Weep not for me. Sing songs of joy. I have had a good life and you all made me live it with glory.

- Compiled by Hartley Neita

# A tribute by the Manley Foundation

*The following tribute was paid on the passing of the late Hon. Herb McKenley, O.M., O.J., C.D., by the chairman of the Michael Manley Foundation, Danny Roberts:*

"We note with deep regret the passing of the legendary Herb McKenley, a valued member of the Executive Committee of the Michael Manley Foundation. The sport that has brought Jamaica most recognition, acclaim and glory is unquestionably track and field athletics; and Herb McKenley has been the pre-eminent figure among the many men and women in our pantheon of icons of track and field.

"Starting with a phenomenal career as a sprinter, on retirement from the track Mr. McKenley continued his monumental contribution to Jamaica as coach, technician, motivator, mentor and administrator for virtually the rest of his life; and even when he finally, reluctantly, gave up the fight against ageing and infirmity and retired from active duty, he assumed a new role as a most enthusiastic, committed and loyal spectator.

"Appropriately, he was the only person ever to have received Jamaica's very special Order of Merit for contribution to Sport; and on the international plane, he was one of only a handful that the International Olympic Committee has honoured with its Order of the Olympics.

"We cannot forget that when Michael Manley was being trauced in the 1970s and the matter became the subject of litigation, Herb McKenley, although a political opponent of Mr Manley, stood for principle and made a decisive appearance in support of Mr. Manley's case.

"He was courageous, lion-hearted, generous, patriotic, unfailingly courteous and altogether a great and decent Jamaican. Our thoughts are with the McKenley family, who, even in their bereavement, must be buoyed by the knowledge that he was a national treasure and that his memory will be cherished by all who were privileged to know him."

B/N - MCKENLEY, HERB