

B/N-MCKENLEY, HERB  
**McKenley's**

**final race**

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**H**ERB McKenley yesterday breathed his last breath in the race of life from the large majestic lungs that brought him personal glory and set a nation on track for athletic stardom.

Two strokes and a heart attack which reduced him to a shadow of his former self in recent years, proved too much for the man who molded Jamaica's track and field in the image of himself.

Information reaching the **Observer** said McKenley had been experiencing problems with his kidneys.

In the Tony Thwaites wing of the University Hospital of the West Indies, Mona, the 85-year-old Olympian, in death, symbolically passed the baton to a generation of track speedsters, who carry on the tradition he blazed in 1944 — Jamaica then a British colonial outpost in the empire on which the sun would never set.

The sporting fraternity, half expecting that the inevitable would come, was nevertheless shocked and in heavy mourning yesterday as news emerged of the passing of the great Herb Henry McKenley, the unmatched legend bearing his country's third highest honour, the Order of Merit.

World sporting history will forever recount the unbelievable race winning third leg that McKenley ran as a member of Jamaica's winning mile relay team at the 1952 Summer Olympics in Helsinki, Finland. Since then, Jamaica has never looked back.

"I would like to extend my sympathies and that of the government of Jamaica to his widow and all the members of his family and to all those who have been associated with him over the these many years, and indeed to all athletics lovers who so revered this great son of Jamaica," said Prime Minister Bruce Golding, who was among thousands of Jamaicans who expressed condolences to the survivors of the track and field icon.

Golding returned to the island from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit in Uganda to the tragic news.

Opposition leader and former minister of sports, Portia Simpson Miller, for whom McKenley served as an advisor for many years, was very saddened by the news of his death.

"His patriotism, loyalty and his commitment to the development of sports (in Jamaica) is unparalleled," said the former prime minister.

"I'm hoping that my dream of establishing the Herb McKenley Sports Centre at Argyle Road, St Andrew will be carried on by this administration... befitting the greatness of this Jamaican, who left us this afternoon," she added.

President of the Jamaica Amateur Athletics Association (JAAA), Howard Aris, received word of McKenley's death within moments of his passing. "I got a call from his wife (Beverly) at around five minutes to six that he had died," he said, his voice breaking.

"His greatness was not only on the track, but off the track as well. He was my great friend and he'll be sadly missed because track and field in sport has lost a great Jamaican," Aris added.

McKenley, who was head coach of Jamaica's team from 1954 to 1973, served also as president of the JAAA. He received Jamaica's third highest national award, the OM in 2004.

McKenley, who was born on July 10, 1922 in Pleasant Valley, Clarendon achieved the unique feat by taking three bronze medals at the 1951 Pan-American Games in the 100m, 200m and 400m.

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## Jamaican track great Herb McKenley is dead

HERB from Page 1

President of the Jamaica Olympic Association Mike Fennel said McKenley's passing is not only a blow for Jamaica but also for the world of athletics.

"This man was huge and his contribution to sports in Jamaica was monumental," said Fennel.

"He was always looking out for the youngsters, always looking for new talent, always seeking ways to help them to build and never losing his vision for the possibilities of our athletes on the world stage," Fennel said.

# FAREWELL!

## Great McKenley stands second to none

**J**AMAICAN track and field sprint legend Herb McKenley, who delivered medals at the 1948 and 1952 Olympics, passed away last evening at the University Hospital of the West Indies after ailing for some time.

Among the great Jamaican athletes, the 85-year-old stands second to none.

In the years between World War II and his retirement from competition in 1954, Herbert (Herb) McKenley, supreme quarter-miler and sprinter, did everything there was to do except win an individual Olympic gold medal.

At the 1948 and 1952 Olympic Games in London and Helsinki, respectively, he won three individual silver medals — twice coming out at the wrong end of photo finishes.

In 1952 he provided one of the great relay legs of all time as Jamaica took the 400 metres relay gold in world record time.

To this day McKenley remains the only man to have reached the finals of the Olympic 100 metres, 200 metres and 400 metres. He was also the first man to run the quarter mile under 46 seconds and under 45 seconds.

He was at various times world record holder at 300 yards, 440 yards, 300 metres and 400 metres.

At a time when outdoor track meets were usually run on dirt or grass, he ran the quarter-mile under 47 seconds on 65 occasions.

He was to evolve from competitor into arguably Jamaica's most influential track and field coach and administrator, playing a lead role in the development of every generation

of athletes since the 1950s.

Up to just a few years ago, McKenley maintained a guiding hand in the track and field programme at his beloved Calabar High School.

And on any given evening — until infirmity made it impossible — he could be found at trackside at the National Stadium watching keenly as young, hungry athletes strove for distant goals.

Born July 10, 1922 in Pleasant Valley, Clarendon, to medical doctor Alexander Givens McKenley and his wife Zilpha Bell, Herb McKenley claims he first came face to face with his athletic future while involved in physical education sessions as a 15-year-old at Calabar.

Thin and lanky, McKenley used to easily outrun the "fat boys" during PE sessions. One day the sportsmaster saw him and told him to come out for the school's track and field team and "learn to run".

According to McKenley, he immediately rejected the suggestion: "I said, 'Sir, I don't need to learn to run. I can run already'."

But the issue was far from over. Soon the youngster was summoned by the headmaster.

He got a lecture that was to stick in his mind forever.

"The headmaster told me how important it is to belong. He said I should always be faithful and loyal and that next to the love of my family I should love my country and my school.

"He asked which sports I played, I told him I played cricket. He told

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# Great McKenley stands second to none

**McKENLEY from Backpage**

me I should go out for the cricket team as well as the running team ... that's how I got started," McKenley said.

After overcoming the initial hostility of the "town boys" who disliked the idea of a "little country boy" running with them and beating them, McKenley rapidly established himself as a leading sprinter at Calabar.

Like so many other great Jamaican athletes, McKenley honed his skills at Boys' Championships.

By 1942, he had earned a track scholarship to Boston College where he quickly stamped his class by winning the US National AAU championship over 400 metres in 1943. He was to retain the title every year until 1949.

In 1945 McKenley transferred to the University of Illinois following a disagreement with the Dean of Boston College and for the first time learnt he could compete on "a global scale".

According to him, one day his coach Leo Johnson (who was later to play a pivotal role in the development of half-miler George Kerr) said to him, "Herb, how would you like to be the greatest quarter-miler in the world?"

McKenley laughed and paid little attention, but his coach was to repeat the question "three or four times" in the following weeks.

Then one night McKenley had what he considered to be nothing short of a spiritual experience.

"I dreamt one night that I was running in a track meet and I was running like hell. I won the race with the officials announcing I had set a new world record of 46.2 for 440 yards. I woke up and could not believe it. I was in a sweat. The clothes were all wet from the race. I was sure I had been running..." he said.

For the next several months, Johnson kept McKenley on a rigorous programme of cross country running aimed at building his strength and stamina.

It was the hardest work he had ever done and McKenley claims he often thought of quitting.

"The thing that kept me going was the cheers of the people in my dream," he said.

He soon reaped reward for the effort. In the indoor season he broke the 400 metres indoor record with a run of 47.9 seconds on a board track.

He followed up in the outdoor season by breaking the outdoor record with a 46.2 clocking on a muddy, waterlogged track. It was the same time he had clocked in his dream.

Sweeping all before him, McKenley approached the 1948 Olympics — Jamaica's first ever — as a clear favourite for the 400 metres.

But confident though he

was, McKenley knew that his six-foot four-and-a-half inch compatriot Arthur Wint was a man to fear.

"He had a tremendous stride. It was intimidating. If you looked at him run you wouldn't want to run with him," he recalled with a chuckle.

Just days before the Olympics, McKenley suffered a major scare when he strained a groin muscle.

He recovered well enough to — perhaps unwisely — contest the 200 metres placing fourth in the final.

Over half century later, McKenley believes over-confidence cost him the gold medal in the 400 metres final.

"I started out very well. I came off the first turn just eating up everybody," he recalls.

He ran the first 200 metres in 21.1 seconds and appeared well on the way to an easy victory when he decided he would not only win the gold medal but decimate the world record.

"I felt so easy and relaxed I completely changed my way of running and decided like I was going after 45 seconds flat," he said.

But 40 metres from the tape, McKenley suddenly realised he was in deep trouble.

"It was like I came up against a brickwall... I found myself shortening and couldn't do anything about it," he recalls.

To make matters worse he could hear Wint coming.

"I could hear Arthur coming... He was like that... you could always hear his footsteps coming... boom, boom, boom... gaining all the time and I couldn't go any faster ... then he went by and took the gold. I always thought it happened because of my over-confidence," McKenley said.

Wint won the race in 46.2 seconds with McKenley a step behind in 46.41.

To make matters worse for McKenley and the relay team, Wint who was also a silver medalist in the 800 metres, pulled up in the 400 metres relay to deprive the Jamaicans of a likely gold ahead of the Americans.

An attack of mumps almost kept McKenley out of the Helsinki Olympics in 1952.

Ironically the short recovery time after the illness influenced him to run the 100 metres at that Olympics as part of his speedwork for the 400 metres and allowed him a shot at another piece of glory.

According to him he had planned initially to run only two or three 100 metres to prepare himself for the quarter-mile.

But while running the short sprints McKenley worked on improving his start.

"I had often found in running the 100 metres that I was getting up too high too suddenly... so that when I was going up the other people



McKENLEY... arguably Ja's most influential track and field coach and administrator

were going forward. I started to talk to myself... to concentrate... I would say 'stay down, stay down'.

"I practised that and suddenly I was through the heats and the semi-final and was in the final.

"Nobody had paid me any attention during the heats, but suddenly after the semi-final everybody came to tell me 'you can win, you can win'."

McKenley claims all the talk threw him off.

"All of a sudden I started thinking about winning and forgot all the things I had been practising. When the gun went for the 100 metres final I had a terrible start, I just shot straight up.

"At 95 metres I found myself in fifth position... I passed everybody in that last five metres and to this day I still think I won that race," he said.

In the tightest of photo finishes, it was determined that the American Lindy Remigino had won the race in 10.4 seconds, the same time clocked by McKenley.

He also lost the 400 metres in a photo finish, this time to another great Jamaican George Rhoden.

While Wint ended up in fifth place, McKenley claims the much feared giant had once again played a role in his downfall.

They were into the final turn of the 400 metres final and according to McKenley, he and the short, stocky Rhoden were "pretty much even" when he suddenly heard the "boom, boom, boom" of the long-striding Wint closing fast.

"I was amazed. I turned my head around to look and in that split second Rhoden took off around the turn. When I looked back Rhoden was gone. I was frightened and I took off after him. He had a lead of six or seven metres but I was catching him.

"I got to within a foot of

him but then suddenly I couldn't go any faster. I had caught him but I couldn't go past him. I still say that if I hadn't looked around for Arthur, I would have gone with Rhoden and I would have beaten him."

As it turned out McKenley and Rhoden were clocked in the same Olympic record time of 45.9 seconds.

That left McKenley with only the 400 metres relay if he was to get the coveted Olympic gold medal.

Wint, the lead-off runner handed over the baton to Les Laing, an accustomed sprinter, a stride behind the Americans. Laing fought bravely, but was no match for his American opponent Gene Cole and handed over to McKenley, 15 metres behind the Americans.

Up against the 400 metres hurdles champion Charlie Moore, McKenley recalls that his first emotion was fright.

"When I got the baton I was scared like hell and I said my God I am not going to catch him and they are going to blame me..."

But 50 metres into

the run McKenley suddenly remembered something his beloved coach Leo Johnson had told him years earlier.

"Herb," Johnson had said, "do it a little at a time".

McKenley relaxed. "I was still running fast but I was relaxed. Suddenly I heard the crowd roaring. When I looked up I realised that Charlie Moore was just four or five metres in front of me and we still had another 75 metres to go.

"Well by the time we reached the change-over I had caught him and was running faster than he was. Rhoden on the last leg was able to get a metre jump (on the great American Mal Whitfield) and maintained the lead through to the end."

The relay team had smashed the world record, clocking 3:03.9 and most amazing of all McKenley had run an unheard of 44.6 seconds on the third leg.

McKenley's face still glows with the memory of it all. "I was in heaven. My goal always was to be a gold medal winner and at the end it was as if it was so designed that I should win my only gold medal at that last opportunity."

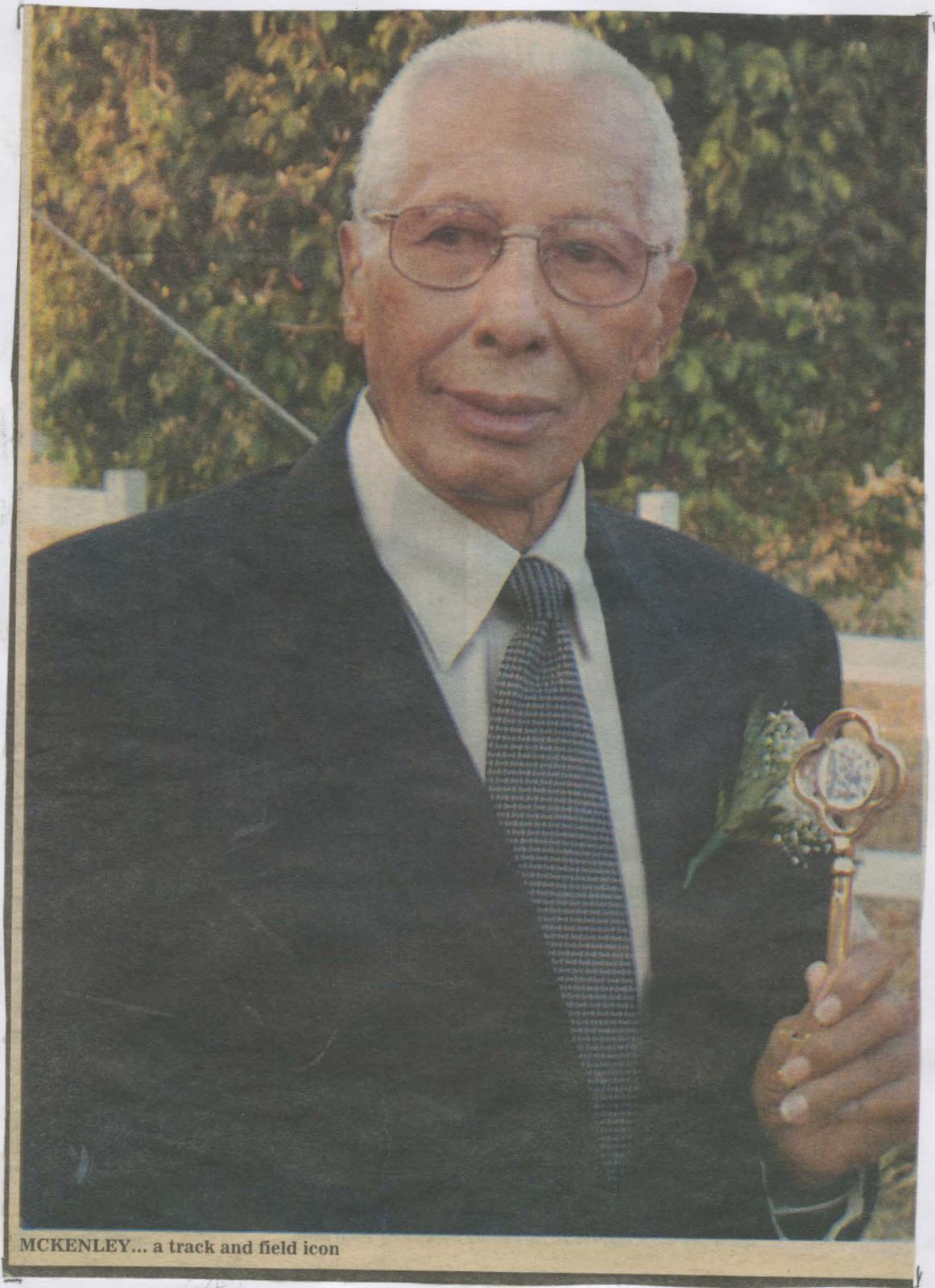


MCKENLEY... did everything there was to do except win an individual Olympic gold medal

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MCKENLEY... a track and field icon

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