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Track & Field Athletics 1991

THE HON. HERBERT HENRY

MCKENLEY O.J., C.D., awardee 1991, was the second Caribbean athlete and the first from the English-speaking Caribbean, to set a time or distance measured world record when he set a new world record for the quarter mile of 440 yards of 46.3 seconds on June 28, 1947. He was to retain this distinction until the second half of the century began in 1950. He was to set three more individual world records for a grand total of five.

In the almost forty years since he ceased top level active international competition, no other athlete from this hemisphere, outside the U.S.A. has come close to that figure of five world records.

On June 6, 1948, when he ran 46 seconds flat for the 440 yards, and was credited with a world record for the 400 meters at that same time, he became the first man to reach what was then considered to be one of the great "barriers" of athletics, like the four minute mile, the 60 foot shot putt, and the 16 foot pole vault.

It was not until 1954, that the four minute mile and the 16 foot pole vault were first attained. Herb McKenley was the first man ever to run under 46 seconds for the Olympic distance of 400 metres when he set a new time of 45.9 seconds beating the time that had been first set by Rudolf Harbig of Germany nine years earlier. McKenley's most famous world record effort came at Helsinki in 1952, when his leg of 44.6 seconds, the fastest ever such effort at that time and, for a long time the only one ever under 45 seconds, was the principal component in the capturing of the gold medals in the 4 x 400 metres relay

in a world record time of 3.03.9 - a record that was to last for eight years and one that had beaten the previous twenty year effort by over 4 seconds.

This was the first and only such victory over a full-strength United States team secured by any other country in the history of the games - an achievement that still stands and the only time that any other than a United States national club or college team has ever held this world record.

This achievement of team Olympic gold medals in world record time is, arguably, the greatest ever single achievement in Caribbean sport. He also closed a gap of 12 to 15 metres held by Charles Moore in what most experts still regard as one of the two best relay legs ever run in Olympic competition. Although he never won an individual gold medal he was and remains the only male athlete in the entire history of the Olympic Games to make the final in the 100 metres, 200 metres and 400 metres events.

Toting up a number of firsts, Herb McKenley can lay claim to being the finest all round male sprinter, the sport has even seen.

The Hon Herb Mckenley also has a superb and superlative record of service to the sport off the competitive field. He is fittingly, after over fifty years of service to the sport, the first Honourary Life President of the Jamaica Amateur Athletic Association after serving as President for several years. In terms of the International Amateur Athletic Federation Herb is one of only three Jamaicans to be awarded the IAAF's Veterans Pin - the others being his compatriot Richard Ashenheim, also a former President of the JAAA and the current President of the JAAA Neville "Teddy" McCook.

In 1987 for the IAAF's 75th anniversary, Herb was also awarded a special medal by the IAAF.

He has been outstanding in lending his prestige and his efforts to all kinds of activities for the benefit of the sport that

others with his kind of achievement might not consider worthy of their attention. For Jamaica, Herb has served as a coach - more often than not the Head Coach - on most national teams to practically all the international games and championships in which this country has made an entry over the last thirty five years.

In the nine olympic summer games since he began in 1956, Jamaica has won thirteen medals in athletics, and in the three outdoor world championships since 1983, Jamaica has won twelve medals including two golds.

During his time as coach, our women have also set world records at 400 metres and over the indoor 200 metres and our men have set or equalled world records or helped to do so.

Herb McKenley was the first Jamaican athlete to receive an athletics scholarship to the U.S.A. and has proceeded directly or indirectly to help hundred of others over the last fifty years to go the same route.

It is typical of our awardee that at 69 he has just been a key member of the coaching panels with the Jamaican contingents at the 11th Pan American Games and the Third IAAF World Championship in athletics As well as the sixth Pan American Junior Athletics Championships.

As coach of his old High School Calabar, has over the last fifteen years not only ended the record successes of fourteen consecutive victories secured at Boys Championships by Kingston College, but has helped to make Calabar by the number of victories that they have secured at these championships, not only the most successful school since that time but the most successful school, after Kingston College in the modern era in these championships.

We salute the Hon. Herb McKenley O.J., C.D., athlete, coach, inspirer, organiser, national and international representative, supreme exemplar and patriot, inaugural member of the Jamaica Sports Hall of Fame and the Black Sports Hall of Fame in the USA.
