

HAMILTON'S HURDLER-

BETTY TAYLOR



Mario Scattolini: Women hurdlers

Cathy Macdonald

Dans les années 30, Betty Taylor, de Hamilton, était connue comme une des coureuses canadiennes les plus accomplies, dans son pays aussi bien qu'à l'étranger. Sa compétence en course de haies était évidente dans les éliminatoires de l'Ontario et du Canada, ainsi qu'aux Jeux de l'Empire Britannique, aux Jeux du Monde de la femme, et aux Jeux Olympiques. en 1936, Taylor reçut le titre de la meilleure femme athlète canadienne de l'année.

still under sixteen, Taylor's 9.9 easily beat the intermediate time of 10.4 seconds.

The Canadian championships were held in Wetaskiwin, Alberta, and the cost of travel prevented Ontario from sending many representatives to the meet. As a result, Taylor did not defend her Canadian title in 1931. Instead, she sharpened her hurdling skills at the popular Hamilton Olympic Club twilight meets and at other competitions throughout the province of Ontario.

At the Canadian Olympic trials of 1932 Taylor competed in the senior

tied in the games trials, setting a new Canadian record of 11.9 seconds for their event.

Betty was expected to do well in London and did not disappoint the experts. At the Empire Games, after easily winning her preliminary heat, she finished second in the final. Her silver-medal performance forced the winner, South African Marjorie Clark, to a record time of 11.8 seconds.

The Women's World Games followed the track portion of the Empire Games, and most of the Canadian women's team remained in London to compete in it. Here Taylor also finished second, running the best race of her career, far better than she had ever done in Canada. She gained a measure of revenge, too, easily defeating Clark of South Africa, who finished fourth.

Her performances in these two races solidified Taylor's reputation as a pressure performer, one who did well when faced with stiff opposition. As well, her hurdling technique was highly praised by both European and Canadian critics.

Upon her return to Canada Taylor enrolled at McMaster University in her home town of Hamilton. She received an athletic scholarship and was an honours student. Although she participated in other sports while at school, hurdling for the Hamilton Olympic Club remained her chief interest; in 1935 she won the Canadian championship again. This time she came from behind to beat Roxy Atkins, who had led the race all the way.

After defending her Ontario and national titles in 1936, Taylor was named to the Olympic team and elected captain by her teammates. This was the fourth time Betty had been selected to represent Canada at a major international event.

"Beautiful Betty," as she was called in Berlin, again gave a stellar performance. Her time of 11.7 seconds in the semifinal heat equalled the existing world record and qualified her for the final. In that race Taylor was on her way to a victory when she was jostled by the hurdler in the next lane and knocked off stride. She recovered but was in a group of four that finished closely. Immediate results gave

... the best Canadian female athlete of 1936 ...

Betty Taylor was a twelve-year-old schoolgirl when Fanny Rosenfeld, Myrtle Cook, and the rest of the Canadian women's track-and-field team returned from their triumph at the 1928 Olympics. Nine years later she retired from her own successful track career, acknowledged as Canada's premier hurdler and honoured as the country's outstanding female athlete. Her achievements, both at home and abroad, contributed to the tradition of athletic excellence established by Canadian women during the golden age of the 1920s and 1930s.

Betty's first notable success came at the inaugural British Empire Games held in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1930. Since there were no women's track events included, the Canadian women's track-and-field championships were staged in conjunction with the games. Competing as an intermediate, the fourteen-year-old Taylor won the 60-metre hurdles easily and impressed knowledgeable onlookers with her fluid style.

By 1931 Ms. Taylor and her Hamilton Olympic Club teammates served notice that they were intent on making a name for themselves in Ontario track circles. The club garnered several titles at the provincial championship meet in August, including Betty's 60-metre hurdle crown. Although she competed in the junior category because she was

ranks for the first time. She earned herself a place on the Olympic squad by finishing second in the finals of the 80-metre hurdles. Betty and the other women selected to go to Los Angeles represented a new era in Canadian track and field. All of the members of the famous 1928 team had retired, and a new crop of athletes was needed to represent Canada in this international competition.

The team fared well, finishing second overall. Taylor, however, was eliminated in the preliminary heats of the 80-metre hurdles and did not reach the finals.

In the summer of 1933 Taylor re-established her supremacy in Canadian hurdling. After competing at the intermediate level in the Ontario championships, Betty entered the senior event at the nationals and ran away with the race, winning by fifteen yards. Her time of 12.4 seconds was more than a full second faster than her efforts of the previous year, and she had raced against the top hurdlers in the country.

The British Empire Games and the Women's World Games, both held in London, England, in 1934, were the scenes of further successes for Betty Taylor. Now eighteen, Taylor was one of three hurdlers chosen for the Canadian team, which was touted as the strongest women's track team ever assembled by Canada. She and Roxy Atkins

Taylor fourth place and no medal. However, when the official photographs were reviewed, she was awarded third place and the bronze medal. All three medal winners were given the same time because the finish was so close.

When the points were added up, the Canadian women finished eighth out of twenty-three teams, with eight points. Taylor contributed four points with her third place, and the relay team also finished third. The eighth-place standing was a sharp drop from the first and second places of the 1928 and 1932 Olympics. Although individual stars like Taylor were able to excel, Canada no longer had the overall talent needed to dominate the team standings.

Betty Taylor's gritty Olympic performance capped a brilliant career. In December of 1936 she was nominated for the Lou Marsh Trophy, awarded annually to the outstanding athlete in Canada, female or male, amateur or professional. Taylor didn't win this award but was one of three women and nine men nominated. Later in the same month she was named the best Canadian female athlete of 1936 and the winner of the Canadian Press Award. In this poll of Canadian sportswriters, Taylor was an easy winner. She was also the obvious and popular recipient of the Velma Springstead Memorial Trophy, awarded to the outstanding female athlete in Canada by the Women's Federation. Another honour came in February, 1937, when the Hamilton Olympic Club presented Taylor with the President's Prize for being the club's outstanding athlete of 1936.

After the presentation by her club, Betty Taylor announced her retirement from track and field. During her tenure as Canada's premier hurdler she continued the Canadian tradition of athletic excellence and was an important participant in the golden age of women's sport in Canada.

Cathy MacDonald is presently completing her doctoral dissertation at the University of Alberta on Canadian women sportswriters of the 1920s and 1930s.

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