



It also must be remembered that Beamon's mark was two feet longer than the record 27 feet 4 1/4 inches set by Ralph Boston in 1965. Beamon was competing against Boston and Igor Ter-Ovanesyan, a Soviet long jumper, who had tied Boston's record in 1967.

A lot of viewers emphasized that Beamon was lucky as he did his jump in the "thin mountainous air of Mexico City." But they completely forgot that everybody else competed in that thin air too.



Lee Calhoun, left, of Gary, Indiana, edges Willie May of Chicago by a head to win the 110 meter hurdles in Rome, 1960.



Wilma Rudolph of Tennessee State displaying the 3 gold medals she won in the 1960 Rome games in the 100 meter, 200 meter and the 400 meter relay.

In 1932, when Los Angeles hosted the games, 127 women competed in 14 track and field, fencing, and swimming events. Since then 13 additional sports categories have been added to broaden the scope of female participation.

In the span of time since the 1932 games, women, and Black women in particular, have provided outstanding performances in all events they participated in.

The most dominant figure in women's competition without a doubt has been Wilma Rudolph who won three gold medals in the 1960 games at Rome, Italy.

Wilma came out of Tennessee State University under Coach Ed Temple, who was developing women runners long before it became stylish for them to compete in big meets. Wilma won gold medals in the 100 meters, 200 meters and 4 x 100 meter relay.

Some of Tennessee State's other Olympic gold medalists were Edith McGuire and Wyomia Tyus. McGuire won the 200 meters in Tokyo in 1964. Tyus won the 100 meter gold at Tokyo and also at Mexico City in 1968.

Besides the previously mentioned gold medal winners scores of others have made history as performers under the American flag in the celebrated Olympics.

Robert(Pappy) Gault, now 61, who coached the U.S. Olympic Boxing Team in 1968 at Mexico, declares all Olympic fighters "try to get the gold(medal) because it is the path to the real gold." Boxers, as Gault sees it, have learned this is the way to make big money fast so if they are fortunate enough to win in the Olympics, they invariably seek the "big payoff" in pro ranks. This has been the trend for most of the ring champions since television scaled the pro purses for title fights to such lofty heights.

Gault, who now operates a training gym on Georgia Avenue in Northwest Washington, D.C., known as "The House of Champions," recalls that the 1968 team of 11 members won nine medals in Mexico. The 1976 team at Montreal, highlighted by Sugar Ray Leonard's victory, won more gold medals but the '68 team set a team mark.



Sgt. Edward Crook, left, of Ft. Campbell, Ky., winning midweight gold medal, 1960. Tadeusz Walasek, right, of Poland won silver medal.



Otis Davis, second from left, won the 400 meter gold medal in 1960.

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Wilma Rudolph

(1940-)



Wilma Rudolph captivated the sporting world in 1960 by winning three gold medals at the Rome Olympics. She sprinted to victories in the 100 and 200 meter dashes, having previously set world's records in both events. No American woman, before or since, has taken three gold medals in Olympic track-and-field. Wilma Rudolph had been unable to walk until she was eight years old.

She was born in St. Bethlehem, Tennessee, the twentieth of twenty-two children, to Ed and Blanche Rudolph. At the age of four, Wilma was stricken with scarlet fever complicated by pneumonia. These diseases left her right leg useless.

Once a week for two years, Mrs. Rudolph and Wilma traveled to Nashville where Wilma received treatment. Every night, after Wilma was asleep, Mrs. Rudolph would massage her leg. When she was eight, Wilma began to walk with the aid of a brace. At eleven, she would walk normally and finally was able to participate in sports.

Basketball was her first love. She became a star player at Burt High School in Clarksville, Tennessee. As a sophomore, she scored 800 points, a state record, and once she made 45 points in a single game, another record. At a tournament in Nashville, Wilma caught the eye of Ed Temple, track coach at Tennessee State University. Temple was refereeing women's basketball games. He recognized track talent even if he saw it on a basketball court. Wilma had no idea that she could run. Yet she was highly motivated to excel at sports which she could not play as a child.

At fourteen, she enrolled in Temple's summer track program. In 1956, she ran the Olympics held in Melbourne, Australia. She won a bronze medal as a member of the third-place 4 by 100 relay team.

In the fall, she returned to high school and continued to run track and play basketball. In her senior year, Wilma became pregnant. "I graduated in May; Yolanda was born in July, and I entered Tennessee State in September." Her pregnancy forced a break in Wilma's training, and she missed the entire 1958 season. She worked "extra hard" to build up her stamina.

By 1960, Wilma had become the best woman sprinter in the world. She set her first world's record at the Olympic Trials in Abilene, Texas. By the end of the year, she held indoor and outdoor records in the 100 and 200 meter runs. She won her three gold medals before the cheering crowds of Rome.

Wilma's two great competitive years were 1960 and 1961. She won nearly every top sports trophy awarded, including the Associated Press Award as Female Athlete of the Year, the Helms World Trophy, and the prestigious James E. Sullivan Trophy.

Wilma set several new world's records in 1961. She was thronged by her fans wherever she went during the European summer track season. In Cologne, Germany, mounted police had to hold admirers back, and in Berlin fans stole the shoes off her feet.

Wilma retired from competition after the 1961 season. She returned to Tennessee State where she earned a B.S. degree in Education. As a teacher and athletic coach she tried to pass on her special skills to hundreds of young competitors.

Today Wilma is busier and more involved than ever. Her autobiography, *Wilma*, was published in 1977, and she was a special consultant for the filming of a television movie based on the book. In 1977, she was awarded the Outstanding Tennesseean Award for her civic contributions to the state.

Wilma and her husband, Robert Eldridge, have four children. Presently she is studying for an advance degree in Business Administration. "By 1984, I hope to be one of the top Black businesswomen in the United States. That's my next challenge." Not content to rest on her laurels, Wilma Rudolph would like to be remembered as more than a runner.

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