

The Great Comeback

Harry Jerome



There are too few people in Canada today who continually thump the drum on behalf of amateur sport even though at times it appears that they might as well thump their heads against a brick wall. Promoting amateur sports is a tough and often thankless task and while progress is being made, each step up the ladder is won only after hour upon hour of hard work -- and frustration.

One of these "too few" people is Harry Jerome, who climbed to the top in sprinting through sheer determination, then fought even harder to stay there.



A member of the B.C. Sports Hall of Fame, Jerome has been called many things over the years - one of Canada's greatest ever athletes, outspoken, critical, etc. -- but he has never been a quitter. The son of a C.N.R. Pullman Coach Attendant, he was born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan in 1940 and came to Vancouver when he was 12 years old.

His teachers at North Vancouver High School encouraged young Jerome to run and his success came quickly. At 18 he broke Percy Williams' 31-year-old record in the 220 yards and his high school track led him to the University of Oregon on a scholarship. A year later, Jerome set his first World Record in Saskatoon when he was clocked at 10 seconds flat for the 100 metres. He shared the record with a German runner and it stood for nine years.

He was on top of the world, but events took a turn for the worse at the 1960 Olympics in Rome. Jerome failed to qualify for the 100 metre finals when he pulled a muscle in the heats. The story was repeated at the Commonwealth Games in Perth in 1962, when Harry had to drop out of the 100 metres final when he ruptured a muscle in his left thigh. Some observers were writing him off as a failure and his injury in Perth sidelined the sprinter for a year. Many expected he would never run again.

They were wrong.

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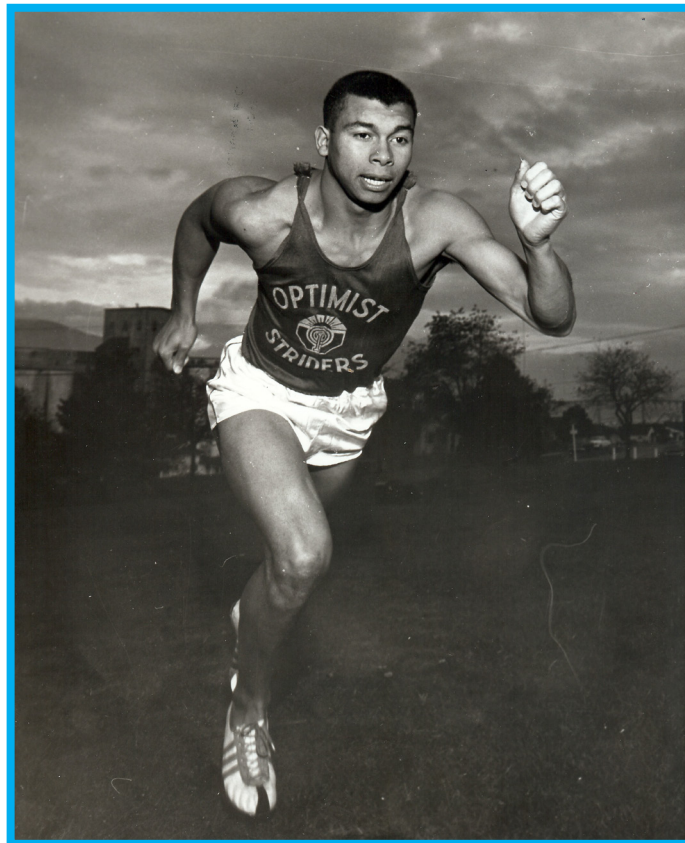
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Jerome made an incredible comeback in 1964 at the Tokyo Olympics, winning a Bronze Medal in the 100 metres. Two years later, he astounded the world again by running the 100 yards in 9.1 seconds for another World Record. That record, which he shared with Bob Hayes of the U.S., stood until 1974. Jerome struck again in the 1966 Commonwealth Games by winning the Gold Medal in a photo finish with Tom Robinson of the Bahamas.

He retired after the 1968 Olympics in Mexico and unfortunately it was a rather sad ending. Jimmy Hines of the U.S. won the 100 metres in a World Record time of 9.9 seconds. Jerome was two-tenths of a second slower and finished seventh. "Now I'm going to get involved in amateur sport in another way" he said at the time. "I'd like to get involved with kids." And that's exactly what Harry's doing. As far as he's concerned he's got another race to win. It's a race to promote amateur sports.



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