

## Milt Ottey



Milt Ottey was a high jumper for Canada when he performed in the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane, Australia. He won two gold medals in that event at those games. His other athletic highlights were ranking #1 in the world in High Jump in 1982, being a thirteen time High Jump Champion from 1979-1992, winning the Bronze Medal at the 1990 Commonwealth Games, being a three time Canadian team member in 1980, 1984 and 1988, finishing in seventh place at the World Indoor Champions in 1987, being a two time gold winner in the 1986 Commonwealth Games, finishing in sixth place in the Olympic games in 1984, being the NCAA champion in 1982, being the US champion in 1982 and winning the Bronze Medal at the 1979 Pan Am Games.<sup>i</sup> His career highlights are Currently working with "Over the Top Performance Athletics" as a Coordinator, Consultant and Head Coach, being the assistant Track and Field Coach at the University of New Mexico from 1997-2000, being the Assistant Track and Field Coach at Kent State University from 1991-1996, and holding a Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of Texas El Paso in 1990.<sup>ii</sup>

## Interview questions for the Commonwealth Games

**Date: March 2/04 Interviewee: Milt Ottey Interviewer: Melanie Hotke, Amy Bosgraaf and Brian Marissen**

### **I. Getting to the Games**

#### **A. How did they get started into their particular sport?**

Really by accident. Around age 13 I accidentally jumped over a bar and I didn't know what I was doing. I was hanging around at recess and a lot of people were gathered around the stick and I jumped over a stick I thought was stuck in the ground. I jumped higher than everybody else that was my introduction to high jump. I took it by accident. I became the high school champion and from there I went on to represent my school and I got into a public school and from there the first track meet I got last place.

#### **B. How did you get selected?**

I went through the Commonwealth Game trials and I won. You have to make the standard but the standard is quite easy comparatively and I went through to the Commonwealth game trials, which also involved the Canadian Championships, and I won that. We took three (high jumpers) in 1982.

#### **Training regimes for the games?**

I trained six days a week, between three to four hours a day. I lifted weights, I did a lot trimetrics for pounding, a lot of running, a lot of technique work, and practiced high jump itself. Even coaching is hard because some people look at it and think that it's easy, but it is very technical, very technical to get things done properly.

#### **C. What did it mean you to as an amateur event?**

The high jump was an amateur event and an amateur sport. Amateur sport being non-professional, Olympic, high school. We don't make as much money. We don't make any money because when you are talking about amateur sports the terminology amateur sports means we don't get paid for it. That's how that terminology started way back when. In fact, when the Olympic movement started again the rich folk who participated in the Olympic game; they were doing it because it was something to do. They weren't getting paid for it. But as time got closer to where we are now, we have more and more people taking part in the Olympic games who need money. It's not a written report but less than one percent of all track athletes in the world make good money off of it. Although you hear about the Carl Lewis', the Marion Jones', to Donovan Bailey and how much money they make; you listen to that and that's only less than one percent of the population that make that kind of money. If you look at an amateur athlete, we train a good deal, we go nine, ten, eleven months of the year and that's our training. Your average person in the street makes more money than your average track athlete. We don't get paid unless we jump or unless you compete, or if you have a contract with a major shoe company or if somebody is paying you the money, and that is not that much. Again people hear Donovan Bailey made a million dollars, Donovan Bailey did this, but that's because of the hype, he won a gold medal in a very prestigious event.

**When asked if he went to the Olympic Games:** Yes, I went to two of them. (When asked if he got sixth in 1984): Yes, that's right.

**When asked if he did his best there:** No, I didn't actually, I actually broke my leg the year before and I should of gotten the gold medal I think personally but my body timing was off and you know the comeback and all that stuff. Stuff happened.

**D. How did you travel to the games? Time it took?...**

We flew. It was long. We went from L.A to Hawaii and spent training camp in Hawaii for a week and a half. We landed in Brisbane a week before the games. We also had a training camp on the gold coast in Australia. I've been around the world eight or nine times.

## **II. Significant memories:**

**A. What is your best memory of the games?**

In '84 I placed sixth (Olympic Games), not winning. The best thing I remember was the opening ceremony when Fredrick Johnson entered the stadium with the torch and he climbed the steps and that was a rare, memorable moment.

**B. What is your worst memory of the games?**

When I placed sixth (at the 1984 Olympic Games).

**C. What it meant for them to represent their country?**

There was a sense of pride and not just at the Olympic games but every time I wore a Canadian uniform in a major competition there was a sense of pride. When I won the gold medal in the '82 and '86 Commonwealth Games, it was very special. I cried on the podium.

## **III. Were there political/cultural issues that they remember that surrounded the games?**

**A.** Not in Seoul and not in L.A., but in 1980 when the Americans were coming through Russia, who was invading Afghanistan, and they pulled Canada and a number of the western countries with them as a boycott and we ended we ended up not going to those games. I guess every country has their own little place of racism and bigotry and all that other stuff. One of the things I do remember in Australia was that the Aborigines were looked down upon. I remember one particular comment that I heard was when one of the administrators was criticizing the Aborigines because they live in the bush and that they hunt and that they kill animals for their meals. I thought back then, how stupid people can be to make a comment like that, just because they go hunt and they kill and eat only what they want. We civilized folks; we go and kill just for fun. We hunt and put heads on the wall, but people who hunt and kill animals; they kill what they eat.

**B. Who paid for what?**

The Commonwealth Committee did. There's the Canadian Commonwealth Committee and through them and the Olympic movement and all these other people. Basically country to country.

**C. Were females treated equally?**

I think so, the whole time. I didn't see any problems.

#### **IV. History of the Games:**

##### **A. What do you know about the history of the games?**

I think they were called the Empire State Games; the British Empire Games and the first one was actually held in Hamilton. Actually I believe the anniversary is coming up and they were hoping that they [Hamilton] tried to get the bid for it but they didn't.

**When asked what was the first game he went to:** The first Commonwealth Games...well the first trials that I went to was in 1978 in Montreal and I placed fourth, only the top three moved on. I think the people who represented Canada at the Edmonton games were Greg Jordan, Boswell(?) and Robert Boucher. And I was a young up and coming it was my second year doing track.

**When asked how old he was during the 1982 Commonwealth Games):** I was about twenty-one.

**When asked if that was when he reached his peak:** No, '86 was my peak, that was when I broke the Canadian Commonwealth record. But in 1980 was when I won the worlds.

##### **B. How he views the progression of the Commonwealth Games.**

I don't know if the games are getting any better but the competition is definitely is getting better, there are has always been high class competition although the rest of the world is taking part. I think that it is pretty much the same, it remains the same; the kids are younger, not as many records getting broken. I don't think that it's getting any better.

**When asked if anybody broke his record:** Yes, a young man named Mark Boswell. I actually coached him.

**When asked what his record was:** It was 2.33 metres.

**When asked how high Boswell jumped:** He jumped 2.35 metres. He's a good kid, he's one of the top ranked athletes in the world right now.

**When asked how old Boswell is:** Mark is 26.

#### **V. After the Games:**

##### **A. The impact of the Games on their lives following the Games?**

Winning the gold medal was nice. Financially, I don't think it affected me that much other than the fact I got more recognition in Canada. It's funny because you go to some function and you think that people are going to recognize you, because it's an athletic function but nobody recognizes you. Then you go to a function where you don't think anyone is going to recognize you, and everybody does. It was freaky taking the bus when I was younger in high school and taking the bus, there was a picture of me in the paper, and the guy sitting right next to me was reading about me and had no idea it was me.

**When asked if people asked for his autograph:** Yes, they do. Actually it's more flattering now than it was back then because people say, "Hey, that's Milt Ottey!"

##### **B. Contrasting experience if they attended more than one game.**

(When asked if his experience in Brisbane was better than the other games he went to) No, not really. I mean four years later I got another gold medal in Scotland in the Commonwealth games there. I was a two time gold medallist at those games. I was getting better; I jumped one centimetre lower than what I did before.

**C. Contrasting Commonwealth to other games they attended.**

(When asked if Brisbane did a better job hosting the Commonwealth Games than in Scotland) Oh, no, it was time you know. I was more mature in '86 than I was in '82. But like I said things don't really change that much.

Brisbane was great because it was my inaugural one, my first one. Scotland was different, I was a more veteran jumper and I was older and more mature. I was like "OK I'm going to go and defend my title now."

**When asked if high jump was all he ever did:** In high school I did everything. I did long jump, ran the hurdles, did triple jump; I did many, many other events but I was always good in high jump.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.actionprogram.com/Bios/olympians/miltOttey.asp>

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