

Black athletes boast many Olympic achievements

By Genoa Barrow
Special to Sentinel-Voice
 SACRAMENTO (NNPA) — There is a definite sense of patriotism associated with the Olympic Games, as Americans take on the best athletes the world has to offer, and since they began competing, Black Olympians have had a dual pressure — to both represent the red, white and blue, and “the Black.”

African-Americans have risen to the challenge and in doing so, have created many golden moments.

1904 — George Poage became the first Black person to compete in the Olympics, being held in the United States for the first time. He also became the first to win a medal (a bronze), for finishing third in the 400-meter hurdles. Poage also overcame hurdles as one of the first Black athletes at the University of Wisconsin.

1908 — In London, the first gold medal awarded to an African-American went to John Taylor, a member of the 1,600-meter relay team.

1924 — At age 20, Cincinnati native William Dehart Hubbard became the first African-American to win an individual gold medal following his performance in the long jump in Paris.

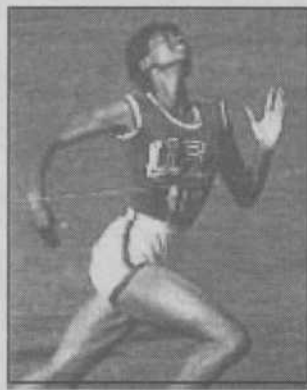
1932 — Louise Stokes and Tydia Pickett became the first Black women to make an Olympic team. They showed up at the Games in Los Angeles but were replaced by White women. The same happened to Stokes when she made the 1936 400-meter relay team.

1936 — In Berlin, Jesse Owens gave Hitler a run for his money, winning four gold medals in the 100-meter, 200-meter, long jump and 400-meter relay. Hitler maintained that Blacks were an inferior race mentally and physically.

1948 — In London, Audrey Patterson became the first Black woman to win a medal (a bronze), for her performance in the 200-meter. During the same games, Alice Coachman, a student at the Tuskegee Institute, was the first to win gold for her record-setting showing in the high jump.

1956 — Milton Campbell is the first Black person to win the decathlon during the the Games in Melbourne, Australia.

1960 — Tennessee Tigerbelle, Wilma Rudolph is the first woman to win three gold medals at one Olympiad, finishing first in the 100-



Wilma Rudolph

meter, 200-meter, and 400-meter relay at the Rome Games.

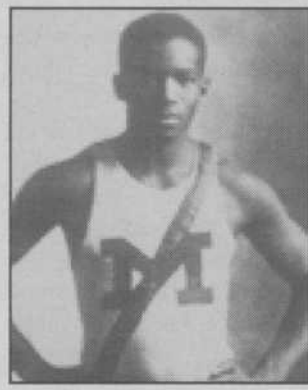
1960 — “When in Rome ...” boxer Cassius Clay (later Muhammad Ali) won gold as a light heavyweight. After returning home and facing racism, Clay tossed his medal into a river. It was replaced 36 years later.

1968 — With heads bowed and fists raised, Tommie Smith and John Carlos solidified their places in Olympic and Black histories. In protesting the conditions of Black Americans and urging unity in the community, two San Jose State University teammates made quite a statement while accepting their gold and bronze medals at the Mexico City Games. Smith and Carlos’ actions got them suspended from the U.S. team, banned from the Olympic Village, where they lived during the Games, and attracted numerous death threats.

1968 — A lanky, 22-year-old by the name of Bob Beamon became the first long jumper in history to reach 28 feet, in the same jump he became the first to reach 29 feet.

1988 — The Games in Seoul, South Korea belonged to one woman — Florence “FloJo” Griffith-Joyner. The always-stylish runner won three gold medals in the 100-meter dash, the 200-meter and 4x100 meter relay. She also took home a silver medal for the 4x400-meter relay. In July 2004 Griffith-Joyner was named to the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame. Her 13-year-old daughter Mary read an old acceptance speech she wrote, evoking tears from everyone in attendance.

1988 — Keeping the glory all in the family, Griffith-Joyner’s sister-in-law Jackie Joyner-Kersey also put in a spectacular performance in 1988. Competing in the seven-event heptathlon (100-



William Dehart Hubbard

meter hurdles, high jump, shot put, 200-meter, long jump, javelin, and 800-meter), Joyner-Kersey racked up a jaw-dropping 7,291 points for the gold. She also took home gold in the individual long jump competition.

1988 — It was Evelyn Ashford’s world record of 10.79 seconds in the 100m that FloJo obliterated during the 1988 Olympic Trials. Ashford, considered to be one of the best sprinters in U.S. history, competed in five Olympics, winning four gold medals and a silver. Most of her medals came from relay performance but in 1984, she struck individual gold, besting Heike Dreschler, the American long jump nemesis from Germany. The finish moved her to tears as she took her victory lap.

1992 — How do you say “we surrender” in Spanish? Opponents of the USA Men’s Basketball Team sure found out during the 1992 Games in Barcelona. Dubbed the Dream Team, the squad wiped the court with the competition, beating teams by as much as 44 points, to go undefeated. Opponents posed for pictures during the games, having family and friends in the stands to capture them with star players. The Afri-



George Poage

can-American players on the team were Charles Barkley, Clyde Drexler, Patrick Ewing, Earvin Johnson, Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen, and David Robinson. Each has a Hall of Fame worthy career. The Dream Team set an Olympic scoring record, averaging 117.3 points per game.

1992 — Dominique Dawes became the first African-American gymnast to win an individual event. “Awesome Dawesome” took home a bronze medal for her floor exercise.

1996 — Muhammad Ali shook up the world again, surprising those watching the opening ceremonies of the Atlanta Games by lighting the Olympic cauldron, despite shaking hands, the result of Parkinson disease. The touching display, just as the torch itself, became a symbol of enduring athletic spirit.

1996 — Also in Atlanta, Josiah Thugwane became the first Black South African to win a gold medal, winning the marathon. Thugwane’s victory came only five years after the International Olympic Committee lifted a 28-year ban on South Africa for practicing apartheid.

1996 — Carl Lewis became only the second Olympian to win the same event

for the fourth straight time. Lewis took home gold in the long jump as he had during 1992, 1988 and 1984.

1996 — Michael Johnson, an heir to Lewis’ sprinting legacy, solidified his place in track and field history. He won the 400 in 43.49 seconds, an Olympic record, then

won the 200 in an unbelievably fast 19.32 seconds, in doing so, he shaved 34 seconds off his own world record, set weeks before during the Olympic Trials. He was the first man to win the 200m and 400m in the same Olympics. In the track and (See Olympics, Page 16)

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