



Harry Jerome biography written by Valerie Jerome: 1960 Rome Olympian, Vancouver educator, and Harry's sister.

Harry Winston Jerome, the first born child of Harry and Elsie came into the world at Holy Cross Hospital in Prince Albert Saskatchewan on September 30th 1940. The nuns here were most impressed that he began his life on St Jerome's Day. When he was eleven days old the family moved to Winnipeg where his father worked as a porter for the Canadian National Railway.

Events marking his life in this city were that he sat by the radio and listened to the first baseball game Jackie Robinson played in the major leagues; being a member of the Cubs Scouts who filled sandbags when the Red River overflowed its banks and inundated the city. The Jerome family was evacuated from their home in the night by the Red Cross as the flood could not be contained. Two sisters and a brother came along as the family grew. Harry's fourth sibling, another sister would not be born until after the family moved west.

In 1951 the Jerome family, amid much protest and racism from their neighbours and fellow students at Ridgeway school, settled in North Vancouver in early September. For Harry, fitting in meant wearing a uniform and playing hard. He distinguished himself in the soccer leagues and made an even greater mark in baseball when he was known for his amazing bunts and speed to first base. As a high schooler he pitched two no-hitters. When Harry was not on the soccer field or on the baseball diamond, he could just about always be found throwing a football. And from the time he was in Junior high until his untimely death at age forty-two Harry and his cohort of sport enthusiasts rented the old Forum on the PNE grounds Saturday nights at 2AM for hockey. He loved the speed of the game and the close contact.

In his grade 11 year Harry was taunted by a school mate that the speed with which he ran around the bases in a baseball game was nothing compared to what that young man performed on the track. Harry could not resist the challenge. He joined the track team for the first time at the age of 17 and took up the sprints. His challenger did not give him much of a race. Harry became the Greater Vancouver high school champion that year and the following year he broke the 30 year old high school record set by Canada's 1928 Olympic Champion Percy Williams.

On graduating from North Vancouver High School in 1959 Harry was offered scholarships from countless universities in the USA and eventually accepted at the University of Oregon in Eugene. That summer he won the 100 and 200 m at the Canadian Championships and was selected to the Pan American Games team. It is here I will point out that besides committing himself to the challenging training, of having the good fortune to have an excellent coach(John Minichiello), Harry had very good genes. His grandfather John Armstrong Howard had been Canada's national champion in the 100 and 200m in 1912 represented Canada at the Stockholm Olympic Games. And in 1959, at that same national Championship that Harry first became Canada's sprint champion, his younger sister was women's champion in the 60m 100m and Long Jump. Jointly they took home, seven gold and one bronze from their first National Championships.

While competing at the University of Oregon he was an All American, he won NCAA and AAU Championships and was greatly loved by the people of Eugene. One of the chief reasons for selecting the University of Oregon was the head coach Bill Bowerman who became a life- long friend and mentor. Bowerman had handcrafted many of the shoes that Harry wore in competition. These were the early models of what would become Bowerman's world wide success; NIKE shoe company.

Harry set seven world records during his career; the first being in 1960 at our national Championships in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan with 10.0 for the 100m. With this astonishing time to his credit he went to the Rome Olympics with great pressure from the Canadian media " to bring home the gold". But Harry pulled up in the semi- final with a badly torn hamstring. There was no doctor on the Canadian team and this tear was diagnosed by the German team doctor, while the Canadian team officials and much of the press declared him a "quitter" with not enough courage to face the challenge of the heavy competition. Nothing could have been further from the truth. He was crushed by the response from Canadians. Over the course of the next six months he recovered his strength and competed in the indoor season , at first with trepidation and fear of re-injuring himself, but by March he was back on top with a new world record for the indoor 60yard run.

In August of 1962 he tied the world record for the 100yards with a time of 9.2 seconds in his preparation for the Commonwealth Games upcoming in Perth Australia in November. And who could have imagined that in that final he would tear his whole left quadracep. The cries of" Quitter" rang out from every corner at this time. Even the four hour groundbreaking surgery by Dr Hector Gillespie to reattach this large muscle group could not dispel the cruel jibes that continued by some sports journalists. Harry's rehabilitation was long and challenging. His doctor was sure that he would never run again. But although most saw his career as over, Harry had more resolve and determination than anyone could imagine. After a month in hospital and three months on crutches, Harry returned to

training; swimming was all he was permitted. Nine months later he ran his first race, a 400m at an easy pace. He was pleased that his leg held up; he now knew it was just a matter of hard work.

In the 1964 Tokyo Olympics he placed third in the 100m final, just two hundredths of a second off second. He placed fourth in the 200m final. He was pleased to have made it to the podium; his left thigh still remained several inches thinner than his right.

In 1966 he set a new world record for the 100yards at 9.1 and won the commonwealth Games 100 in Kingston, Jamaica and in 1967 won the Pan American games 100m. In the 1968 Mexico City Olympics he placed seventh in the final in which runners placing second to seventh were almost a straight line.

Harry retired from participating in athletics and shifted his energy and drive into providing sports opportunities for all Canadian children. He received the order of Canada in 1973. He suffered a seizure in 1981 and never fully recovering from this he suffered two more the following year and died December 7th 1982 at the age of 42.

His legacy in building sports programs across our nation can be found in the Ottawa valley girls soccer league, the Premier Sports awards program in BC and countless programs from Newfoundland to Kitwanga. He wanted all kids to experience the joy of sport, the self- discipline, self –reliance and the abundance of opportunities that had shaped his life.

By Valerie Jerome.