

EVELYN FURTSCH OJEDA
1932 OLYMPIC GAMES
TRACK & FIELD



AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
INTRODUCTION

Southern California has a long tradition of excellence in sports and leadership in the Olympic Movement. The Amateur Athletic Foundation is itself the legacy of the 1984 Olympic Games. The Foundation is dedicated to expanding the understanding of sport in our communities. As a part of our effort, we have joined with the Southern California Olympians, an organization of over 1,000 women and men who have participated on Olympic teams, to develop an oral history of these distinguished athletes.

Many Olympians who competed in the Games prior to World War II agreed to share their Olympic experiences in their own words. In the pages that follow, you will learn about these athletes, and their experiences in the Games and in life as a result of being a part of the Olympic Family.

The Amateur Athletic Foundation, its Board of Directors, and staff welcome you to use this document to enhance your understanding of sport in our community.

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AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
METHODOLOGY

Interview subjects include Southern California Olympians who competed prior to World War II. Interviews were conducted between March 1987, and August 1988, and consisted of one to five sessions each. The interviewer conducted the sessions in a conversational style and recorded them on audio cassette, addressing the following major areas:

Family History

Date/place of birth; occupation of father/mother; siblings; family residence;

Education

Primary and secondary schools attended; college and post-collegiate education;

Sport-Specific Biographical Data

Subject's introduction to sport—age, event and setting of first formal competition; coaches/trainers/others who influenced athletic development; chronology of sports achievements; Olympic competition; post-Olympic involvement in sports;

General Biographical Data

Employment history; marital history; children; communities of residence; retirement;

General Observations

Reactions and reflections on Olympic experience; modernization of sport; attitudes on and involvement with the Olympic Movement; advice to youth and aspiring athletes.

Interview transcripts were edited and may include additional material based on subsequent conversations and/or subject's own editing.

EVELYN FURTSCH OJEDA

1932 OLYMPIC GAMES - LOS ANGELES

400-METER RELAY

Gold Medalist

INTERVIEWED:

December, 1987

Santa Ana, California

by George A. Hodak

EVELYN FURTSCH OJEDA

Interviewer: George A. Hodak

Hodak: Today I am in Santa Ana interviewing Olympian Evelyn Furtsch Ojeda, who earned a gold medal in the 1932 Olympics on the women's sprint relay team. First off, Mrs. Ojeda, I'd like you to talk a bit about your family background. Could you tell me when and where you were born as well as the number of brothers and sisters you had.

Ojeda: I was born in San Diego, California, on April 17, 1914. I have one brother who is four years older than I am. My parents came to San Diego from Michigan. They were both raised in Traverse City, Michigan. It was after they moved to San Diego that I was born. We lived there for five years and then my father took a job at the Mexican border at Tecate. He had a general merchandise store and was postmaster there. We were there about a year and a half. It was very isolated and we decided to move to Santa Ana. So I spent pretty much all my life after that in Orange County, mostly in Santa Ana and Tustin.

Hodak: What did your father do in Santa Ana?

Ojeda: When we came to Santa Ana, my father went to work for a wholesale grocery company. Smart and Final. He spent his life working as a clerk in the order department.

Hodak: Did your father or brother encourage you in an athletic direction when you were young?

Ojeda: Not essentially. But I was always fast, I think I was born with a natural ability. At company picnics or lodges that my parents

belonged to the children always had races, and I would always win. It got to the point where they would give me a ten-yard handicap and I would still win. So everybody thought that I was a very fast runner. I was a natural runner.

Hodak: And when did you begin to compete in more formal competition?

Ojeda: I went to Tustin High School and I was going out for basketball, field hockey and baseball. In a small school you go out for every sport because you need all the people you can get out there on the field. I had a gym teacher who thought that I was especially fast, and she told the Tustin track coach that she thought that I had chances of doing something with my ability to run. So after school I went to the boys' track team and I ran before Vincent Humeston, who was the track coach. He was interested in me as he was interested in all of his students. He was a very conscientious track coach. So, he wrote to the Los Angeles Athletic Club to find out if they had any program for the coming Olympics in 1932, and also if anything was going on in 1931—which was when I was training. He received a letter back from Mrs. Aileen Allen and she invited me to come up to Paddock Field in Pasadena and try out with some of the girls she had there training.

So on Sunday, Mr. Humeston and his wife and my mother and father and I all got in the car and went to Pasadena. At this meet I won all the races that were there, so Mrs. Allen said, "Why don't you come down on Sundays and train with us?" So that was my pattern for the rest of 1931. I trained with the boys' track team in high school and on Sundays I went to Pasadena.

Hodak: How did the boys and the students at Tustin High School respond to you competing?

Ojeda: The boys accepted me and I was just one of the gang. I had no problem at all being a girl. They just thought it was great that I had joined their team.

Hodak: And you mentioned running with the L.A. Athletic Club. Did this lead to any national competition prior to the 1932 Olympics?

Ojeda: In 1931, the Los Angeles Athletic Club sent three girls back to New Jersey to the national meet. They gave me 500 dollars so that my mother and Mr. Humeston and I could attend the national meet. So we got in Mr. Humeston's old car and we drove cross-country—it took us 11 days—and we arrived in Jersey City to attend this meet. At that meet I came in second and received a silver medal in the 100 meters. A local girl, Eleanor Egg, got first place. I came in second and Stella Walsh, who was considered the world champion at the time, came in third. So after we came on home we decided that as long as I had beaten Stella Walsh—she was the one I went back there to compete against—that I would go ahead and train for the Olympics in the following year.

I should point out that women's track here on the West Coast was not as advanced as that on the East Coast. They were much more organized than we were. The AAU rules were that you had to have three officials timing a race in order to make it an official record. We might have three timers but they weren't official AAU timers. So we never knew who had records. I'm sure that Anne O'Brien set a record in the 50-yard dash but it wasn't official. We were all amateurs in the West.

Hodak: And who were some of your other teammates with the Los Angeles Athletic Club?

Ojeda: Lillian Copeland, Anne O'Brien and myself were sent back in 1931.

Hodak: Was Aileen Allen serving as your coach at the L.A. Athletic Club?

Ojeda: Aileen Allen was officiating our training program in Pasadena. I was always under Mr. Humeston as my coach. He was the one who trained me, advised me, and looked out for my welfare.

Hodak: What sort of training tips or advice did Mr. Humeston give you?

Ojeda: He considered me a natural runner and he didn't change my style. But he trained me on starts. We didn't have blocks yet; we had our trowel and we had to dig a little hole for starting. And he trained me on the finish too, which is very important. He pretty much left me to my own style of running. I was supposed to have had a very long stride.

Hodak: Tell me a bit about the 1932 tryouts.

Ojeda: When 1932 came, we were training in Pasadena. The Depression had hit and the Los Angeles Athletic Club had run out of money and they decided that they weren't able to send anybody to the Olympic tryouts. So everybody had to get there the best way they could. So we came on home to Tustin and didn't know whether we would get to go to Chicago or not. The president of the Tustin Chamber of Commerce decided that if they could raise \$300 they could send my mother, my coach and I back to Chicago. So he went door to door and raised \$190, which we took and made the trip to Chicago and back.

Hodak: How was it that the relay team was eventually selected?

Ojeda: At this meet, the women's portion was all done in one afternoon. We had our preliminary heat, our semifinals and our finals all within four or five hours. I had won my preliminary heat and my semifinal heat. The six girls that were chosen out of the semifinal heat were supposed to have been the Olympic team. But when we came to run the final heat, which would have had three girls to run in the 100 meters and three girls who would make up the team to balance the relay team, we ended up with seven girls. An extra girl was allowed to run from Chicago, and in this race she won the finals. I fell at the tape and, since they had an extra girl, they disqualified me and I was eliminated from the Olympic team. So Mr. Humeston got on the phone and called Aileen Allen in Los Angeles to explain

what had happened. She said, "Well, I'll see what I can do here and you just get on home as fast as you can." So we got in our car and drove home, not knowing whether I would be on the Olympic team or not.

Hodak: So you didn't travel back with the rest of the team.

Ojeda: No, I did not get to travel with the Olympic team on the train back to the Chapman Park Hotel, where the girls were staying. I was traveling by car and got home several days later. When I arrived home my father had a telephone message from Aileen Allen telling me to come to Los Angeles and that I was going to be on the team.

Hodak: Were you surprised or had you expected this?

Ojeda: We were surprised. We didn't really expect anything to happen. So I was driven up to the Chapman Park Hotel and given a room. We were to go immediately to the school that they had set aside for the relay team to practice. Six girls plus one high jumper arrived there to make up the relay team, and the new Olympic coach, George Vreeland, took over. And as we ran for him, he chose the four girls who would be on the relay team.

Hodak: And in addition to you, the other three were?

Ojeda: He chose Mary Carew for the number one spot; I was the second runner; Annette Rogers was the third runner; and Wilhelmina Von Bremen was the fourth runner.

Hodak: And Annette Rogers also qualified for the high jump?

Ojeda: She had qualified for the high jump but had not qualified for the 100 meters. But she was a very fast runner, so she was chosen to be on the relay team.

Hodak: And at what point does the sprint relay come on the Olympic

schedule?

Ojeda: It is toward the end. It is one of the last events. So once we were chosen, we had a week to practice passing the baton and teamwork so that we could run together.

Hodak: So this kept you from attending a lot of other functions?

Ojeda: I wasn't able to socialize or go to other things in the area. If I did have any extra time I would usually go to the Coliseum and watch the other athletes perform.

Hodak: Did you perfect the passing of the baton rather well? Things obviously went smoothly in the final race.

Ojeda: We seemed to go together very well and had no problems passing the baton.

Hodak: Had you had a lot of prior experience on relay teams?

Ojeda: We had practiced in Pasadena. We always had a relay team. So I had run with other girls. At one Southern California meet I received a gold medal on the relay team, plus a gold medal on the 100 meters.

Hodak: Let's talk about your event then. What do you recall of the day of your event? How did you feel going into the race?

Ojeda: We were all very excited about it and were just very happy that it turned out as well as it did. It was a very close race. The Canadian team had won in 1928, and they were the team to beat because they had been together for four years. At the end of the race it was something like a one-yard difference.

Hodak: And Wilhelmina Von Bremen ran the final leg?

Ojeda: Yes, she ran the final leg. During this race we broke both the Olympic and the world's record. Although we ran it in 46.9, they were not counting tenths of a second during the Olympics. So our Olympic record is 47 seconds and our world's record is 46.9 seconds.

Hodak: And what would you say about the awards ceremony?

Ojeda: We were presented on the stand and the flag went up. They played the national anthem, which is a very emotional thing. During the 1984 Olympics, Channel 7 was having highlights of Olympic moments and Mary Carew was able to get a copy of our relay team. We have a shot of us four girls grinning ear to ear when they gave us our medals. You can see my lips moving: "We're so happy!"

Hodak: Were other members of your relay team in Los Angeles in 1984?

Ojeda: Yes, Mary Carew and Annette Rogers came out to the Olympics in 1984, and we had a special party given by ARCO for all the 1932 Olympians. The three of us got together and took pictures and reminisced. We had a wonderful time. Wilhemina Von Bremen had passed away.

Hodak: Now, let's talk a bit about the Olympics in general in 1932. Who stands out when you think of the women's track and field team? Maybe [Mildred] "Babe" Didriksen?

Ojeda: Babe Didriksen was number one. She was the star. I had no personal contact with her because I didn't run against her. I got along fine with her. In my Olympic book I see I'm standing beside her, so I must have thought she was alright. And then Mary Carew and I were very friendly. We were together most of the time.

Hodak: Were you able to meet many foreign athletes? Was that a part of the proceedings at Chapman Park Hotel?

Ojeda: Yes, they had foreign athletes that came and mingled. We had some fun meeting other boys and girls.

Hodak: You mentioned going to other events at the Coliseum. Are there any events that you particularly recall?

Ojeda: Well, I remember the men's 440, 220 and 100 meters, which were all very close races and contested for irregularities on the measurements.

Hodak: Was there anything that surprised you about the Olympics, in terms of the crowds or the attention?

Ojeda: The 1932 Olympics is considered one of the highlights of Olympic Games up until that time. It was very successful. During the Depression they were afraid that it would not be a success. But they did make a profit, they had good crowds and everyone was so well-behaved. There was no problem with anybody in the audience. They were all very patriotic. It was very rewarding.

Hodak: You had a lot of friends in attendance, I imagine, in the Coliseum.

Ojeda: Yes, many of my friends from Tustin came to see me run. I had a lot of people that were really rooting for me and standing behind me during this time.

Hodak: What about the pageantry or the ceremonies that surrounded the Olympics?

Ojeda: The ceremony in 1932 was practically the same as 1984. They haven't changed the format. The elaborate pageantry was not there in 1932, it was very simple. But everything else that you saw in 1984 they did in 1932. And it was a beautiful ceremony.

Hodak: Were you invited to any competition immediately following the Olympic Games in Los Angeles?

Ojeda: No, I was not. After the Olympics were over I came home and just went back to my normal way of life.

Hodak: Let's talk a bit about your normal way of life. Did that include continuing to compete in amateur track?

Ojeda: Well, there wasn't any track in Orange County at that time.

Hodak: So you didn't continue your affiliation with the L.A. Athletic Club?

Ojeda: No, I did not. I didn't do anything further in track. After the Olympics, I went to Santa Ana College for two years and I went back to playing basketball, field hockey and baseball. That's all there was. After I went there for two years I married. After I was married I moved to San Diego. My husband's family was originally from Chihuahua, Mexico. His grandfather had a big ranch that was taken over in the Mexican Revolution. Then my husband's father came to El Paso, Texas, where my husband was born.

I had a daughter that was born in 1935, so when the Olympics came in 1936, I didn't feel like I could leave my baby and go back into training. So I didn't try out for the Olympics in Berlin.

Hodak: Did Aileen Allen or anyone else approach you about resuming your workouts?

Ojeda: No, only Mr. Humeston. Mr. Humeston was still interested in me and he said, "I think you could do it if you wanted to."

Hodak: Have you followed the Olympics much through the years?

Ojeda: I have not attended any except in 1984. But I follow the sports and the athletes and I am quite interested.

Hodak: So how large a family did you have?

Ojeda: Seven years after I had my daughter, I had a son. So I had two children. My daughter has five children and my son has two children. So I have seven grandchildren, who are all grown now. My youngest grandson is 17, a senior in high school. My son is in the audit department of Security Pacific Bank. He has traveled all over the world in his job. My daughter manages two libraries for Hughes Aircraft at Newport Beach and Carlsbad.

Hodak: So tell me a bit about your husband and his line of work?

Ojeda: My husband was always in retail, department store type of merchandising. We lived in San Diego for a year and a half. Then we got homesick for Santa Ana so we came back to Santa Ana. He went to work for JC Penney and worked there for 11 years. Then he decided to go into business for himself. So we moved back to Tustin and we opened a market which we ran for five years. So both of my children graduated from Tustin High School. We lived there until 1963 when we moved back to Santa Ana in a new part of town. My husband got tired of the grocery business so he studied for real estate and got a real estate license—I also got a real estate license—and until he passed away he had an office in Garden Grove on Harbor Boulevard. I am still in the office and work with another lady who has a brokerage license. So I am still active in real estate. I am also very interested in historic preservation and I have done some work with the Tustin Historical Society.

Hodak: Were you a part of the Spirit Team in 1984?

Ojeda: I was not a part of the Spirit Team partly because I got lost over the years; I was not even a member of the Southern California Olympians. I was invited to receive a trophy for Mary Decker in Santa Ana. She had been named Woman of the Year by a local sports organization, and they asked me if I would stand in for her. At this meeting I met many reporters who weren't even born when I was running. And then I received several cards from different people who wanted to interview me. Then Paul Zimmerman of the *Los*

Angeles Times came and interviewed me and wrote a very nice article about where I am and what I'd been doing.

Hodak: Did you attend any of the Olympics in 1984?

Ojeda: In 1984 I attended many things that were coming up for the Olympics. I was at Knott's Berry Farm for the torch run. I went up to the Games the day of the relays. I had tickets so I got to see the relay team win again for the United States. Then, on the last day of the 1984 Olympics, ARCO financed a get-together of all the medal winners of the 1932 Olympics and we had a celebration. Then after getting together with my teammates and seeing all of the people from 1932, we went to the Closing Ceremonies on the final day.

Hodak: You also have been inducted into the Orange County Sports Hall of Fame.

Ojeda: Yes. In 1984 I was presented the Ralph Clark Distinguished Citizen Award. That is an award presented annually by Ralph Clark, a former member of the Orange County Board of Supervisors. Then the following year I was inducted into the Orange County Sports Hall of Fame.

Hodak: What things stand out or contrast sharply when you look at modern track and field or modern Olympics compared with those of your day?

Ojeda: When we ran in 1932 we just loved to run and loved to be a part of something that was as exciting as that was. We only did it as one part of our life, and when it was over we went back to doing our own thing. Everyone did something else after it was over. There was nothing else going on, nothing else to do.

Hodak: Are you envious of modern athletes in any sense?

Ojeda: No, not a bit. In fact, one thing I wanted to mention was that I have no arthritis, I never had any injuries, and I always figured that was because we didn't work out so hard.

Hodak: If you were asked to describe the significance that sports has had for you, could you encapsulate that? How significant was your involvement with track?

Ojeda: This has had a big influence on my life. I'm sure it has changed my life a great deal. It has been a very rewarding thing for me. I did it because I loved to do it. I liked to run. I met many nice people. My association with sports has been all to the good.

Hodak: Did your children follow in their mother's footsteps?

Ojeda: I'm sorry to say they did not. I was a "one time only."

Hodak: Well, I thank you for allowing me to come down and talk with you. The Amateur Athletic Foundation also appreciates your cooperation on this project. I thank you very much.

Ojeda: Thank you.