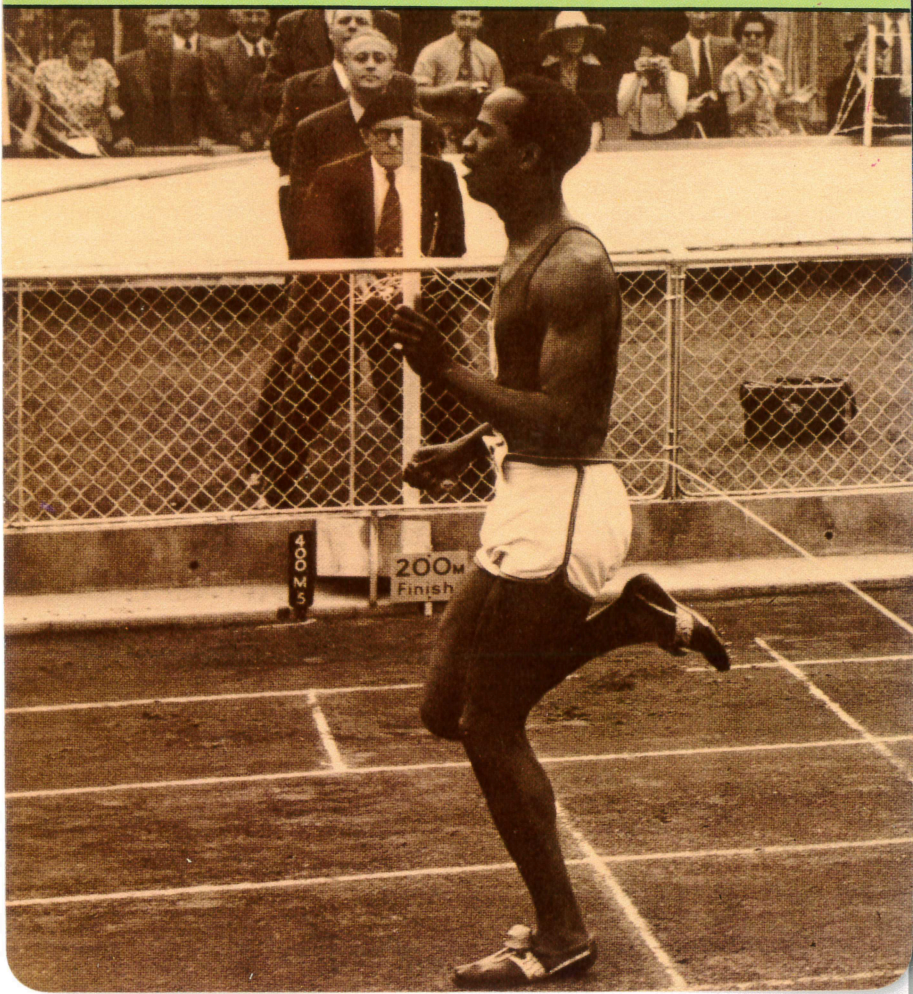
Track and Field

McDonald Bailey



Track and Field

McDonald Bailey

Mac the Speed

Which sprinter created a record which may never be beaten on British tracks? The answer is Emmanuel McDonald Bailey–Mac to his fans–who stacked up no fewer than seven AAA sprint doubles, yes, 14 individual national sprint titles. That was in the period 1946–1953, a golden age of British athletics when the fluent rhythm of the Trinidad-born Mac was one of the main attractions which drew crowds of 40,000 to White City Stadium.

Mac never looked as though strength counted as a component of speed. He moved with grace and style and when he moved fastest, he never seemed to be trying. Unlike his West Indian contemporary, Arthur Wint, who wore the Jamaican colours in Olympic competition, Mac always ran for Britain. His first big Games appearance was at Wembley in 1948. The Olympic 100-metre final was won by the American sprint-hurdler Harrison Dillard with Mac, hardly recovered from injury, a disappointed fifth. Mac already had his name before the British track public with regular clockings of 9.6–9.8 seconds for 100 yards in the days when those times were first class. Mac could comfortably have won European titles in both 1946 and 1950, but under the rules then in force he was not eligible for that competition.

At Helsinki, in 1952, Mac was one of the favourites to split the U.S. domination in the 100 metres. The previous year he had equalled the world record of 10.2 sec. at Belgrade. Poised, relaxed, he had won, in his accustomed manner, with the opposition almost out of sight. But in the Olympic final, engaged in a tight three-way duel with the American Lindy Remigino and Jamaica's Herb McKenley, Mac omitted to dip at the finish. It was something he had never really needed to do. Remigino won by an eyelash from the Jamaican with Mac, bronze medallist, only nine inches away from the gold.

He had a brief career in rugby league before he retired. But his bag of sprint titles is imperishable and his 10.2 sec for 100 metres remained the fastest manually-timed clocking by a British sprinter for over twenty years.

EMMANUEL McDONALD BAILEY

Born Dec. 8, 1920, in Williamsville, Trinidad

AWARDS AND RECORDS

1948 OG: silver medal, 4 x 100 relay, 41.3 sec
1952 OG: bronze medal, 100 m, 10.4 sec
World record: 100 m, 10.2 sec (Belgrade, 1951)

McDonald Bailey, whose popularity helped to create the golden age of British athletics

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