

# Track and Field



*Willie Davenport*



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## Willie Davenport

### Old Breeze

Four years of frustration were wiped out on Oct. 17, 1968, for 25-year-old Willie Davenport. The native of Warren, Ohio, could finally relax and enjoy the olympic gold medal he had waited so long to get. A pulled leg muscle prevented Davenport from realizing his olympic dream at Tokyo in 1964, but at Mexico City's Olympic Stadium, he streaked to the finish in the record-breaking time of 13.3 seconds in his specialty, the 110-meter high hurdles. The 6' 1", 185-lb Davenport's achievements did not end with the Olympics. In fact, he reeled off an amazing string of victories over the following year. What is even more amazing is that he hardly ever practised, maybe just spending a little time on his start or form going over the hurdle. As he explained it, "I've studied hurdles well enough and I know the techniques well enough that if I make a mistake in a race I can pick it up by myself. Then I'll practice it. Like I said, I had to work once on the start and once on the first hurdle. But other than that, well, everything just fell into place."

Willie D., or Breeze as he was sometimes called, was a tough, punky kid while attending Howland High in War-

ren, where the student body was overwhelmingly white. He did not even begin running track seriously until his senior year. After graduation, he continued jumping – from airplanes with the 509th Airborne, and over hurdles with a club while stationed in Mainz, Germany. After his discharge, he enrolled at Southern University in Baton Rouge, La., where he resumed hurdling in earnest.

After his success in Mexico City Olympics, Davenport went undefeated in both indoor and outdoor events in the next sixteen meets – until the spring of 1969. Along the way he twice equalled the world indoor record for the 60-yard hurdles and established new standards for hurdles at 45, 50, 70 and 120 yards. In fact, there was not a world record in the hurdles that existed that did not have old Breeze's name alongside it either alone or in concert with another runner.

#### WILLIE DAVENPORT

Born May, 1943, in Warren, Ohio

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

Olympic gold medal, 1968, in the 110-meter high hurdles