

Mel Patton '49, MS '51 (right) came in fifth in the 100-meter dash in London, but took gold in the 200-meter sprint (beating, among others, Cliff Bourland '43) and the 4x100-meter relay. Graduate student Roy Cochran (below) also won two gold medals, in the 400-meter hurdles and (together with Bourland) the 4x400-meter relay.



LONDON



1948



After cancellation of the 1940 and 1944 Summer Olympics due to World War II, London was selected to host the 1948 Games. Taking place just three years after the end of the conflict, in a country still in financial and physical shambles, the competitions were dubbed the “Austerity Games.” No new venues were constructed; instead, Wembley Stadium, which had survived the war intact, was outfitted with a temporary track, and many government buildings were put to use for Olympics-related purposes. There was no proper Olympic Village: Male athletes were housed in military barracks, and women were placed in local college dormitories. All were asked to bring their own towels. Post-war rationing remained in force, although British competitors received rations equivalent to those allotted to heavy industrial workers. Still, according to *Life* magazine, “by athletic standards the show was superb, despite the fact that the weather was the worst in Olympic history (the sun shone only three days).” The International Olympic Committee barred Germany and Japan from the competitions because of their roles in the recently ended war. The Soviet Union was invited, but chose not to field a team. Italy, which had signed an armistice with the Allies in 1943, sent more than 200 athletes. In all, 59 countries competed, including many — such as Burma, Ceylon, Lebanon, Puerto Rico, Syria and Venezuela — participating for the first time. Among the more than 4,000 Olympians who gathered in London for the 1948 Games were 16 with ties to USC. Those Trojans took home a total of 12 medals, including 10 golds.



MEL PATTON

Mel Patton's '49, MS '51 career as an amateur sprinter lasted barely three years, and he never competed in an AAU national meet. That would hardly seem to qualify Patton for the Hall of Fame, if not for the fact that during that brief time, Patton was the fastest man in the world — and a two-time Olympic champion.

Patton enrolled at USC in 1946 following a two-year stint in the Navy. Years later, in an interview he gave for the AAU's An Olympian's Oral History project, he revealed that he chose USC over many other universities because he wanted to train under famed coach Dean Cromwell. Nicknamed "Pell Mell," Patton became a four-year USC letterman and captained the 1949 Trojan track and field team.

In 1947, Patton equaled the world record of 9.4 seconds in the 100-yard dash, and lowered the mark to 9.3 seconds the next year. He won his first NCAA championship in 1947 in the 100-meter dash, a title he successfully defended for the next two years. He was also the 220-yard sprint champion in 1948 and 1949.

1948 was a year of triumph and defeat. In the 100-meter dash at the Olympic Trials, he came in second to fellow American sprinter Barney Ewell. He was still considered a favorite to win gold in the event at the London Olympics, but finished a disappointing fifth. Patton made up for that defeat in the 200 meters, coming off the turn with a 2-meter lead in the final before holding off Ewell by only 2 feet at the tape to win gold.

Controversy nearly cost Patton a second gold medal in London. The U.S. 4x100-meter relay team of Ewell, Lorenzo Wright, Harrison Dillard and Patton crossed the finish line in 40.6 seconds, nearly 6 yards ahead of runner-up Great Britain. But the Americans were disqualified when a judge ruled that Ewell and Wright exchanged the baton outside the passing zone.

Mystified by the ruling, the U.S. lodged a protest, but the medal ceremony proceeded as scheduled. According to *The Complete Book of the Olympics*, an appeals jury reviewed film of the race three days later and ruled that the baton exchange had, in fact, been legal. With the disqualification now withdrawn, the U.S. received the gold, Patton's second of the Games.

A year later, Patton set a 220-yard sprint world record of 20.2 seconds, breaking the record set 14 years earlier by Jesse Owens. His time was also accepted as a world record for the 200 meters.

After retiring from amateur competition in 1950, Patton ran professionally in Australia before returning to the U.S. to pursue a career as a track coach. He eventually entered the electronics industry. For a short time, he was also the director of national sports programs for Saudi Arabia.

Patton was inducted into the National Track & Field Hall of Fame in 1985.

ROY COCHRAN

Roy Cochran MA '49, PhD '50 ran his way from a childhood in Mississippi to a royal encounter at the Olympic Games.

The ninth of 10 children, Cochran was a football star and the sole member of his high school's track team. Several universities recruited him, and he almost accepted a football scholarship to Tulane University before being talked out of it by his older brother Commodore, who had run for Indiana University's track team and won a gold medal in the 4x400-meter relay at 1924 Olympics in Paris. Cochran followed his brother's advice and went to Indiana on a track scholarship.

After winning the 1939 AAU championship in the 400-meter hurdles, Cochran was heavily favored to win gold in that event in the 1940 Olympics. Unfortunately, he was denied the opportunity to compete when those Games were cancelled due to World War II. He continued to excel athletically after graduating, even setting a world record in 1942 in the 440-yard hurdles while training to become a U.S. naval officer.

In the years after the war, Cochran enrolled at USC to pursue a graduate degree in physiology. Now 29 years old, he thought his days of competing were behind him, but he quickly discovered that he was still running in top form and began formally training once again. He won his second AAU title in the 400-meter hurdles in 1948 and earned a spot on the U.S. team for the London Olympics.

In the Olympic 400-meter hurdles final, Sri Lanka's Duncan White set a fast early pace, but Cochran took the lead at the halfway point and went on to beat White by a remarkable 0.7 seconds, setting an Olympic record. Cochran again followed in his brother's footsteps when he won his second gold medal of those Games in the 4x400-meter relay.

Despite winning two gold medals, Cochran's greatest moment of fame came after an encounter with King George VI during a cocktail party at Buckingham Palace. The September 1948 issue of the *Indiana Alumni Magazine* includes an account of that meeting in a syndicated column by Vincent X. Flaherty.

"For some reason, the King singled out Roy Cochran, America's 400-meter hurdles Olympic champion," Flaherty wrote. "Roy, a real guy, who is extremely intelligent and versed, kept the conversation kicking 15 minutes with the King. The two sat off in one corner of the big room all by themselves. Other members of the party wondered why the King devoted so much time to one individual... 'He's one of the swellest guys I ever met,' said Cochran, thoroughly enthralled. 'And do you know something else? It took a real King to make me taste my first drink of liquor. He didn't make me, of course. I just sort of felt it wouldn't be right if I didn't.'"

Cochran, who passed away in 1981, was posthumously inducted into the USA Track & Field Hall of Fame in 2010.





THEY'RE BACK!

DUE TO WORLD WAR II, THE GAMES OF THE XIVTH OLYMPIAD WERE THE FIRST SUMMER OLYMPICS HELD SINCE THE 1936 GAMES IN BERLIN.



WATCH AND WIN

ALTHOUGH THERE HAD BEEN LIMITED TELEVISION COVERAGE OF THE BERLIN GAMES IN 1936, THE 1948 LONDON OLYMPICS WERE THE FIRST TO BE SHOWN ON HOME TV. THE BBC PURCHASED THE BROADCAST RIGHTS TO THE GAMES AND TELEVIEWED SOME 60 HOURS OF COVERAGE. THE SIGNAL, HOWEVER, DID NOT EXTEND FAR PAST WEMBLEY STADIUM.

TROJAN VICTORIES AND HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 1948 LONDON GAMES

USC OLYMPIANS: 16 GOLD: 10 BRONZE: 2



CLIFF BOURLAND '43

After winning AAU and NCAA championships in the 440-yard dash for USC in 1942 and 1943, Cliff Bourland served as a U.S. Navy captain in World War II. At the London Olympics, he finished fifth in the 200-meter sprint but won a gold medal as part of the United States' 4x400-meter relay team.

FORTUNE GORDIEN MA '69

Although he held the world record in the discus throw from 1949 to 1959 — improving his own record three times — Fortune Gordien never captured Olympic gold. He won a bronze in the discus at the London Olympics in 1948, finished fourth at the 1952 Games in Helsinki and took silver in Melbourne in 1956.

WALLY RIS '76

The son of immigrants who fled the Bolshevik Revolution, swimmer Wally Ris won gold and set an Olympic record in the 100-meter freestyle in London. He also participated on the United States' record-setting 4x200-meter freestyle relay team.

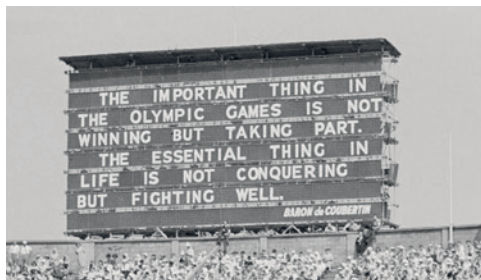
INDOOR SWIMMING

THE EMPIRE POOL, ORIGINALLY CONSTRUCTED FOR THE 1934 BRITISH EMPIRE GAMES, HOSTED SWIMMING EVENTS AT THE 1948 LONDON GAMES. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME OLYMPIC SWIMMING COMPETITIONS WERE HELD UNDER A ROOF — AND THE LAST TIME THE POOL WAS USED. NOW KNOWN AS WEMBLEY ARENA, THE REMODELED FACILITY IS A POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT VENUE.



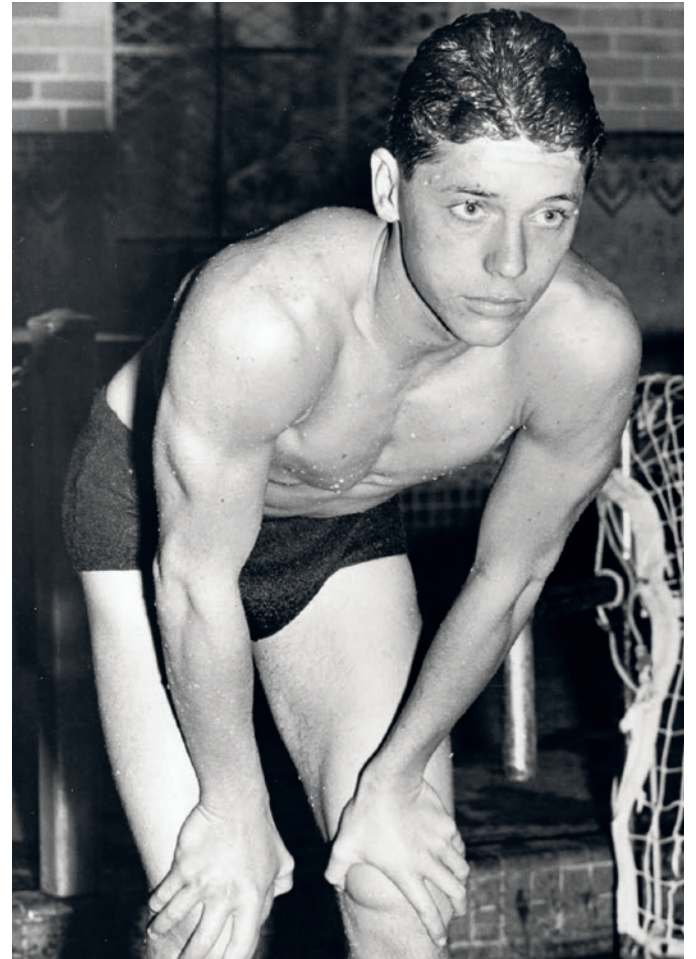
FIRST TO THE FINISH

THE 1948 LONDON GAMES MARKED THE FIRST OLYMPIC USE OF STARTING BLOCKS, ENABLING SPRINTERS TO START FROM A CROUCHING POSITION.



WALLACE WOLF '51, JD '57

Wally Wolf began his long Olympic career in London in 1948 when, as a 17-year-old, he won gold as a member of the United States' record-setting 4x200-meter freestyle relay team. He swam in the same event at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, and was a member of the U.S. water polo teams in Melbourne in 1956 and in Rome in 1960. At USC, he was a four-year All-American swimmer and played on the Trojan water polo team that tied for the Pacific Coast Conference title in 1948 and 1951.



WILBUR THOMPSON '49, MS '57

In the 1948 Games in London, South Dakota native Wilbur Thompson heaved the 16-pound shot put 56 feet, 2 inches, smashing the previous Olympic record by more than 3 feet and winning the gold.

GOING FOR THE GOLD

IF USC HAD BEEN ONE OF THE 59 COUNTRIES PARTICIPATING IN THE LONDON GAMES, ITS TOTAL OF 10 GOLD MEDALS (OUT OF 12 OVERALL) WOULD HAVE TIED IT FOR THIRD PLACE WITH FRANCE AND HUNGARY.



“When I told my father I wanted to be a diver, he said, ‘I’ll back you 100 percent if you promise me that you’ll become a doctor of medicine.’

So I promised [him] I would. My first two years of medical school were spent on campus. During my lunch hour, I would go to the pool and dive for recreation. Every time I did poorly on an examination, I would go to the athletic club and dive at night... by the time I graduated I was a hell of a diver.”

SAMMY LEE MD '47



TRAITS OF A TROJAN SCHOLARLY

SAMMY LEE

