



ALUMNI PROFILE

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WHO IS DON MCFARLANE

The British Empire and Commonwealth Games were opened in Vancouver on July 30, 1954 by Earl Alexander of Tunis and closed on August 7 by the Duke of Edinburgh. In all, 662 competitors from 24 nations participated in the games with Canada coming fourth in medal standings.

Don McFarlane was a competitor at these Games, and is modest when asked about his two medals won at the Games. "I was lucky; I had good genes. Really you should congratulate my mom and dad."

But this modest statement belies the tremendous accomplishments of this sprinter, member of three Halls of Fame (McMaster University, Burlington Central HS, Town of Burlington) and 1954 British Empire Games silver medallist in the 100yd sprint and gold medallist in the 4x100yd relay. The time of 41.3 seconds was a new games record and this was the only gold medal that Canada won in Track & Field (Don was the anchor runner in the race).

He remembers most the "camaraderie" and the "friendship" experienced at the 1954 Games, and is very proud that his gold medal was won on home soil. He speaks of the medal ceremony, with the "Maple Leaf Forever" being played while the Canadian flag, the "Red Ensign" was raised. Interestingly, while waiting on the field for this ceremony to begin, he witnessed the race where Roger Bannister won the "Miracle Mile".

In 2014, the 60th anniversary of the British Empire Games was celebrated at the BC Hall of Fame with two of the four members of the 4x100 relay team in attendance. Don said this reunion was "really fun", and was impressed that all members of the men's rowing eights team (all in their 80's) were in attendance.

It all began when Don was 14 years old and he realized that he could run fast – at church picnics and public school field days. Wanting to feed the fire that these early fun races had lit, he joined the Hamilton Olympic Club, where he trained two to three times a week. A natural sprinter, he went on to establish a Canadian University record of 9.9 sec. in the 100yd sprint as well as win several junior and senior Canadian championships.

In addition to athletic prowess, Don was a success academically, with an honours degree in mathematics and economics from McMaster University. This institution also nominated him, but was unsuccessful for a Rhodes scholarship. Don became an Actuary and was a Fellow in both the Canadian Institute of Actuaries and the Society of Actuaries. Academic achievement runs in the family, with Don's twin brother Ross a PHD in physics from McGill University, and postdoctoral fellowship at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). The two siblings still speak regularly today, even though Ross has been based in California for years.

When asked about the impact that being a high performance athlete had on his life, Don states that sport gave him self confidence, a determination to achieve, and that being in shape defined him. Until a few years ago, he was still playing tennis and squash, and at the age of 84, still goes to the gym 5 mornings a week.

Don is equally proud of the fact that him and his wife Margaret married in September 1954 immediately after the games, have four children, and recently celebrated their 61st anniversary.

Commonwealth Games Canada is proud to salute Don McFarlane for his achievements in sport, and most especially his gold medal in the 100yd sprint.

