

Herb Washington – Flint Central 1968



Who won? This is the finish of the 50-yard dash at the Milwaukee Journal Indoor on March 9, 1968. On the right is Charlie Greene, a 3-time NCAA 100 champion and 3-time winner of the NCAA Indoor 60. On the left is Herb Washington, a teenager from Flint. Many observers said that Washington won, or at least tied Greene.

Wrote Track & Field News: “For a change, right or wrong, Charlie Greene was awarded a decision in a close sprint finish at the first Milwaukee Journal Games since 1965. But the newsmaker was close runner-up Herb Washington, a 17-year-old senior of Central High in Flint, Mich., whose 5.1 clocking matched Greene’s as well as the world standard first set in 1939 for 50-yards. Washington, who became the fourth dashman to claim a piece of the record, did not especially surprise Midwest filberts for he had won the Junior Champ 100 title last summer in a wind-aided 9.4 and copped the Cleveland KC 50 in 5.3.”

The previous December, Washington, the No. 6 man on the Flint Central basketball team, announced he would leave the team to concentrate on track with coach Carl Krieger. The two retooled Washington’s start, and he won his first meet, running 6.3 in the 60 to defeat Tom Randolph (MAC recordholder in the 100) at the Western Michigan Relays on January 27.

On March 1 at the Cleveland K of C meet, Washington won the 50 in 5.3 (after a 5.3 semi), topping a strong collegiate field. Then came Milwaukee the next weekend, where the high school senior established his world class credentials.

On March 23, Washington finally got his moment. At the Hamilton Indoor Games in Ontario, the high schooler tied the World Record with a 5.1 in his semifinal, then came back to win the final in 5.2, beating Olympic 200 bronze medalist Ed Roberts.

As a high school phenom, Washington also had his share of success outdoors, winning the Class A sprint double at the state finals as both a junior and senior. His 9.8 for 100 yards in 1972 tied the meet record. Earlier that year he had set the state record 9.4 with a win at the Mansfield Relays, later tying it when he won the post-season Golden West Invitational in

California. At the time, the Golden West was the closest thing at the time to a high school national championships; Washington placed 2nd in the 220 that day in 21.3.

Washington went on to fame at Michigan State, winning the NCAA dash title as well as All-America honors four times. He captured 7 Big 10 titles and broke World Indoor Records on several occasions. He later played two seasons in Major League Baseball as a “designated runner” for the Oakland As. He has since become a successful businessman.

Greene, his rival in Milwaukee, broke the 100 m World Record twice in the summer of 1972 and captured Olympic gold in a World Record 4 x 100.

