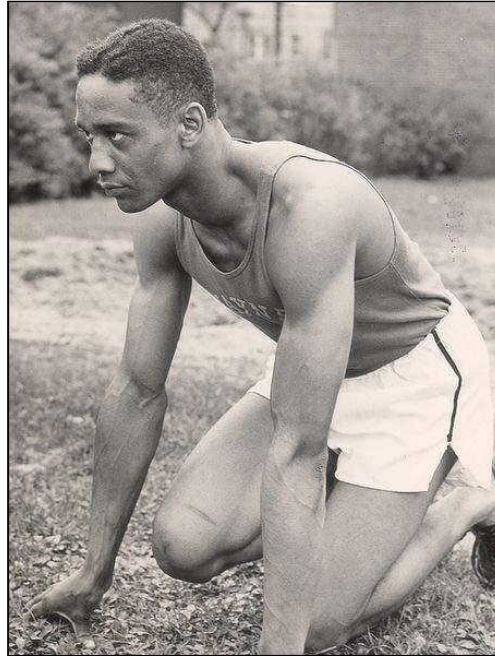


Lorenzo Wright – Detroit Miller 1944



He wasn't even the star of his high school team, yet four years later, Lorenzo Wright would be an Olympic gold medalist.

At Miller High, the city championship was the biggest meet Wright ever competed at. His senior year, he won the long jump in a modest 20-3.5 and led off the winning 4 x 220 relay. At the end of the season, he was the team's No. 3 scorer.

Wright went to Wayne State, where he blossomed into a star. In his final meet of the season, he won the 100, 220, both hurdle races, the long jump and anchored the winning 4x2. Four days later he joined the Army to fight in the final months of World War II.

Private First Class Wright returned after two years of service and picked up where he left off. He won 5 events at the 1947 conference meet and at the NCAA Championships sailed to 25-9.5 to finish 2nd in the long jump. It was the third-longest jump in the world that year.

The next winter, he won the U.S. indoor title at 25-3.75; he was only the second man ever to go past 25-feet indoors; the first was Jesse Owens. At the Olympic Trials he finished 3rd and was also named an alternate for the 4 x 100 relay.

In London, Wright finished a frustrated 4th in his specialty. But he was given a chance to run second leg in the relay, and his blistering backstretch helped the U.S. win. However, an official disqualified them, saying that the pass from Barney Ewell to Wright was out of zone. The U.S. protested—and after the podium ceremony giving the gold to Britain, the British judges relented when multiple photos showed the exchange was well within the zone. Wright and his teammates were given their gold medals on the boat ride home.

Though he won another U.S. Indoor title in 1952, Wright retired after failing to qualify for the Olympic Trials. He then took a coaching job at Miller High. To add insult to injury, the AAU called that a violation of his amateur status, and banned him for life. He coached successfully in Detroit for over 15 years and in 1969 was the first African-American named in charge of the city's high school sports programs. He was stabbed to death by his wife on March 27, 1972 at the age of 45 during a marital dispute.