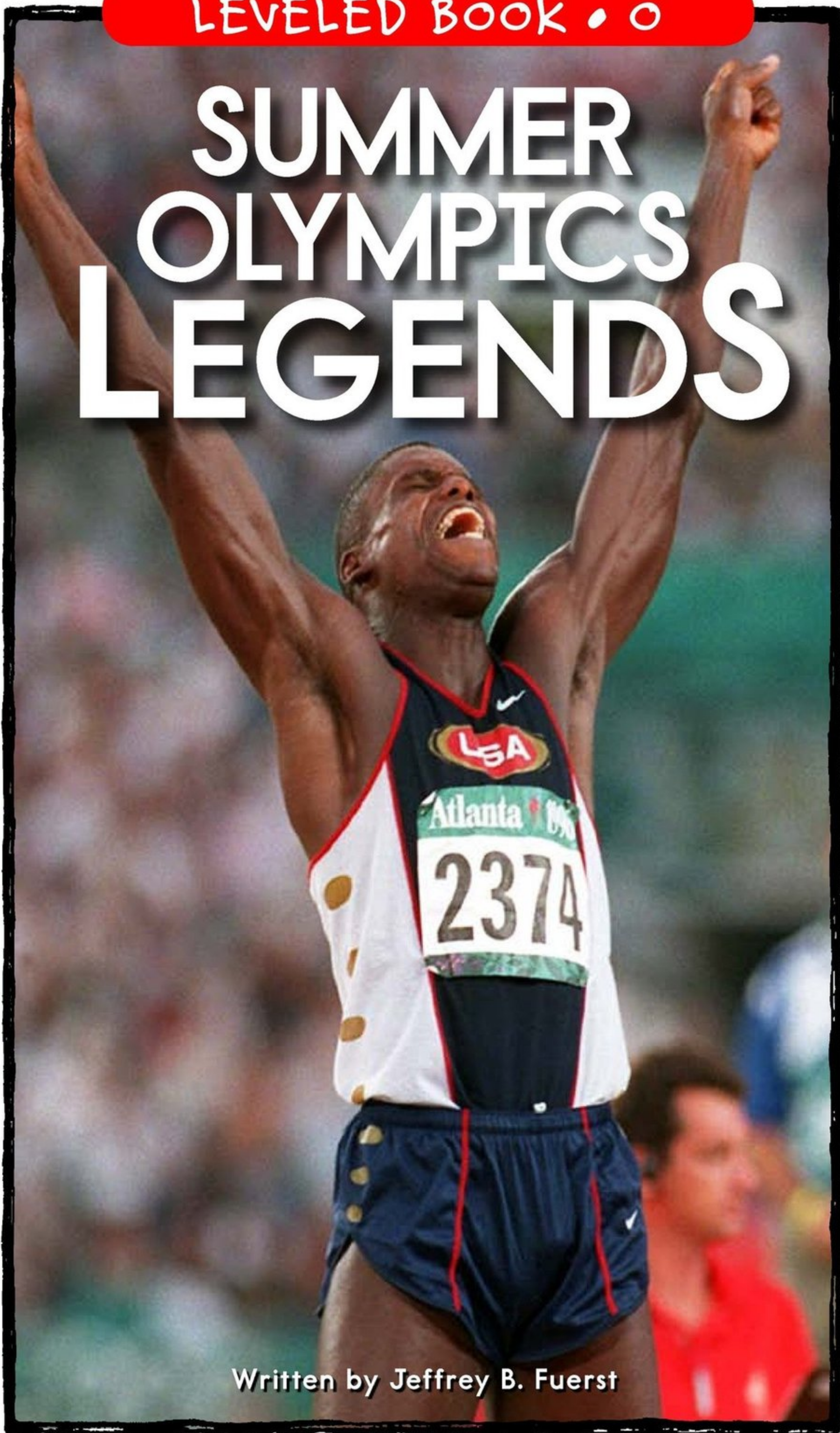


LEVELED BOOK • 0

SUMMER OLYMPICS LEGENDS



Written by Jeffrey B. Fuerst

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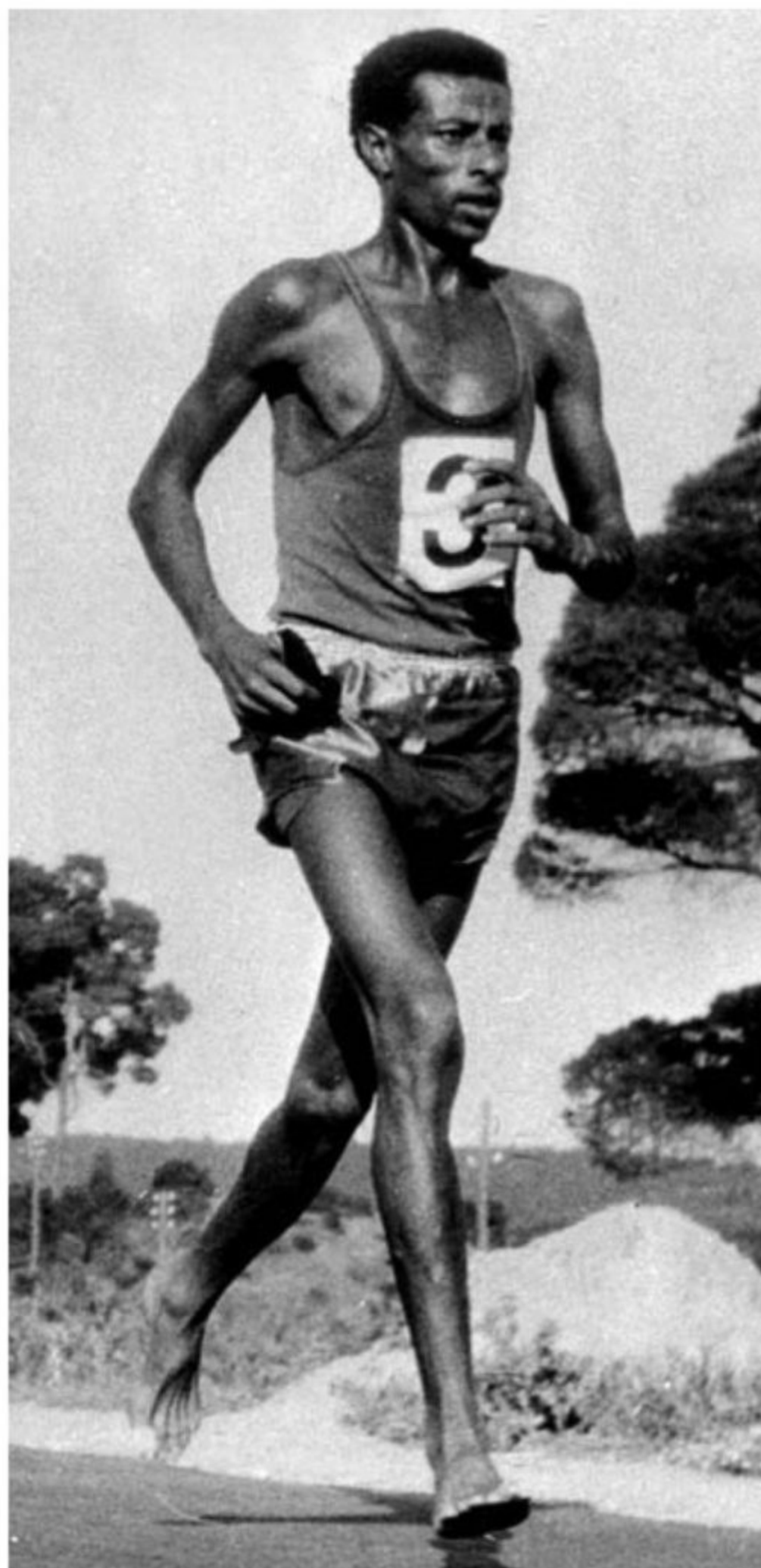
Australian sprinter Cathy Freeman lights the Olympic Torch in the 2000 games.

Introduction

Sports fans the world over gear up for the Summer Olympics every four years. In modern Olympics, more than 10,000 athletes from 200 countries compete in 300 events. Athletes run, jump, swim, and much more to win gold, silver, and bronze medals. Some athletes may earn a place in the record books. A few may even join the ranks of these Summer Olympics legends.

Shoeless Wonder:
Abebe Bikila
(1932–1973)
Marathon
Ethiopia

On your mark,
get set, go! The
Olympic marathon
starts like any
other race. But in
the marathon,
runners go, go,
and keep going!
The marathon is a
long-distance race.
It is 26 miles
(42 km) long.



Bikila runs barefoot.

You could probably walk 26 miles in
about eight hours, plus time for breaks.
Marathon runners cover 26 miles in a
little over two hours, and they don't
take breaks.

The marathon race at the 1960 Olympics was unforgettable. Abebe Bikila was in second place with less than a mile to go. Then he pulled away and won by 200 meters. Plus, he set an Olympic record—running barefoot! Bikila trained by running barefoot over the countryside of Ethiopia, a country in Africa. Shoes, he said, hurt his feet.

Four years later, Bikila won the marathon again. This time he wore socks and shoes and set a new world record.



Bikila won his second Olympics marathon in Tokyo, Japan, just six weeks after doctors removed his appendix.



Mark Spitz was named World Athlete of the Year in 1972.

Golden Boy:

Mark Spitz (1950–)

Swimming

USA

The dark-haired swimmer with the mustache bragged he would win six gold medals at the 1968 Olympics. He ended up winning two gold, one silver, and one bronze medal. Quite a **feat!** But it was not good enough for Mark Spitz. He trained hard for the next four years.

At the 1972 games, Mark Spitz did not brag. He entered four individual swimming races, including his specialty stroke, the butterfly. He also swam in three team relay races. Spitz won seven gold medals, an Olympic record. Plus, he set new world records in every race. Now *that* is something to brag about.

Decathlon Double:

Daley Thompson (1958–)

Decathlon

United Kingdom (Great Britain)

Daley Thompson was one of the best of the best. He won the decathlon in 1980. Then, in 1984, he won it again. He is only the second person in the history of the Olympics to win the decathlon twice. In 1988, at the ripe “old” age of 30, he still performed well enough to come in fourth place in sports’ most grueling event.

Decathlon athletes, or “decathletes,” may be the best all-around athletes. They run fast for sprinting and hurdling races. They have **endurance** for longer races. They are strong enough to throw the javelin, discus, and shot put. Decathletes can long jump, high jump, and pole vault.



Thompson flies through the air during the long jump.

Most Olympic athletes train hours a day, for years, to **excel** in just one event. They train for either track (running) or field (throwing and jumping), but athletes who compete in the decathlon must train for ten different events.



Jim Thorpe: Greatest Athlete of the 20th Century

Jim Thorpe (1888–1953) was a well-known Native American college football hero when he entered the 1912 Summer Olympics. He won the ten-event decathlon. He also won the five-event pentathlon. He set world records that lasted for many years in both of these difficult and demanding events.



Fanny Blankers-Koen holds her daughter after the 1948 Olympic Games.

Super Mom: Fanny Blankers-Koen
(1918–2004)
Sprinter/Jumper
Netherlands

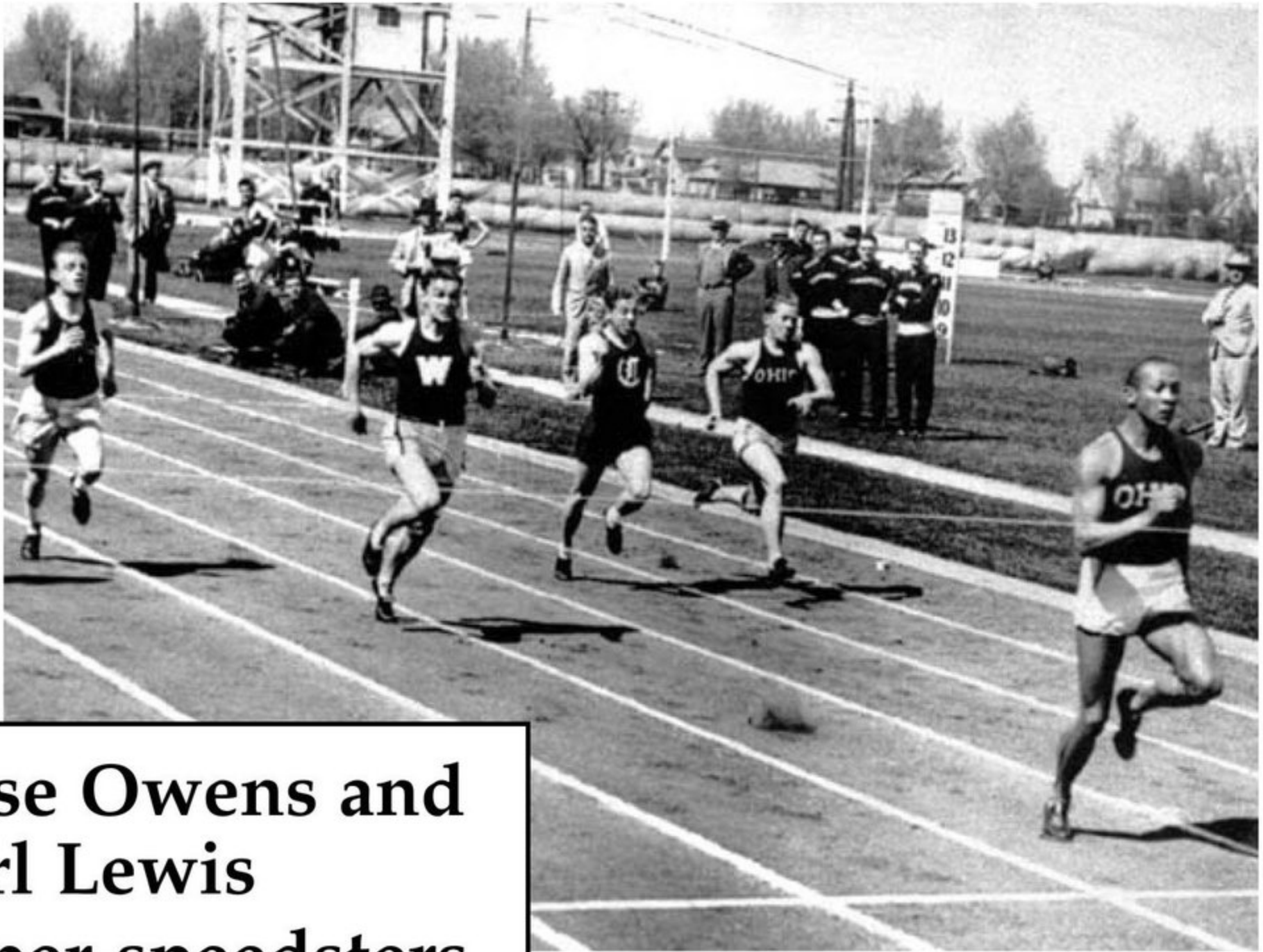
At the 1936 Olympics, 18-year-old Fanny Koen came in a disappointing sixth place in the high jump. She knew she would do better next time. Unfortunately, she had to wait 12 years for her chance. The Olympics were not held in 1940 or 1944 because of World War II.

By the next Olympics in 1948, Fanny Blankers-Koen was 30. She was married and the mother of two children. She was also determined. People told her to stay home with her family—she didn't listen. Instead, she won the 100-meter, 200-meter, and 100-meter relay races. She also won the 80-meter hurdles. No woman had won four gold medals in one Summer Olympics before.

Many people thought Fanny could have won six gold medals. At that time, she held the world record in the long jump and high jump. But Olympic rules then did not let women enter more than three individual events.

Blankers-Koen competes in the 80-meter hurdles in London during the 1948 Olympics.





Jesse Owens and Carl Lewis Super-speedsters

Jesse Owens (above) and Carl Lewis (right) have also each won four gold medals in one Olympics. Owens fought against prejudice at the 1936 Summer Olympics, proving that what's inside a person, not skin color, makes a true champion.





Comaneci competes on the floor exercise.

**Everyone's Darling:
Nadia Comaneci
(1961–)**

***Gymnast
Romania***

The crowd at the 1976 Olympics roared with delight. A little 14-year-old girl in a ponytail showed unusual grace and **agility** on the uneven bars.

Everyone in the audience knew Nadia Comaneci (co-MAN-eech) had done a great job.

How good was she? The scoreboard showed a 1.0, but that's because it wasn't made to show a 10. She was perfect! A 10 is the highest score in a gymnastics event. Never before had anyone earned a perfect 10.

Nadia continued to charm the judges and audience during the Olympic Games. She scored six more 10s in other gymnastic events. She won three gold, one silver, and one bronze medal. She was also named all-around Olympic champion.

At the 1980 Olympics, Nadia added two gold and two silver medals to her trophy case.



Comaneci's performance on the uneven bars earned her a perfect 10.

Glossary

agility	the ability to move quickly and easily (p. 14)
endurance	the ability to continue going even when there might be pain (p. 9)
excel	to perform extremely well (p. 10)
feat	an act showing amazing skill (p. 7)

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