

A record breaker with Olympic spirit

After representing Great Britain in the 1960 Rome Summer Games, Joy Jordan was spurred on to be the best in the world

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I competed in the Rome 1960 Olympics 800m women's race when I was 25. It's a great thrill to be representing your country. The atmosphere in the stadium was fantastic, everybody cheering and shouting, but I was very nervous. I made it through the heats, so I got into the final and came sixth, with a time of 2:07:8 minutes.

The Olympics did my racing good because weeks later I broke the world record for the 880 yards with a time of 2:06:1, beating the time of 2:06:6 set by a Soviet runner more than four years earlier. My world record was smashed two years later by an Australian. I presume it was the Olympics that fine-tuned me and increased my speed.

I was 11 when I discovered that I could run fast and started sprinting for my school. I went on to represent Hampshire and competed in the inter-counties races. I left school at 17, joined the Ministry of Supply and studied mechanical engineering, but I didn't take the final exam as I was concentrating on athletics.

I swapped sprinting for middle distance running. I wasn't doing so well as a sprinter so my coach kept pushing up the distances until I became an 880 yards runner. I had more stamina for longer races and that's when I started winning the women's three

As (races organised by the Amateur Athletic Association, now England Athletics) then I got picked for international competitions. In those days, races in the UK were often measured in yards, while in the Olympics and World Championships it was metres.

Running tracks were hard to find. They were usually grass, and cinder tracks were few and far between. I lived near army barracks in Aldershot and I was allowed to use their track. I would train for three days and then have a rest day. I'd warm up by jogging one mile and then repeat 220, 440 and 660 yards, with a recovery period in between.

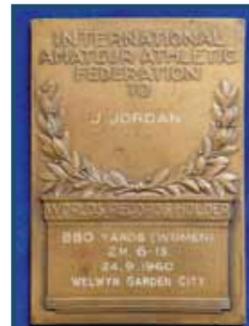
Winning races gives you the boost to carry on and as an international competitor I got to travel. By my mid-20s I'd been to Russia, Poland, France, Italy, Germany, Finland, Sweden, the former Yugoslavia and Australia.

I was described as 'the untouchable force of middle distance running in Britain between 1958 and 1962', which felt good.

My diet was good, natural food. Today more thought is given to nutrition and athletes have a dietitian but we just ate plenty of vegetables, meat and fish. We had a cooked breakfast, a light lunch and a meal after training.

Being an athlete wasn't a full-time job in the 1950s and early 1960s. While I was competing I got married and worked as a scientific assistant, assessing noise and vibration in military vehicles, including tanks, for the Ministry of Supply.

We wore black shorts, which weren't as brief as they are today and a vest with a club badge on it. The tracksuit and the spiked running shoes were the most expensive items.



Above: a plaque honours Joy's world record
Below: Her 1960 Rome Olympics commemorative medallion



I retired from athletics in 1962 after competing in the British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Perth – I wanted to start a family.

My coach became my husband. I met Dennis when I joined an athletics club at the age of 18. We have a son and daughter and celebrate our diamond anniversary next year.

Most of my team uniforms went into the dressing-up box for the kids. There were different outfits for each competition. We used to come up to London to get measured. For the Olympics we wore a pale blue jacket and skirt, a red hat and bag and white shoes. For the Commonwealth Games it was a crushed strawberry-pink colour. I do wish I'd saved all of them.

My children are proud of me but I've been there and done it – you almost forget about it. It's not until people come up to you and say 'I hear you were in the Olympics' that you realise that it wasn't such a minor achievement.

It's very important to keep fit. At 80 I still play golf a couple of times a week and I spend 10 minutes doing stretches every morning. I never use the car to get to the village and I like being out in the fresh air. I used to play squash and badminton but I've given those up because I had a hip replacement and don't want to risk falling and doing any more damage.

Nottingham Racecourse named a race after me to mark the 2012 London Olympics. I presented a trophy and had a lovely day out; it was nice to know that somebody remembered what I'd done.

Joy Jordan is a member of Shelford WI, Nottinghamshire Federation. With thanks to Bingham Leisure Centre and Parkwood Leisure.

Fighting fit at the age of 80, Joy gets back on track
Inset: in pole position in the number one vest at the Women's Amateur Athletic Association meeting at White City, which she won



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• For more sporting inspiration, see page 18 for our interview with Olympic gold medallist Kelly Holmes



Above: Joy wore her uniform with pride when she represented Great Britain in the Rome 1960 Olympics – it is still in pristine condition today