



Your on the Street Reporter



Uyless Black

Bobby Morrow: World-Class Sprinter

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We often hear stories from our friends about special events in which they say, “I’ll never forget that time in my life!” or “I’d never seen such a thing!” and other exclamations of wonder. Count me in. One experience I hold dear to my sports-loving heart is watching a man who was at that time the fastest sprinter in the world. The very man who would, on that day, lose in his favorite event, the 100-yard dash.

My experience was a double whammy. I watched my sports hero run a race, and I watched my sports hero lose the race.

In my pre-teens, teens, and into my adult years, I was a mediocre performer but an ardent fan of track and field. Several family members excelled in the sport. My father was a miler and a high jumper back in the early 1900s. My brothers did well in the sport, with two of them winning many citations, including “athlete of the year” at two major universities for their performances in several events at each meet. Your reporter was, at best mediocre, but in my defense, I devoted springtime, summer, and fall to swimming.

For my “I’ll never forget experience,” dad and I motored 135 miles from our home in southeast New Mexico to Big Spring, Texas, where the American Business Club Relays (ABC) were being held.

We wanted to see brother Tom compete. He was a decathlon caliber of athlete, supremely adept in several track and field events. It is well-deserved that he, along with my brother, Ross, and nephew, Ronnie, are in the local Lea County Athletes’ Hall of Fame.

The year was 1957. The year before, Morrow had won three gold medals at the Melbourne Olympics (the 100-meter, the 200-meter, and the 4x4 100-meter relay).

No one had dominated the Olympics like this man did since Jesse Owens in 1936. Owens also won gold in the broad jump. Sprinters can do well in the broad jump (aka, long jump), and Morrow often won or placed in this event.



Morrow was a national hero and high-lighted on the covers of many magazines, as seen in the photo on the left. One writer described him as “the fastest and prettiest runner in the state.” I would have used the terms, “fastest and most graceful.” He seemed to be running as if his track was air.

The magazine THE WEEK made these observations: “He won the 1955 Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) championship in the 100-yard dash. The next year, he successfully defended his title and won the 100- and 200-meter races at the NCAA championships. ...He

narrowly missed a world record in the 100 meters. In the relay, he ran the final leg in a winning effort against the Soviet Union and helped his team set a world record of 39.5 seconds, breaking a mark that Owens had helped set 20 years earlier.”¹

The ABC Relays in Big Springs managed to attract, not only Bobby Morrow and his affiliate-school, Abilene Christian College (ACC, now ACU, Abilene Christian University)² but Duke University, a track and field powerhouse. The great sprinter, Dave Sime, ran for Duke and

¹ *The Week*, June 19, 2020, 35.

² Morrow was a religious man, plus coach Oliver Jackson was known as a fine track coach. His teams won the Texas Conference title five years in row.

was considered by many to be on a par with, or even better than Morrow. Their record leading up to the event was 1-1.

So for this weekend, I was excited. I would watch my brother win medals in several events. But I had watched Tom perform many times. I especially wanted to watch my idol, Bobby Murray in person, to see him run and (I hoped) win another big-time contest. After all, he was running against Dave Sime, one of the best in the world.

How a relatively small city like Big Springs, Texas, managed to attract far-away Duke was a mystery. ACC was located nearby and competed with local teams frequently. I mentioned this to dad, who responded Duke was likely enticed to come to the meet because Bobby Morrow's ACC team was entered.

Dad and I were seated near the 50-yard marker. Both sprinters got off to a good start. Sime was just slightly ahead of Morrow as the racers passed by where we sat. At the finish, from our perspective, we were not sure who won, but Sime was announced the winner shortly after the conclusion of the race.



This photo shows the runners crossing the finish line. (Sime on the right, Morrow in the middle.) It appears Sime is about one-half step ahead of Morrow, but that impression might be due to the angle of the camera. Sime's lunge forward while Morrow finished head-high might have sealed the judges' conclusion.

By the way, the runner on the left is Bill Woodhouse, also one of the best sprinters in the world and who bested his team mate, Morrow, on more than one occasion.

If you want to see this race, it is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsQfuFqGLa4>.

Tom competed against Bobby Morrow on more than one occasion in the 4 x100 relay race. He told me his team never beat ACC---never came close---while Morrow was running the anchor leg. While at North Texas State, Tom also played basketball against Oscar Robinson (whom I consider to be the best all-round player ever, a subject for another article). Tom has yet to share with me how many points Oscar scored on him in their competition with Oscar's Cincinnati.

Anyway, Morrow intended to defend his Olympic titles at the 1960 Olympics. He suffered injuries between 1956-1960 and did not qualify for the team, but was designated as a backup. During those years, Morrow made it no secret that he was critical of the United States Olympic big-shots (my term, intentionally derisive), and characterized them as enjoying a "feather-bedded" life for taking precious seats on the airplanes to/from the games that he believed should have been made available to athletes. His main complaint was paying the athletes \$15 a day, while the official lived, as Morrow might have put it, "in tall cotton."

These pronouncements did not endear him to Avery Brundage, a major force in American and international Olympics activities. Bobby was instructed to be at the airport at a specific time the next day to take a (reserved) flight to go to the Olympics. Upon arriving at the airport, he was informed he was not on the team.



After 1960, Morrow ran only on occasion, essentially hanging up his track shoes about that time. He stayed in Texas, became a cotton farmer, remained famous until his death on May 30, 2020, in Halingen, Texas.