

Mr 800: Phil Edwards (Brit. Guiana/Canada)

— Ulf Lagerstroem —

Phil Edwards, a black Canadian athlete won bronze over 800m. It was the third time he'd reached the final and this was second consecutive bronze over the distance. In 1928 He had finished fourth. over the distance. In addition he won bronze in the 1500m at the 1932 Games and was twice a member of the 4x400m relay which also won medals of the same colour.

In addition, he captured a British Empire Games gold (1934) for Brit Guiana, one AAU title (1929) and an AAU Jr title (1927). He was a member of a WR-breaking Empire 4x880 team in 1932 albeit an unratified mark.

To be added are also two IC4A wins, a few Canadian titles and a world leading performance in 1929, at 1.52,2 (880). Indoors he twice won the so-called (NYAC) Halpin 880. He was indeed Mr Twolap.

Usually (Dr) Edwards was a frontrunning athlete with mostly ineffective finishing powers. He possessed a long, smooth copy-book stride. He was the type of runner that was easily trained, and only worked out more seriously when there was a major championship title at stake. He knew how to peak at the right time, and had a fine tactical sense that he did not always use though.

Philip Aron Edwards was born 22 (or on the 13th) September 1907 in Georgetown, British Guiana, with a mixture of three races in his blood. His maternal grandfather was said to come from Scotland, his paternal grandmother from the East Indies. He was the twelfth of his parents' thirteen offsprings.

His first athletic experience consisted of walking contests with an elder brother, "King". Later his father Fitz, a magistrate, would take him for runs with him, and Phil discovered that he liked running and that he was good at it. He commenced to compete, mainly in quarter and half mile runs.

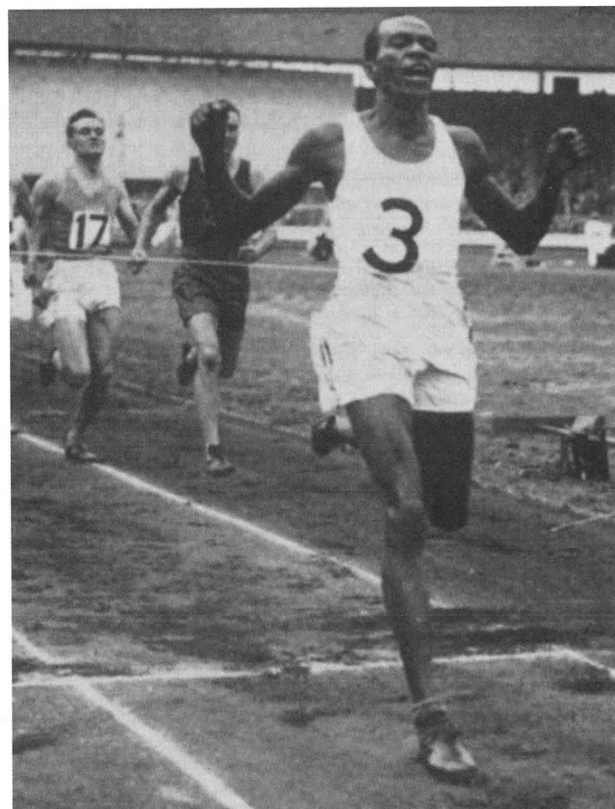
Being a graduate from the exclusive Queen's College in Georgetown BG, he left for New York in the spring of 1925 to enroll at NYU, where the elder brother already was a student and also athlete. Later their parents and a few other family members joined them there.

Reportedly his 880 yds best was 1.59 run on grass, before he emigrated, and Phil considered himself a leading trackman in the small nation. At 16 of age he had won no fewer than seven events at his school's sports in 1924.

Soon he started to run in open US meets though without much success. At a big New York meet in September 1925 he was introduced as "the South American champion" (!), yet did not live up to expectation as the quite unheralded champ ended up last in a race won in 1.57,4 by Pincus Sober.

At the time he regarded Alan Helffrich, US national half mile champ three times, as a model athlete. Phil admired the latter's running style and tried to copy it.

Attending New York University he came under the wing of famed coach Von Elling, who sent him out with the cross country boys to improve on stamina, then considered Phil's weakest point. In fact, he would also com-



John Edwards at the British Commonwealth Games in London 1934

pete at the event and do well. Years later an ex-team mate of his told that "Edwards could run every race from the 100 yd dash to a cross country run, and do each one superbly".

Von Elling's coaching was beginning to yield positive results during the 1926 season. Freshman Edwards won a 880 yd handicap race at Brooklyn in mid-June. With a 5 yd start (running 800,1m) he posted 1.57,2.

A week later he was runner-up in the Metro(politan) AAU junior half mile, finishing some ten yards behind the winner's 1.56,8, and ended in the same position in the slower senior race, run another week later. Encouraged by these performances Phil started at the national AAU junior event and got fourth. He still was only 18 of age.

In the winter everything indicated that he was on the right track. In November he placed third in a regional, inter-collegiate six-mile cross country run, and he was to continue to be placed high at the event in those years.

Despite being inexperienced at racing indoors on boards, in February 1927 Phil won the Millrose 880 in a sluggish race, became Metro AAU champion at 1000 yds with a new meet record, and came in fourth in the national final. In the latter race he was a humiliatingly well beaten fourth behind winner Hahn's 2.12,8 "world record".

At the outdoor NYAC Games, held on a rainy day in early June 1927 he started from scratch in a half mile hcp event and was spanked by another, local scratch runner. Shortly after Phil took the outdoor Metro AAU 880, with a 1.55,0 meet record, and in early July he all but nipped

the US national title. A mere foot separated him from the winner. Phil's estimated time was 1.53,7 at 880 (1.53,0 at 800m), the world's third fastest performance that year.

In early September he competed in Canada for the first time, winning a 1000 yds run in a 2.13,4 all-comers record and avenging himself on Ray Watson, his AAU conqueror, at a tight finish.

Because of scholastic problems he had been "forced out of NYU" and been ineligible for the collegiate circuit that season. Yet he returned to his studies there in the autumn.

He was approached by a Canadian party who proposed that he should move to Canada and represent that country in the 1928 Olympics. Phil accepted. As he was a citizen of another Empire nation there would be no major problem.

In 1928 he upgraded further. He took the NYU two-mile relay team to the IC4A indoor victory, and won his first of *four* straight national AAU 600 yd indoor championship titles, a unique achievement. Moreover, he emerged victorious at almost all of his indoor starts and they were several. In fact, he was undefeated up to 3 March, when he assisted Lloyd Hahn in breaking the 880 record with a magnificent 1.51,4, faster than the outdoor world record.

Soon after he was in bed with the measles and that put an end to his indoor ambitions that campaign.

Outdoors "the mercury-footed phantom, all legs" was instrumental in the NYU quartet's medley relay victory at the Penn Relays. Later he took a Mid-Atlantic IC double and the IC4A half mile by seven yards, now as captain of the NYU track team. He did not run in the NCAA meet, nor in the US nationals, but went to Canada to report for the OG trials, and winning the national 800 m title in 1.52,0, good for seventh on the year's world list.

He was selected for the Olympics held in Amsterdam, where he did a fine job of it. Edwards got a team bronze in the 4x400 and was fourth at 800. However, in the 400 he did not get into the final (49,2 in heat).

Afterward he competed in UK, being on two victorious relay teams in the Empire v USA match, and a little later Phil came home winner in a Dublin half mile, clocked in 1.52,2 at 800 m.

In late August in New York he got the satisfaction of beating Hahn for the first time, and did so soundly indeed. He disclosed that he entertained plans of studying at London University, at the School for Chartered Accountants, but nothing came of it.

A Splendid Season

After retaining his indoor Metro and AAU titles, Edwards' 1929 outdoor campaign turned out to be one of his best.

The first highlight of his season was his fast anchor leg for another Penn Relays medley relay victory. As in 1928, however, he was unable to overcome the considerable ground lost by his team mates in the two-mile relay event despite highly praised, most courageous efforts.

Five weeks later, he outclassed the opposition in the IC4A half mile. After a fast opener, at a sub-1.50 pace, the

slender favourite "who ran with the grace and speed of a deer", was tiring in the last lap, and still came home in a 1.52,2 world leading clocking. Some 16.000 spectators were cheering him on.

Russell Chapman, the next inter-collegiate champion and a to-be indoor sensation, finished way back.

After another five weeks had gone by, Phil was on the starting-line of the national AAU final, run in Colorado. He changed his tactics and the result was a sluggish race, which he easily won by five yards. The runners were hampered by very strong winds besides the altitude.

After the meet he commenced a tiresome journey of 1600 miles by plane and train up to Canada, where he only two days later won the half mile and the mile race as well for his Hamilton club, against a combined Oxford/Cambridge team. In the former event he made a shambles of Tom Hampson, the future British Empire (1930) and Olympic (1932) champion. Hampson was still far from being at his best. Two months later, in September, Phil won another Maple Leaf title.

That year he was elected NYU member of the Alpha Phi Sigma society.

A Turbulent Year

The year of 1930 commenced badly for Phil. He was barred from collegiate competition due to some IC4A rule.

The positive news was that at the beginning of the year he captured his third indoor AAU 600 title and also won the Canadian one. Yet in a Boston 1000, Chapman turned the tables on him. Phil took the Halpin half mile, defeating the Swiss, Paul Martin – OG silver medallist 1924 – and lost a 1000 to him. Paul was like Edwards later a medical student and was completing his studies in the USA. He had won the AAU 1000 a year earlier.

In view of his ineligibility Phil did not train as much as usual. He was also studying for his final exams and was graduated in June. Moreover, he planned to marry though the marriage was put off (it did happen in 1931 though).

This time he told friends that he intended to go to UK to study law at Cambridge, but again his plan fell through.

At the time of the British Empire Games held at Hamilton in August, Edwards was off form and a shadow of his previous, competitive self. He ended up fifth in the 880 and the mile, and was an eliminatee at 440. At these games he represented his birth nation, British Guiana, instead of Canada.

Shortly afterward, Empire athletes clashed with a US selection in Chicago, and Phil exhibited improving form on his 880 relay leg for the winning team. His only other race of note was a mile win in New York a few days later.

In the autumn he was admitted to McGill University, Montreal, to study medicine.

There were rumours telling that Phil had run 46,6 in an unofficial 440 time trial, which was hard to believe.

The following year, 1931, was another lost year on track for him – but for his fourth and last AAU indoor 600 yd victory in 1.12,6 after leading all the way. It was a meritorious win as he defeated the wellknown French

800 m world record holder (1.50,6), Séra Martin, a step behind, and Phil's own Canadian successor as half mile star for a while, Alex Wilson, a US student at Notre Dame.

In the Halpin race, however, it was Russell Chapman who finished winner with a 1.52,8 record, leaving the others some ten yards or more behind. Phil was third between the two European Martin's. Chapman easily took the Millrose 880 too, in 1.53,8, with Séra third, whereas Edwards got third in the 600, won by compatriot Alex Wilson.

Moving outdoors he kept a low profile and his record was patchy. Phil did not go to Winnipeg to dispute the national titles, yet took his McGill team to the victory of the Canadian inter-collegiate championship, as he was to do for six consecutive years.

Reportedly, his fastest 880 was run at Cleveland OH in July, in 1.54,2. His brilliance was not there that season.

The L. A. Man of Bronze

Newly-married, Phil thought he had better take care of wife and studies, in the first place, and with some exception desisted from competing in the indoor circuit in the winter. And he was to have an all-important mission later, in the summer.

1932 was another Olympic year, which meant that Phil Edwards again whipped himself into form. As usual he managed to peak at the right time. Not for nothing was he known as a man of surprises.

Before the Games he did not show his hand, and he even got beaten by a metre by Wilson in the trials at home. In the Los Angeles final he did. In the 800 he set a furious pace (52,4 at 400), almost burning himself out but still saved the bronze medal in 1.51,5, the year's fourth fastest performance. Unofficially, his real clocking much later was set at 1.50,6, based on video and photographic evidence (thanks to R Hymans, London).

Anyhow, his participation might already have ended in the first heat though, as a protest was lodged against him for obstructing Keller of France. Phil was accused of cutting in too sharply in front of Keller, who then pulled up.

In the end the Canadian was not dq'ed.

Hampson of UK won in a new world record (1.49,7), much thanks to Phil's fast pacing. Wilson was closely behind.

Nobody might have expected another medal for Phil in the 1500 m final, but he showed surprising staying power and ended third in a 3.52,8 best. The famous Italian, Beccali, won.

The bronze was a spectacular achievement. Considered a novice at the distance and not properly trained for it, he even left a few big-name performers behind, like Cunningham, Larva, Ny, and Lovelock. Still Phil was to continue running a mile now and then, when he had nothing better to do or could gain points for his college or club.

A third bronze came his way in the 4x400 m relay, Phil teaming up with anchor Alex Wilson.

After the Olympics Phil first competed at a San Francisco meet, being on two victorious Empire relay

squads, the 4x880 one dipping under the WR. Then in Chicago he emerged winner over two stars, Peltzer of Germany and Hornbostel of USA at 800 m. The winning time was modest (1.55).

In September he produced a reasonably good mile performance in New York, holding off Crowley, AAU second.

Phil considered giving up running competitively, yet when the 1933 indoor season got started he was again found beautifully striding on the boards. Trackwise it was not a very successful year for him though.

North American indoor highlights included Edwards v Glenn Cunningham matches in the half mile. In February they raced each other on an unbanked track in New York and Phil was jostled, ending up last.

In mid-March at Boston, McGill handled Boston U in a dual meet, and Phil was pipped by a Bostonian in the 600.

At the Edwards/Cunningham rematch at Hamilton four days later the home boy was in the lead in the last stretch when he suddenly fell. That year his opponent was the world's leading half miler.

Then in mid-April he got some consolation. Phil faced Milton Sandler, fresh AAU champ and co-record holder at 600 m, at a record attempt made on the fast indoor track at Buffalo NY. Leading all through he reached the post in 1.21,6, just two-tenths off the record. Sandler was soundly beaten, by seven yards.

Phil kept a low profile in the outdoor season, and did not contest any major championship, not even the Canadian nationals. His 880 best was a 1.55,2 clocking returned in July.

On 2 September at Toronto, however, he showed that he was still able to surprise the track community. At 1000 yds he posted 2.10,8, four-tenths better than the world best in a Briton's possession.

He terminated his 1933 campaign by winning the Canadian IC title at 880.

The Beginning to the End

In 1934 he seemed to be semi-retired though he came out of it to do his part when conditions so required. Thus, in March he agreed to again trying to fight down Cunningham, this time at 1000 yds, at an annual, big Hamilton event. He did not succeed, and the Kansas "Iron Man" won the fast race in 2.12,2.

After winning the national half mile crown in July, Phil was selected for the Empire Games held in London. They were his second Games and he easily came home winner in 1.54,2. He did not come to the start of his mile heat.

Four weeks later he did run a mile, at Toronto on 1 September, in the important Canadian National Exhibition meet, spanking Joe McCluskey, the foremost US steeplechaser, on a rainy afternoon.

Phil's last races of the season were as usual run in the intercollegiate meet held late in October. He won the mile but unexpectedly let himself be outfoxed by a team mate in a sluggish, 2 minute halfmile. There he ran four finals

within a couple of hours. After that he hung up his spikes on definite terms, at least that was how it seemed.

It follows that in 1935 he was not seen on the tracks at all – albeit with one single exception, the intercollegiate event in October. There he did his duty to McGill by posting a 1.57,2 for the victory.

Then Phil once more had a change of mind. Probably persuaded by federation people to give the Olympics another chance, Phil, who was his own coach, trainer and adviser, resumed training in 1936. He made his seasonal debut as late as the end of June. Before leaving for Berlin and his third Olympic participation, he did a 1.53,6 (metric) best, won one more national title, and was graduated from McGill as the first coloured student ever to be so at the School of Medicine.

Almost needless to say, he once more managed to peak at the right moment. In the unevenly paced 800 m final, Phil appeared to even have a silver medal within his grasp – until the Italian, Lanzi, came sprinting and placed himself between winner Woodruff and the Canadian veteran. His fifth Olympic bronze was a fact.

His time in the final was poor, and he ran faster in his heat with 1.53,2, which turned out to be his very last seasonal best. Imagine, an athlete placed No. 24 on the world list running third in a star-studded Olympic field!

In the 1500 he got fifth, in an excellent 3.50,4 career best, thrashing wellknown middle distance aces like Cornes, Szabo, Ny, Venzke ... John Lovelock of NZ won the gold in a 3.47,8 world record time, Cunningham second. It was the fastest race in history and Phil's fifth place as meritorious as unexpected.

In the 4x400 m relay Phil was close to capturing still another bronze, yet the Canadians were edged out of the third-place by the German anchor, Rudolf Harbig.

Edwards was elected captain of the Canadian track

team in Berlin. After the Games he started at races in UK (being on a losing Empire two-mile relay squad v USA), Poland and Latvia. Back home again, his farewell run took place at the National Exhibition games at Toronto on 5 September. He won a 1000 yds handicap affair in no sensational time.

Towards the end of the year Phil Edwards was named the outstanding Canadian sportsman and athlete of 1936, receiving trophies and other distinctions.

He was expected to return to his birth nation to practise his medical profession but did not. Instead, he accepted a three-year appointment as resident house surgeon at the General Hospital of Barbados BWI. While serving there he was approached by Guiana officials with a proposal to him to run for the country at the Empire Games in Australia in 1938. Phil either was not interested or could not take the necessary time off.

Yet in 1939 he was persuaded to compete at the British Guiana "Olympiad", despite being untrained and semi-injured, ending up fifth in the 880.

During the war he served with the Royal Canadian Medical Corps and rose to the rank of captain.

After it ended he earned his graduate medical Diploma, and began to specialize in tropical diseases. He joined the staff of the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. Edwards never lost touch with the sport. He died on 7 September 1971 following a heart attack. ■

Phil Edwards' Career Records

Outdoors: 400 m 49,2 (1928) – 800 m 1.51,5 (1.50,6) (1932) – 880 yds 1.52,2 (1929) – 1000 yds 2.10,8 – 1500 m 3.50,4 (1936) – Mile 4.25,6 (1929). Indoors: 500 m 1.05,0 (1929) – 600 yds 1.12,0 (1929) – 600 m 1.21,6 (1933) – 660 yds 1.22,1 (1933) – 880 yds 1.54,2 (1931) – 1000 yds 2.14,8 (1930) – Mile 4.21,0e (1929).

This Flag Dips to No Earthly King ... The 1908 Olympic Opening Ceremony: Fresh Evidence

— Bob Wilcock —

Bill Mallon and Ian Buchanan have dealt authoritatively concerning the controversies relating to the flags at the Opening Ceremony, and the conflicting reports of flag-bearer identity, in their article in JOH Vol. 7, No. 3, September 1999 (reprinted in the 2009 XIII Olympic Congress Special Issue), and in their book *The 1908 Olympic Games, (Appendix II)*.

There were two occasions in the Opening ceremony when the flag should have been dipped: when the teams lined up on the field facing the Royal Box, and during the march-past, as the teams passed the Royal Box.

Mallon and Buchanan concluded that the "possibility exists, which ... would explain both aspects of the problem. Perhaps Rose failed to dip the flag during the march-past ... which was of little consequence to the British media, but

then he did dip it while in line with the other flag bearers". They speculated that the issue may never be fully resolved, but evidence has at last emerged.

The Flags around the Stadium

Mallon and Buchanan record the US protest at the fact that 'Old Glory' was not flying amongst the flags around the stadium (nor was the Swedish flag) (pp. 314-5). These omissions were soon put right, and the British Olympic Association apologised. The reason for the omission, and the fact that flags of non-competing nations China and Japan were flying is that, under the agreement between the BOA and the organisers of the Franco-British Exhibition it was the responsibility of the organisers not only to