

## Archie Williams

by John Gilbert 2015

One of our sons, Carl, went out for Track in high school. We lived in Marin County California, just north of the SF Golden Gate Bridge, and our High School was Sir Francis Drake High. I was very busy at that time trying to earn a living and seldom attended any of Carl's Track Meets. One time in about 1974 Pat and I, as Carl's parents, received an invitation to an evening party at Carl's Track Coach's home in nearby Fairfax. We arrived about dusk at Archie Williams home. There were perhaps 10-20 parents at the party. Archie and his wife had set up festivities in their backyard. I remember them both as very quiet low-key people and we knew nothing about them except they were black in an almost all white environment. Archie, as an older coach at track meets, appeared to enjoy working with the kids even though none of them would ever be outstanding athletes. The only thing I recall about the party was that Archie brought out a guitar and entertained us with songs of the era. Our children subsequently all finished growing up in Marin County, I retired in 1991, and Pat and I moved to Spokane, Washington shortly thereafter.

At least a decade later I was browsing thru a collection of used books in Spokane and noticed one titled "The Games Of "1936...OLYMPICS IN GERMANY" and purchased it. Several days later while looking at the material related to Jessie Owens's famous exploits at the Berlin '36 Olympics games I read the caption under another black athlete. The name was Archie Williams! He had won the gold medal for the 400-meter run. Further reading in the book mentioned that Archie had become a Marin County high school coach.

Research is easy now, but not in the past as the Internet didn't exist. The U.S. government in 1991 signed into law a bill that would jump start the Internet and that

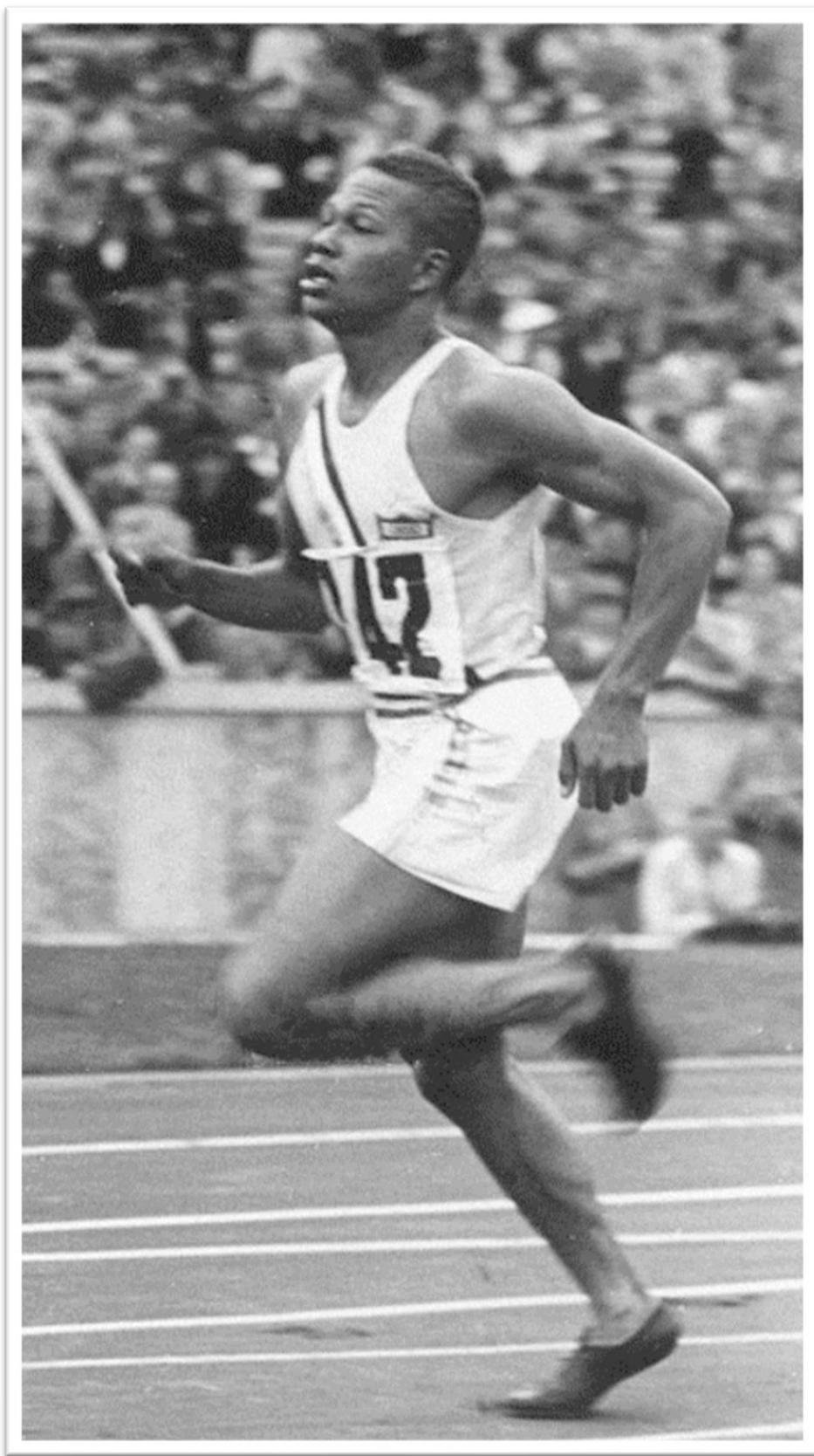
coincidentally was the year I retired from computers (forever, I thought). Now in 2015 we can do massive research on the internet sitting at home anytime of the day or night. Further research on Archie Williams using this new technology follows:

1. Archie grew up in Oakland, California. He attended a small college there and transferred to the University of California where he set a world record in the 440-yard run and earned an engineering degree in 1939. After winning the 1936 400-meter run in Berlin he had accepted an invitation to run in Sweden where he injured himself. That injury cut his track career short. Archie earned a private pilot's license after graduation and joined the Army Air force where he became an instructor. Twenty years later Archie retired from the U.S Air force as a Lieutenant Colonel. He then became a high school track coach in Marin County, California. There is much more about him that you can find at [CALISPHERE](#), University of California Black Alumni Series.

Is there a single point to this story? One that comes to my mind is that we sometimes get so involved in ourselves we fail to notice interesting people around us. There are many stories like this one to tell. Most of them will never be told.



Archie Williams was a virtual unknown in track when he set a new world record in the 400 meters in the NCAA championships. At Berlin he won the gold by inches over Britain's Godfrey Brown. Williams was a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and was a school teacher in Marin County, California, for years. BA





Archie Williams, the gold medal winner in the 400 meters, gets some direction from film maker Leni Riefenstahl for her film *Olympia*. BA