

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH | CELEBRATING HARRY JEROME

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**Henry (Harry) Winston Jerome (1940–1982) | Agent of Change | Remembered as a world-class sprinter and tireless advocate for amateur sport in Canada.**

Born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Harry Jerome was 12 years old when he moved with his family to Vancouver. Jerome's exceptional speed made him a standout in a variety of sports. At 18 years of age, he broke the Canadian record for the 220-yard sprint, and shortly after accepted a scholarship to study at the University of Oregon where he would earn his masters in science.

A true agent of change, Jerome set or matched seven world records over his career, beginning in 1960 when he matched the world record for the 100-metre sprint at the Canadian Olympic Trials in Saskatoon. Sadly, disappointment soon followed.

At the Olympic Games in Rome, Jerome pulled a muscle in the 100-metre semi-finals, and dropped out of the competition. An unsympathetic press unfairly dubbed him a "quitter." In speaking out against the accusations and demanding better support for Canada's athletes, Jerome inflamed even greater animosity.

Later, at the 1962 British Empire and Commonwealth Games, he suffered a severely torn thigh muscle and, again, was mistreated by certain members of the press.

Following surgery and in training at the University of Oregon under Bill Bowerman, a co-founder of Nike, Jerome worked on his comeback.

True to his motto, "Never give up," Jerome returned to compete at the Summer Olympics in 1964. A year later, he won bronze in the 100-metre final at the Summer Universiade, only two one-hundredths of a second behind silver, forcing the press to show renewed respect.

At the 1966 British Commonwealth Games, Jerome earned his first gold medal at a major international sports competition, winning the 100-yard event. That same year, he ran 100 yards in 9.1 seconds, which was described by prominent journalist Paul Rimstead as, "one of the greatest achievements in the history of Canadian sports." In 1967, Jerome earned his second gold at the Pan American Games.

Jerome represented Canada in the Olympics for the third time in 1968, a remarkable accomplishment

considering the odds against his longevity as a runner. He was seventh in a blanket finish in the 100-metre race where silver was only 0.16 seconds faster than seventh place.

Retiring from competition in 1969, Jerome continued teaching in Vancouver while advocating for improved training and facilities in amateur sport. He established cross-country clinics for the federal Fitness and Amateur Sports Directorate, leading five other top athletes in providing coaching and demonstrations at high schools across Canada.

Jerome also petitioned the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CTRC) for better representation of racialized Canadians in the media, and urged department stores to use non-white models.

Tragically, Jerome was only 42 years of age when he died of an aneurysm, but his perseverance in the face of adversity continues to inspire. The Vancouver Sun Harry Jerome International Track Classic is held each year in his honour, and the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA) recognizes members of the African-Canadian community through the Harry Jerome Awards. Inducted into the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame and Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, Jerome also received the Order of Canada. He is commemorated on Canada's Walk of Fame in Toronto and with a nine-foot bronze statue in Vancouver's Stanley Park.