

## August 1932: Ray Lewis becomes first Canadian black athlete to win Olympic medal

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'Rapid Ray' Lewis was a Hamilton track and field athlete who made history in August 1932 when he became the first Canadian-born black athlete to win an Olympic medal. He won bronze as part of the 4x400-metre relay team at the Games in Los Angeles. At the British Empire Games two years later, he won a silver medal in the mile relay (4x440 yards). In the late 1930s, he was forced to retire because of shin splints.

### Significance

"Lewis had this incredible attitude toward life. Nothing was going to hold him down. He faced racism and he stared people down on it."

*John Cooper*

*Author of two books about Ray Lewis*

Lewis was the grandson of runaway slaves. He graduated from Hamilton's Central Collegiate in the late 1920s, and won a scholarship to an American university but got homesick and returned to Hamilton where he became a railway porter — the only work he could find. But he still loved to run. He would often sprint alongside the CPR train tracks during stopovers. After the 1932 Olympics — when he arrived back in Hamilton with his medal — he received little recognition. There were no parades or celebrations. However, later in life he received many accolades including an Order of Canada in 2001. In 2005, a school in Hamilton was named after him.

### Ray Lewis

(1910 — 2003)

He was born and died in Hamilton.

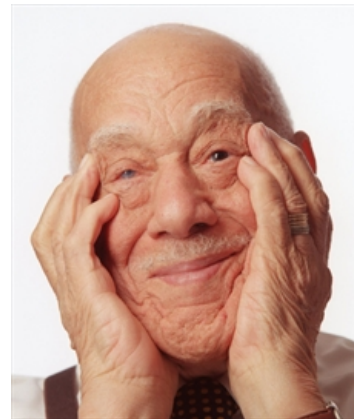
He raced through the streets of Hamilton as a boy to train.

He was the first Canadian-born black Olympic medallist but struggled against the racism of the era.

A sprinter, he won a bronze at the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles, and silver at the British Empire Games in London two years later.



Ray Lewis at the British Empire Games.



A portrait of Ray Lewis in May 2001 by Spectator photographer Scott Gardner on the beloved Hamilton athlete and businessman's 90th birthday.

