

# Shadow Running: Ray Lewis, Canadian Railway Porter and Olympic Athlete

by John Cooper with Ray Lewis

Ray Lewis has quite a story to tell. The great-grandson of escaped slaves, Lewis was born in Hamilton in 1910. He went on to win a bronze track-and-field medal at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1932, and a silver one at the Empire Games in 1934. For 22 years he was a railway porter for the Canadian Pacific Railway. Today, he lives in Hamilton, within sight of where he saw a Klu Klux Klan cross burn for two days in 1929.

Being black in Canada in the 1920s and '30s was not easy. Opportunities were limited: jobs were in service, and sports were limited to track-and-field. Lewis excelled at both without ever demeaning himself by playing the role that ignorant whites wished to assign him. For example, when a man once asked him if he liked watermelon, Lewis responded that yes, he always ate it fried.

*Shadow Running* is a collection of Lewis's anecdotes arranged in chronological order. Some are funny, like the one about an Ontario premier losing his false teeth on a train, and some are illustrative of attitudes at the time, as when a Canadian lacrosse player asks to rub Lewis's head for luck. Overall, they provide a glimpse into a racist world which, one hopes, is history.

Lewis's voice comes through clearly in *Shadow Running*, and the effect is that of sitting with Lewis and listening to him talk. At times, this creates problems. There is no dramatic pacing to the book, and minor personal events that mean little to the reader are equally weighted with his international running victories and incidents such as the onset of shin splints that prevented him from qualifying for the 1936 Berlin Olympics. *Shadow Running* is a brief, often interesting, personal look at a bygone world. With background, context, and pacing, it could have been more.

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