

MARJORIE JACKSON.

“The Lithgow Flash”

Marjorie Jackson was born in Coffs Harbour on the 13 September 1931. Her parents were Mary and William Jackson.

Marjorie went to Coffs Harbour Public School until her family moved to Lithgow and she completed her education at Lithgow High School.

Like most girls of her time she trained to become a Typist at the local Tech. When she turned 16 she became interested in running and she joined the Lithgow Athletics Club. She was good at running and was soon winning most of the Clubs races at 100 and 200 yards. This was noticed by the Club Coach, Jim Monaghan and he asked her to take some extra lessons.

She could not afford to buy good running shoes but her parents managed to obtain a second hand pair that was several sizes too big and she stuffed paper into the toes and they would have to do.

In 1948 Marjorie was winning every Club event and was noticed by State Athletic officials. She entered the State 100 yards Championships but was disqualified because she made a false start. It was then that Jim Monaghan, who had been a Professional Runner, decided that he would take her in hand and train her so that this mistake would never happen again.

At this time the team for the 1948 Olympic Games was being chosen and Marjorie had hopes of making the team but the Selectors were not impressed and Marjorie was very disappointed.

She decided that she must train harder. She would now train with Jim Monaghan every night after work at the local oval and try to make the 1952 Olympic Team.

It was not easy as she was training on grass and the Olympics were run on cinders. There were very few cinders tracks in Australia at this time.

The 1948 Olympics Women's 100 and 200 yards events were won by the Dutch runner Fanny Blankers-Koen who was the World Record holder and in 1949 she came to Australia to show the Australian Public what an Olympic Star looked like. She would run in the Australian Championships and compete against our local runners.

Australian women had never won an Olympic Gold Medal in the history of the games and the Australian Press wrote articles praising Fanny Blankers-Koen and saying that she would show our local girls how an Olympic Champion could win .

However, the winner of the 100 and 200 yards events was the shy young Lithgow girl who left the Olympic Champion far behind and the Australian Athletic Officials were stunned.

The Press were stunned.

The Olympic Champion was stunned.

The Lithgow Flash was born.

Fanny Blankers-Koen was very gracious in her speech before leaving Australia and said that;

The World has seen a new Athletics Star.

Fanny Blankers-Koen, Olympic Gold Medalist and holder of the World Record in her events, would retire from racing before the next Olympic Games.

In the Australian Championships in 1950, Marjorie would win her two events and she broke the World Record in the 100 yards.

At the 1950 Commonwealth Games Marjorie won the 100 and 200 yards and helped her team win the two relay events.

The shy, Country girl was now a National Hero.

The citizens of Lithgow rose to the occasion and raised the money to build a cinders track in their town for Marjorie to train on. They could not afford to install lighting at the track but Marjorie would run with Jim's car at the end of the 100 yards with its lights on.

In 1952 Marjorie had run in events in Australia and had broken the World records for the 100 and 200 yards. She was selected in the Australian Team for the Olympic Games.

At the Olympic Games at Helsinki in 1952 Marjorie Jackson won the 100 and 200 yard events in World Record times.

In the 100yards relay, Australia had a team of Marjorie Jackson, Shirley Strickland, Winsome Cripps and Verna Johnson and they had broken the World Record in the Heats and were expected to win the Gold Medal. They were well in front with Marjorie as the final runner but she dropped the baton and the team was disqualified.

Marjorie wept and all Australia mourned.

At these Games, Marjorie met and fell in love with the tall, handsome Cyclist, Peter Nelson, He proposed and the Australian Women's Weekly had a field day.

All Australia loved Marjorie and Peter.

At the Commonwealth Games in Vancouver in 1954 Marjorie won the 100 and 200 metre events; did not drop the baton and her team won the relays.

Soon after these Games Marjorie, who was now Mrs Nelson, would retire from Athletics and decided to become a Housewife in her husband's home town, Adelaide.

She would be involved in Sports Administration and would encourage many young girls to join Athletics Clubs to become sprinters and try for Olympic Honours.

It would see the era of what is known as *The Golden Girls* as Australia would dominate the World in women's running and see new Olympic Gold Medalists such as Betty Cuthbert, Shirley Strickland and many more make their appearance.

Marjorie was the manager of the Women's Olympic Teams in 1982, 1986 and 1990. In 1994 and 1998 she was Team Manager and Athletics Liaison Officer.

She was also an active member of the Organizing Committee of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

Marjorie was loved and respected by all the Women who came under her charge.

Marjorie and Peter had a very happy marriage and she was devastated when Peter died of leukemia in 1977. She launched *The Peter Nelson Leukemia Research Fund* and dedicated herself to raising funds to pay for research of this terrible disease.

It has raised many millions of dollars to this day.

Marjorie's dedication to Sport and her Fund has brought many Honours to *The Lithgow Flash*.

Great South Australian in 1986.

One of 200 Great Australians in 1988.

Life Member of the Olympic Council in 1995.

Legend of Australian Sport in 1995.

Olympic Legends Postage Stamp in 1998.

Australians of the Century in 1999.

Australian Sports Medal in 2000.

One of 127 Australian Women Pioneers in 2001.

Hon. Doctorate Charles Sturt University in 2001.

Marjorie Jackson-Nelson was appointed as the Governor of South Australia in 2001.

Marjorie Jackson Nelson was made a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order and was made a Dame by Queen Elizabeth in 2002.

The Peter Nelson Fund has a full time research Fellowship with two research Scientists in the Department of Microbiology at the University of Adelaide.

Marjorie Jackson-Nelson has come a long way from being a shy Country girl from Coffs Harbour and Lithgow who came to fame as the first Woman to win a Gold Medal at Athletics since 1896.

She is a well loved and respected woman by all Sportspeople in Australia, She will always be – OUR MARJORIE.

(John Imrie, 6th Sept; 2020)