

Having written about three great British football managers on Friday and told you three great stories from Aesop's Fables on Sunday, I thought I would tell you today about three great athletes, and then on Wednesday about three great writers, and then on Friday about three great scientists. Here are three great athletes:

### JESSE (pronounced 'Jess -ee') OWENS

Jesse Owens was born in 1913 and went on to become the greatest and most famous track and field athlete in history. His most famous accomplishment came in the 1936 BERLIN OLYMPICS. By 1936, Germany was led by Adolf Hitler, who believed and told anyone who would listen that the kind of blonde and tall people that you would find in Northern Europe were superior to any other kind of people, particularly black people and Jewish people. It shouldn't have needed Jesse Owens - who was black, and born in Alabama in the United States - to prove how sick and mad this kind of thinking was, but he certainly had a point to prove when he travelled to Germany in 1936 to compete in the Olympics. Hitler was using the Olympics to show off to the world that he was in charge of Germany, and that Germany was back as a major force in the world under his leadership. But then Jesse Owens showed everyone what an idiot Hitler was by winning four gold medals at the Olympics - first of all in the 100 metre sprint, and then in the long run, and then in the 200 metre sprint, and then in the United States team for the 4 x 100 metre sprint relay. Owens' achievement not only won the German crowd over - with 80,000 people cheering his victory in the 100 metres - but also made him world-famous. It was an achievement that would not be matched until 1984 when CARL LEWIS won gold medal in the same four events in the LOS ANGELES OLYMPICS. An interesting fact is that Jesse Owens won his gold medals wearing track shoes manufactured by the German shoemaker ADI DASSLER. Put the 'Adi' and the 'Das' in Dassler together, and what do you get - Adidas! So Jesse Owens won his gold medals wearing Adidas shoes. Here is a 15 minute film about Jesse Owens at the Berlin Olympics:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=linifMJ0xio>



### FANNY BLANKERS-KOEN (pronounced 'Ko - un')

Fanny Blankers-Koen was a Dutch athlete who was born five years after Jesse Owens, in 1918. Like Owens, she got to compete in the 1936 Olympics, but didn't win any medals, coming 6th in the high jump and 5th in the Dutch 4 x 100 metre sprint relay team. She might have hoped to do better at the Olympics in 1940, but there was to be no 1940 Olympics - WORLD WAR II had broken out, and having athletes meet up from all over the world to compete was unthinkable. Athletes like Blankers-Koen had to wait for the war to end. Finally it ended in 1945, and the next Olympics was scheduled to be in LONDON, in 1948. By then Blankers-Koen was 30 years old, and had married and had two children. Everyone assumed that her athletic career was over -



how could someone that old, who had had two children, still compete? But compete she did, and like Jesse Owens, she won four gold medals at the London Olympics, in the 100 metre sprint, 200 metre sprint, 80 metre hurdles, and in the Dutch 4 x 100 metre sprint relay team. She was the first woman ever to achieve this feat. The British press called her 'The Flying Housewife'. Much later on, in 1999, she was given the title 'Female Athlete of the Century' for her achievements, which included setting or equalling 12 world records. Here is a three minute film, in incredible colour (remember this was filmed in 1948, when black and white film was standard) showing Fanny Blakers-Koen's amazing achievement at the 1948 London Olympics:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Y\\_G0H-b3QE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Y_G0H-b3QE)

## DICK FOSBURY

Despite their achievements, neither Jesse Owens nor Fanny Blankers-Koen could say that they changed the events they competed in. They simply performed better than anyone else in those events. But our third great athlete, Dick Fosbury, did fundamentally change the way everyone would compete in his event - the high jump. Until Fosbury came along, people would compete in the high jump by jumping over the bar side on, trying to scissor their legs one after another over the bar. Fosbury, who was born in 1947, could never master that way of jumping, and experimented with other ways of competing in the high jump. (Unlike the fox in our Aesop's fable about the fox and the grapes, Fosbury didn't think, 'This is really difficult - I'm going to give up: the high jump's a really rubbish event anyway'.) The introduction of thick foam mattresses for high jumpers to land on when they jumped allowed Fosbury to come up with a way of doing the high jump which was completely new - it involved jumping backwards



over the bar, with the legs not having to be lifted one after another over the bar but instead being carried over the bar by the weight of the jumper's body which was falling into the mattress on the other side of the bar. Fosbury's new jumping technique was called the FOSBURY FLOP, and everyone got to know the Fosbury Flop when he used to compete in the high jump at the 1968 MEXICO OLYMPICS. Fosbury won gold medal, and everyone from then on switched to using the Fosbury Flop when doing the high jump. Here is a four minute video showing you how Fosbury's way of doing the high jump was different, and showing how he used that technique (pronounced 'tek - neek') to win gold medal at the 1968 Olympics:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZsH46Ek2ao>