

Olympic Athletes

Lawrence (Larry) O'Connor



Photo courtesy of the Northumberland County Archives

Having an Olympic athlete for a coach is probably a good plan, especially when that athlete lives in the same town as you! For young Larry O'Connor, that town was Cobourg and his coach was Olympic hurdler, Arthur Ravensdale, who had participated in the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles.

Larry was born to Laurence and May O'Connor in Toronto in 1916. Unhappily, May passed away when Larry was just 11 months old. When his father married Ella Brady of Lindsay, Larry gained two sisters, Constance and Frances.

When Larry was thirteen his father was appointed to the bench as County Court Judge and the family moved to Cobourg. The boy exhibited natural athletic ability and his interest in track and field, particularly the hurdles event, made working with Ravensdale a natural fit.

While still in high school, **Larry was chosen for further training at the Ontario Athletic Commission Camp** on Lake Couchiching where he distinguished himself by being the first boy to swim to an island one mile away. Judge O'Connor marked the accomplishment by donating a plaque to the camp.

Larry next attended the University of Toronto where he studied Political Science and Economics and joined the **Blues Intercollegiate Track and Field Championship team.**

Larry and his teammate Jimmy Worrall, Canada's Olympic flag bearer that year, travelled aboard the S.S. Duchess of Bedford for their 6-day journey to compete in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany. Interestingly enough, the park-like Olympic Village constructed by the German Military would later be used as an officers' training camp. At the games, Larry finished with his best time ever in the 110 metre hurdles: a remarkable 14.8 seconds. The result was good for 6th place but only **a fraction of a second behind the American Gold medalist!**

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That Olympic experience launched O'Connor on a successful career during which he set several Canadian records:

- 🍁 120 yard high hurdles, 1935 and 1937
- 🍁 220 yard low hurdles, 1937
- 🍁 120 yard low hurdles, 1938
- 🍁 110 metre high hurdles, 1939

He also set a world's indoor best in the 60 yard high hurdles at Maple Leaf Gardens in 1937.

Larry went on to compete in the **British Empire Games** held at Sydney, Australia in February 1938, where **he earned a Silver Medal in the 120 high hurdles, and a gold in the 4 x 110 yard relay.**

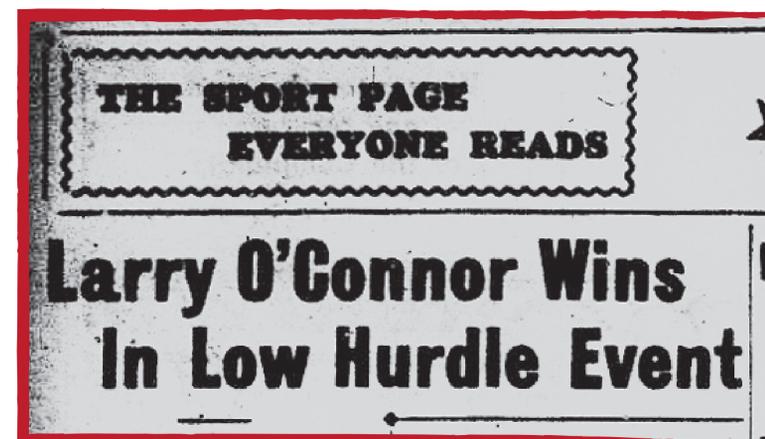
When he returned home from the British Empire games, Larry completed his B.A. degree and subsequently enrolled at the Osgoode Law School, graduating in 1941 and joining the law firm of James McNevin in Chatham, Ontario. The next year was special too, as he married Helen Conway of Huntsville in May and also joined the Army.

After being wounded at Caen, France, he was returned to Canada and rejoined the Law Firm now named McNevin, Gee, O'Connor.

Larry O'Connor received many honours during his athletic career including the Norton Crow Memorial Trophy and the John W. Davies Trophy. In 1967 he was **inducted into the Canadian Amateur Athletic Hall of Fame** and in 1991 the **University of Toronto Sports Hall of Fame.**

In 1988, **at the age of 71, he proudly ran with the Olympic Torch**, for a kilometre, on a road near Chatham as part of the cross-Canada relay before the Calgary Olympic Winter Games.

It was a crowning achievement to a stellar career in track and field.



O'Connor, who hurdles beautifully-a stylist if there ever was one-was pressed to the limit by Jimmy Worrall, a Toronto clubmate and former McGill student. They ran neck and neck for the 100 metres, and it was only O'Connor's marvelous turn of speed in the last ten metres that beat off Worrall's challenge.

Alexandrine Gibb
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