

MS MARJORIE JACKSON-NELSON

Citation for the conferral of a Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*)

On the fifth of February 1949, a huge crowd at the Sydney Sportsground settled into their seats to watch the world's greatest woman athlete, Fanny Blankers-Koen, in action against local sprinters. Racing over 100 yards in what was considered merely an exhibition run, the Flying Dutchwoman found herself beaten to the tape by a 17 year-old typist from Lithgow.

No one took the result seriously. People said the mighty Dutch athlete, winner of four gold medals at the 1948 London Olympic Games, had not yet settled down to local conditions. Some days later there was another race, this time over 100 metres. The Lithgow sprinter again went to the front and stayed there, finishing in 11.8 seconds, a new Australian record and one-tenth of a second faster than Blankers-Koen's winning Olympic time.

Marjorie Jackson was born at Coffs Harbour, NSW, on September 13, 1931 and moved to Lithgow with her family when she was still a child. At fifteen she won the 100 yards at the New South Wales Combined Girls' High Schools' carnival and broke an eighteen-year old record in the 75 yards. Just after turning sixteen, Marjorie was invited to compete in the State trials with the possibility of selection for the 1948 London Olympics. Everyone then forgot about the Lithgow girl until Fanny Blankers-Koen arrived in Australia after her London Olympic triumphs.

Marjorie went on to win two Olympic and seven Commonwealth Games gold medals during her athletics career. Between 1950 and 1954 she won every State and Australian title for the 100 yards, 100 metres, 220 yards and 200 metres. At the 1950 Commonwealth Games held in Auckland she won four gold medals. In the 1952 Olympic Games in Helsinki Marjorie won two gold medals, equalling the world record in the 100 metres and setting a new world-record in the 200 metres. In doing so Marjorie became the first Australian woman to win an Olympic gold medal for track and field and the first Australian (male or female) to win an Olympic gold medal on the running track since 1896. At the 1954 Commonwealth Games in Vancouver Marjorie won a further three gold medals.

Marjorie broke world sprint records on ten occasions. Her achievements were recognised in 1952 when she became Australia's "Sportsman of The Year". The prestigious Helms Foundation in the United States awarded her the title of "Outstanding Athlete 1952". In the 1952 Coronation Honours Marjorie, popularly known as "The Lithgow Flash", was awarded an M.B.E. for her service to athletics.

Marjorie's commitment to excellence in Australia has not been confined to athletics. In 1977 her husband, Peter Nelson (an Olympic cyclist), died of leukaemia. In that year Marjorie launched the Peter Nelson Leukaemia Research Fellowship and since then has dedicated herself to raising funds to sponsor research into combating this disease. This single-handed campaign has involved thousands of hours of work speaking to groups around the State and the nation, in order to raise funds. She has now raised in excess of three million dollars for the cause.

The funds Marjorie raises are used to sponsor a Leukaemia laboratory in Adelaide, and recently her campaign resulted in the appointment of a second researcher of Leukaemia at the Flinders Medical Centre. A full time research fellowship has also been established with the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Adelaide.

Marjorie's dedication to athletics has continued despite her massive commitment to the leukaemia cause. She is a past President of the South Australian Division of the Australian Olympic Federation. She was appointed Women's Section Manager of the Australian Commonwealth Games teams of 1982, 1986 and 1990. She was also appointed as General Team Manager for the 1994 Commonwealth Games held in Victoria, Canada. It was the first time a woman had been appointed to this position. Marjorie was appointed as a Board Member of the Sydney Organising Committee for the 2000 Olympic Games and carried the Olympic Flag into Stadium Australia at the Opening Ceremony.

Marjorie was honoured by the Governor-General and the Prime Minister as one of only twenty living members of the "200 Great Australians" recognised during Bi-Centenary celebrations.

Chancellor, I present to you Marjorie Jackson-Nelson, an outstanding Australian athlete, tireless worker for the Commonwealth and Olympic Games Movements and an extraordinary fundraiser for leukaemia research, for conferral of the award Doctor of the University *honoris causa*.

Dated this Nineteenth Day of April Two Thousand and One