

LEMUEL CLARENCE HOUSER
1924 & 1928 OLYMPIC GAMES
TRACK & FIELD



AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
INTRODUCTION

Southern California has a long tradition of excellence in sports and leadership in the Olympic Movement. The Amateur Athletic Foundation is itself the legacy of the 1984 Olympic Games. The Foundation is dedicated to expanding the understanding of sport in our communities. As a part of our effort, we have joined with the Southern California Olympians, an organization of over 1,000 women and men who have participated on Olympic teams, to develop an oral history of these distinguished athletes.

Many Olympians who competed in the Games prior to World War II agreed to share their Olympic experiences in their own words, in the pages that follow, you will learn about these athletes, and their experiences in the Games and in life as a result of being a part of the Olympic Family.

The Amateur Athletic Foundation, its Board of Directors, and staff welcome you to use this document to enhance your understanding of sport in our community.

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President
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AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY METHODOLOGY

Interview subjects include Southern California Olympians who competed prior to World War II. Interviews were conducted between March 1987, and August 1988, and consisted of one to five sessions each. The interviewer conducted the sessions in a conversational style and recorded them on audio cassette, addressing the following major areas:

Family History

Date/place of birth; occupation of father/mother; siblings; family residence;

Education

Primary and secondary schools attended; college and post-collegiate education;

Sport-Specific Biographical Data

Subject's introduction to sport—age, event and setting of first formal competition; coaches/trainers/others who influenced athletic development; chronology of sports achievements; Olympic competition; post-Olympic involvement in sports;

General Biographical Data

Employment history; marital history; children; communities of residence; retirement;

General Observations

Reactions and reflections on Olympic experience; modernization of sport; attitudes on and involvement with the Olympic Movement; advice to youth and aspiring athletes.

Interview transcripts were edited and may include additional material based on subsequent conversations and/or subject's own editing.

DR. LEMUEL CLARENCE "BUD" HOUSER

1924 OLYMPIC GAMES - PARIS

SHOT PUT

Gold Medalist

DISCUS

Gold Medalist

1928 OLYMPIC GAMES - AMSTERDAM

DISCUS

Gold Medalist

INTERVIEWED:

May, 1988

Long Beach, California

by George A. Hodak

DR. LEMUEL CLARENCE HOUSER

Interviewer: George A. Hodak

Hodak: Today I am in Long Beach, California, visiting with Dr. Lemuel Clarence "Bud" Houser. Dr. Houser competed in the 1924 Paris Olympics, where he won the gold medal in both the shot put and discus. This uncommon double victory has not been accomplished in any subsequent Olympic competition. In the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam, Dr. Houser repeated his victory in the discus, the only event he entered in 1928. In addition, Dr. Houser won six national AAU championships, four collegiate championships, and set seven different world records during his athletic competition. Furthermore, Dr. Houser managed to accomplish the majority of these records while also studying dentistry at USC. Dr. Houser, I'd like you to begin by talking of your family and childhood. First, could you tell me your date and place of birth?

Houser: Okay, George. I was born September 25, 1901, in Winagan, Missouri. I come from a family of 13 children. There were six boys and seven girls in my family, and I was the baby of the lot. My father was a cattle rancher and ran cattle in the panhandle of Oklahoma. He finally gave up on that and moved the family back to the farm in Missouri. He lost a lot of cattle one winter and didn't see any way to keep going at that. I remember him saying, "You've got to be a millionaire to do what I'm trying to do. I'm just not going to put you kids through this anymore." So, like I say, he moved us back to Missouri.

Then, when I was about two years old, my mother died. I was just old enough to know something bad had happened, that something was really wrong. And then when I was about seven, my father got sick and died soon afterwards. And I tell you, it's a terrible thing to

lose your parents that early . . . it's something you never really get over. I can remember some of the children at school would make fun of me because I didn't have any parents. And I'd get so upset and angry. But you know how kids can be—they don't really know what they're saying. I get kind of emotional when I think of all this But things weren't easy for us.

Hodak: They certainly weren't, So you were raised by your brothers and sisters?

Houser: Yes. After my father passed away, the family sort of broke up and went in different directions. Several of us moved out to Oxnard, California. My sisters went to work in a bank and then one of my sisters and brothers opened up a small cafe, the Sidney Cafe, on B Street in Oxnard.

Kodak: Were any of your brothers athletes?

Houser: Well, they were workers. They were all pretty big and strong guys. My father was about 6-5 and my brother Perry was probably six feet. They could have been athletes, but, like I say, they had to work. My father was a very strong, well-built man, too. I remember he had a beautiful, deep voice—a singer's voice, you might say. My brothers did do a lot of boxing. I remember working during the summertime with them out in the San Joaquin Valley on harvesting crews. We'd work long, hard ten-hour days and then at night we'd box.

Hodak: What sports did you first develop an interest in?

Houser: Well, I liked all the sports. I think the first medal I ever won was in the mile run at a YMCA meet in 1916. I played basketball and baseball, and then I really got serious about track. I was a very good catcher; my cousin was the pitcher and I was the catcher on the team. I knew a baseball scout, Fred Snodgrass, and he tried to sign me to a pro contract for the Cubs. He said, "Bud, I know you

can do it. You've got the talent to make it." I think I could have made it, but I was more interested in the track. I really went bonkers over that track. (laughter)

Hodak: I imagine Oxnard Union High School was a rather small school at the time. What kind of coaching or general facilities did you have?

Houser: Well, it was a tiny school—they've since built a new one, of course. The track coach, H.G. Berlin, was the mathematics teacher. He was a fine man. He thought I was a natural mathematician and encouraged me to go into engineering. But, bless his heart, he didn't know too much about track, especially the field events. Whatever you did was something you developed on your own. I remember seeing a discus laying around one day. I thought I'd give it a whirl, so I threw it on out there and it seemed a pretty good throw. However, I really didn't know much about the shot or discus at first, and no one else seemed to either.

Hodak: The records show that you competed in nearly every event in high school. I read that at a meet in Fillmore you placed first in five events: the shot, the discus, the 100-yard dash, the 120-yard hurdles, and the high jump. And I believe you came in second in the 440. You might have been tired in that race.

Houser: (Laughter) Oh, I was just showing off for my girlfriend. Dawn. She and her dad came up from Los Angeles to see that meet. They drove up in a big green Packard and everyone was looking around asking, "Who is that?" I do remember that meet. I ran pretty well in those days.

Hodak: And one of your teammates at Oxnard was Cliff Argue?

Houser: Yes, Cliff was a great sprinter and jumper. Cliff and I looked a lot alike, you could barely tell the two of us apart. There was one meet down at Occidental where we tied L.A. High—just the two of us scored all our points. Then in the state meet. Cliff didn't run quite

as well; I think we finished second. Cliff was a very good student and he went to Occidental College and then to law school at USC. And of course he was in the 1924 Olympics, too. I met Cliff's son, John, last fall at a Trojan alumni dinner. He had some good stories.

Hodak: Do you recall the national interscholastic meet in Chicago?

Houser: Oh, sure. The town of Oxnard got a collection together for me to get there. I threw the javelin there for the first time. I'm not sure, but I think I finished third. I know I did win the shot and discus. That was the biggest meet I'd been in up to that time.

Hodak: As you say, you developed your own approach to the shot and discus. What was the key to your success in these events?

Houser: Well, it was my quickness, I guess. I could get around the ring real good. And the biggest thing is the pivot, that's where you get your distance from. I certainly wasn't as big as most of the other weight men. You remember Pat McDonald? I beat Pat in an AAU meet down in Pasadena in 1921, while I was still in high school. Oh Pat got a little down about it, but he shook my hand and said, "Bud, you were just too good today." (laughter) I knew all those big weight guys, like Pat, Ralph Rose, Matt McCrath, Pat Ryan, Tom Lieb, [Glenn] "Tiny" Hartranft, Ralph Hills. We had some good battles. They were all real nice guys, I loved them all. We'd rib each other, but we were all friends. It's nice to know you've got friends in the line of competition.

Hodak: How did you decide on attending USC?

Houser: I had my mind made up to be a dentist. My dad was a "cowboy dentist"—he had to be. If one of the animals got sick, he'd take care of it. I told everyone I wanted to be a dentist. They'd all say, "Bud, are you crazy? You can't put those big hands in somebody's mouth." (laughter) But I'm the kind that set's his mind on something and sticks to it. I wasn't about to be discouraged, because I was determined to be a dentist. So I went to USC

because they had the best dental school around. A lot of people thought I was at 'SC lust because I could throw the shot and discus around pretty good—but I went there to study to be a dentist.

We had to study six days a week in dental school—and it was a lot of work. Coach Cromwell would wait for me after I'd get out of class—the other track guys would already be done with practice—and help me out with my workout, it was almost dark by the time I'd get out there a lot of times. Dean Ford was the head of the dental school and he was pretty strict. But he was a great teacher and a real gentleman. Everyone seemed to think I was getting money because I was on the track team, but that wasn't it. I worked hard in the summer and my brothers and sisters chipped in for me to go to school.

Hodak: What do you recall of your collegiate and AAU competition? Any particularly memorable meets?

Houser: Well, that ICAAAA was always a big meet. Then I'd go to AAU meets in the summer with the Los Angeles Athletic Club or the Hollywood Athletic Club. It's kind of funny, but I remember the meets where I lost. (laughter) Bill Neufeld beat me by a mile up at a meet at Cal. I was pretty sick and I couldn't get much of a throw off. I think I lost to Ralph Hills once back East. But other than that, I beat all those guys at practically every meet. And the thing is, I never could understand how those guys couldn't beat me. They were all a lot bigger than I was. I think what it came down to was that I never got nervous at a meet. I remember going up to Tiny Hartranft at the Paris Games and I said, "Tiny, how are you? Are you going to throw one way out there today?" And ol' Tiny's hands were shaking and he said, "Oh . . . I don't know Bud." A lot of those guys would tie up, you see—and I never did. I wasn't cocky, but I was confident.

Hodak: It seems you had good reason to be confident. I'd like to talk some more about the 1924 Olympics.

Houser: Well, there again, I was up against some great athletes, I was just a sophomore and I sure didn't expect to win two gold medals. Tom Lieb was a big, powerful guy, a football player at Notre Dame, I got to know Tom pretty well in Paris, and then later he came out to Los Angeles and coached at Loyola. Well, Tom tied up and got third. That was the first time the discus had been thrown over 150 feet in the Olympics. I won the discus on my second throw—it was just a little over 150 feet. And it was almost the same story in the shot put. Ol' Tiny was so jittery and nervous; same thing with Ralph Hills. Tiny would say, "Hell, Bud, I don't know why I can't beat you. I'm bigger than you." (laughter)

Hodak: What other things could you tell me about the Paris Games—the travel, accommodations, other competitions and so forth?

Houser: You know we went by ship. We'd set up a big mattress on the deck and practice throwing the shot and discus that way. It was funny because the boat would rock to each side, and we'd have to scramble after the shot before it went over the side. And, sure enough, we lost a few of them over the side. (laughter)

I remember Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford were with us. I got to know Douglas Fairbanks real well. He loved that track, I tell you. He'd never miss a meet at the Coliseum; he might pass up a football game, but not a track meet. He'd have Kenny Grumbles, Leighton Dye and I over to the studio on Saturday mornings for decathlon competitions. He was right in there with us. He said, "I've got a generation on you guys and I don't want to pile up and die right here, so I'll stop at six events; you guys can keep going." He'd always make sure we were given a nice lunch afterwards. Fairbanks was really a good athlete. I remember he could chin himself forever—he was very strong.

Then of course we got to see a lot of the competition, and that was fun. There were several of my teammates there, and we all rooted for each other. Everyone laid out the red carpet for us. I loved

every minute of it. At the end of the Games I was chosen to carry the flag for the Closing Ceremonies. I've always thought of that as one of the biggest honors I ever received.

Hodak: Then you returned to USC and graduated from dental school. How were you able to keep in training?

Houser: I would go out and practice at a field on Pico Boulevard next to the Forum Theater. I'd get out there after work and do my workouts. I decided just to concentrate on the discus because I had so little time; and there were some awfully good shot putters that came along, like Herm Brix, John Kuck, oh, a bunch of them.

I was married by this time and my wife came over to Amsterdam with me. One night there was a little fight between some of the workers on the ship and I got called in to break it up. I also did a little dental work on the ship, with Dawn as my assistant. I got to know General MacArthur real well on the ship. He really took a liking to me. We became very close friends. We stayed out in the harbor there and one night someone came on the ship asking where I was. I wondered if I had done something wrong. (laughter) Anyway, I was escorted along with Johnny Weissmuller to a big banquet. I didn't have any idea what it was all about. I asked General MacArthur what this was all about, and he said, "Why, this is for you two generals." So we got into the act and started calling each other general. (laughter) At that banquet, MacArthur told me he wanted me to carry the flag for the Opening Ceremonies. And I guess you've heard about all the commotion over that. I was standing next to him as the other teams marched in, and I saw them lower the flags as they approached the stand. A lot of them were dragging their flag real low . . . right down in the mud. So I turned to General MacArthur and asked him if that's what I should do. He looked over at me, paused, and said, "Bud, you do whatever you think is right." And I walked right up there and held our flag straight up—I wasn't about to drag it through the mud. I guess that caught everyone's attention, and there was a little in the

papers about it and all; but I did what I thought was the right thing to do.

On the day of my competition, I walked over to the official and asked when I was scheduled to throw. The official looked down the list and said, "Dr. Houser, you are the defending Olympic champion and, therefore, you have the honor of throwing last." Well, that didn't turn out to be such an honor. (laughter) What happened was that another of our discus men, Jim Corson, a big, lovable guy, walked up to me and John Anderson and told us he had forgotten his track uniform. We couldn't believe it! I said, "You had it on the ship. What are we going to do with you, throw you overboard on the way home?" So I loaned him my sweat pants and Anderson loaned him a track shirt, and Corson got to throw right away. So while I was standing around—they wouldn't let you leave the field—with just shorts and a shirt on, it started to rain. And that's a cold rain you get there in Amsterdam, believe me. Then a couple of the German boys came over and invited me to stay in this tent they had set up to keep dry in. When I went into the tent, one of the other guys went and stood outside. So I said, "No, this isn't right. I don't want to stay here if it means one of your men has to be outside. I can't do that." And I insisted he get back in the tent, and I went back out in the rain.

Finally my turn came up after the others had had their throws. By this time I was awfully cold and wet. My first throw slipped out of my hand and maybe went 90 feet or so. So I put some resin on my hands, and on my second throw the discus stuck to the resin and it hardly got out of my hand. So, now I'm left with one more throw to qualify for the finals. I stood back a minute, said a silent prayer, and then I heaved it out there. And was I happy! I could tell I had gotten off a good throw because I could see the other marks out there on the field, and mine was out beyond them. So I went on from there to win the discus again. And that Corson, God bless him, got third. He didn't know how lucky he was, getting to throw early.

Hodak: You told me that you saw Charlie Paddock after his last race.

Houser: That's right. He was past his prime by then. Charlie came over to me, just after I'd gotten that throw in, and he was all upset. He said, "Bud, they beat me by 20 yards." He was really down about his race; at the same time, he was happy for me. Oh' Charlie was really quite a guy. But I'll always remember seeing how upset he was after that race.

One other race I did see was Ray Barbuti's. I never could see how a guy that big could run so fast. I told him I thought he should be a hammer thrower. (laughter) He just laughed about it. Barbuti was dead set on winning that race—and, by golly, he did.

The Olympics brought the best out in me. I competed in and won all sorts of meets, but there's nothing like the Olympics. I think I could have had another fling at it in 1932, but my wife was pregnant and she didn't think I should be out there playing around with track while she was expecting a child. But, like I said, there's nothing else like the Olympics.

Hodak: Were you invited to compete in other meets following the '28 Games?

Houser: Oh, yeah. I went to France, Belgium and Germany. One day we were in Germany, and a man came up to my wife and I and said, "Didn't you throw the discus the other day in Amsterdam?" My wife said, "Throw it—he won it!" (laughter) The German people were all real nice. I'm of German descent and Houser is a very popular German name. So wherever we went, we were treated like kings.

Hodak: So you returned to Los Angeles and resumed your dental practice. You had a few film offers also, correct?

Houser: (Laughter) I guess you could say that. I had a few little parts in the movies, but I knew I wasn't an actor. Some of the movie people would try to tell me I was, and I'd say, "Oh, come on now, let's not

get too ridiculous." I had my office in Los Angeles on Pico until 1960, and then moved to Hollywood and treated a pretty big Hollywood clientele. I don't know, some of those movie people were pretty nutty types. I also did a little sportswriting for the newspapers. I knew a lot of the big writers, like Maxwell Stiles and Braven Dyer, about the time they started to get a lot of recognition. But I stuck with my dental practice for 40 years and I've been pretty successful.

Hodak: Would you talk now about your children?

Houser: Sure. I have two children, [Lemuel Lee] Bud Jr. and Bonnie. Buddy was a pretty good athlete; he won a lot of medals in high school. He studied engineering at USC, and now he owns his own business. And I can't tell you how proud I am of Bud. He just landed this huge contract with the Navy and that will keep him busy up and down the West Coast.

My daughter, Bonnie, went to USC and became a dental hygienist. I'm just as proud of her as I am of Bud. She's the apple of my eye, George. Bonnie married a great man, Mike Toll. Mike was one of the biggest building contractors on the West Coast. He has projects going all over the place. I can't say enough good things about Mike.

Hodak: What general interests or hobbies do you have?

Houser: I used to play a pretty good round of golf, and I've won a few tournaments here and there. My wife was a good golfer, and we won some tournaments together. Then I also was pretty serious about boating and water skiing. Bud and Bonnie are real good water skiers; they won all kinds of water skiing races. I raced out at Lake Arrowhead, Lake Mead, out in the Pacific, oh, several other places. I really loved racing the powerboats. I've done a lot of fishing too. I love to fly-fish—I could do that all day. I've fished a lot up at Convict Lake, north of the Owens Valley. I'd say

there's nothing I'd rather do than fly-fish.

Hodak: And you're a musician, I see.

Houser: Well, I don't read music but I've played different instruments, mainly the organ. I'm no great musician but I play anyway. Here, I'll play you a few chords.

Hodak: There's no need to read music if you can play that well. All of your interests and activities have kept you in exceptional shape.

Houser: That's what they tell me, so I guess I am in good shape. You know, I think I might just make it to 100. Wouldn't that be something?

Hodak: Yeah, you could ring in the next century. I wonder what general summary thoughts do you have on your athletic competition?

Houser: I know that the sports did me a lot of good. Over the years I've received a lot of honors due to my track records. And I've made a lot of great friends along the way. I've never had any regrets about the time I put into track. Of course, winning three gold medals, well, that's something I'm very proud of. At the time, I didn't think too much of it. I thought, "Oh heck, anyone can do that." But now that I look back on it . . . I have to say that I did pretty well.

Hodak: I have to agree with you. Dr. Houser. I'd say you did better than pretty well. It's been a real pleasure to visit with you. I thank you for sharing so much with me. You've been very kind.

Houser: You're welcome, George. I'm glad to help on the project, I've enjoyed it very much.