

EEN KONINGIN MET MANNENBENEN [A Queen on a men's legs] -Fanny Blankers-Koen - athlete of the Century, by Kees Kooman; Published by Uitgeverij L.J. Veen in Amsterdam/Antwerp; 2003, 240 pages in Dutch. ISBN 90-204-0820-8. Price: Euro 16.50. Reviewed by Anthony Th. Bijkerk.

The only known biography of Fanny Blankers-Koen was written immediately after the London Olympics in 1948, when the glory was still upon her. The authors of the book *FANNY*, Jan Blankers [her husband] and Aad van Leeuwen, were of course not very critical, but their writing on that very important period in London during the Games were then [and are still] a monumental description of the glorious events and the strain she had to endure during those days.

Kees Kooman, a sports journalist, who has been following the Olympics since 1980, and who was chief editor of *Runner's World* has now written a biography of a different nature, not only praising Fanny, but looking through the eyes of many people who were close to her during her life as an athlete, mother and friend. For many she was a heroine, to others including her own children, she could be impatient, self-centered, and very ambitious; even careless to others and impervious to critic and loss.

She was a woman with two faces: One glorious and the other could be mean.

Her own daughter Fanny junior expressed this feeling in the book as: *"I think my mother never loved herself; while the other way around she could not give love and friendship herself to other people! Laying an arm around your shoulder like my father used to do, was an impossibility for her."*

Of course, the book also takes us back to her early Olympic participation in Berlin 1936, to the difficult period during World War Two, to her marriage with Jan Blankers and to the birth of her two children Jan Blankers junior and Fanny Blankers junior.

But also to her Olympic performances, the twelve world records in seven individual events and in two relays; showing how versatile she was as an athlete. From the 100 yards, through the 100 metres, 200 metres, 80 metres hurdles; high and long jump and the decathlon; they all belonged to her honourlist! An impressive document of her performances over a period spanning sixteen years.

The last chapter is a tragic one. Insiders already knew that a few years ago, she had a cardiac infarct. In 2002 disaster struck her down; Alzheimers disease and a brain damage combined brought her into a nursing home, where she is now waiting for her life to end. We all hope for her that it may not take too long!

Note: Because I, with many other persons, assisted Kees Kooman in his research for this book, I advised him to have the book translated in English, because I feel that many people, all over the world, are interested in reading this biography. I will keep our readers informed about progress!