Coachman, Alice

(b. Nov. 9, 1923, Albany, Ga., U.S.), American athlete who was the first black woman to win an Olympic gold medal.

Coachman first attracted attention in 1939 by breaking Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) high school and college women's high-jump records while barefoot. She won the AAU outdoor high-jump championship for the next nine years, also winning three indoor high-jump championships. She excelled in the sprints and basketball as well; competing at Tuskegee Institute (1940-46) she won national track-and-field championships in the 50- and 100-metre dashes, the 4100-metre relay, and the running high jump, and, as a guard, she led the Tuskegee basketball team to three consecutive conference championships.

At Albany State College in Georgia, Coachman continued high jumping in a personal style that combined straight jumping and western roll techniques. At the 1948 Olympics in London, her teammate Audrey Patterson earned a bronze medal in the 200-metre sprint to become the first black woman to win a medal. In the high-jump finals Coachman leaped 5 feet 6 1/8 inches (1.68 m) on her first try. Her nearest rival, Britain's Dorothy Tyler, matched Coachman's jump, but only on her second try, making Coachman the only American woman to win a gold medal in that year's Games. Altogether she won 25 AAU indoor and outdoor titles before retiring in 1948.

CoACHMAN CLEARING THE HIGH JUMP AT A TRACK-AND-FIELD MEET

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