

THE ORIGINAL GOLDEN GIRL

Tributes pour in as nation recalls Olympic Betty Cuthbert's feats

WILL SWANTON



Betty Cuthbert hit the home straight with a decreasing lead, she leaned into the final turn like a kangaroo on the hop, she was running out of gas, her mouth was agape, her knees were high, her elbows were higher, her posture was less upright than the textbooks may have recommended — but the legs and heart were in full working order at Tokyo's Olympic Stadium. She held on to become and remain the only athlete to win an Olympic gold medal in the blue-ribbon 100m, 200m and 400m sprint events, and in her moment of unrivalled personal glory, she slowed down past the finishing post, closed her eyes and asked herself and the heavens the most humbling and deep and meaningful of questions: "Have I done enough?"

A giant of Australian sport died on Sunday after a four-decade battle with multiple sclerosis. Cuthbert's third individual Olympic gold medal in a third different event is a feat yet to be matched, and yet the mark of this humble and publicity-shy woman from an era of down-to-earth yet all-conquering Australian female athletes was her regard for the 4x100m relay gold on home turf at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics as the single most thrilling moment of her Hall of Fame career. It allowed her to provide her teammates with the gift of a famous triumph rather than having to beat them. Because the sequence of Shirley Strickland to Norma Croker to Fleur Mellor to Cuthbert while a crowd of 103,000 screamed itself hoarse at the Melbourne Cricket Ground became one of the quintessentially great Australian sporting moments. Because she could look at her three fellow sprinters, and her beaming countrymen and women in the stands, and know that she had done more than enough to pour a little light into their lives.

"Being so young I never expected anything very marvellous," Cuthbert once said of her three triumphs as an 18-year-old at the Melbourne Games. "It just happened. I think I was at the right age. I remember the relay and I think that really was the greatest as far as being able to share with somebody the feeling of achievement. The feeling of, 'I have done something with my life.'"

Have I done enough? Cuthbert asked it of herself and God as soon as she won the 400m gold medal at Tokyo in 1964. Have I done enough? She asked it of herself and God during her 40-year fight with multiple sclerosis, the bastard of a disease that rendered useless those beautiful and previously unstoppable running legs. She was only ever a slip of a thing, three apples high and not much heavier at 169cm and 57kg. She was born, bred and schooled in Sydney's northwest. She attended Ermington Public School and Macarthur Girls High School. She finished her days at Mandurah, about an hoursouth of Perth, where she had moved because it was just about as far away as she could get from the fame that always made her uncomfortable. Carrying the sort of aura reserved for Don Bradman and a rare selection of Australia's true sporting legends, she bowed to pressure to return to the spot-





Sporting highlights

1956 MELBOURNE OLYMPICS
GOLD 100m: set world record of 11.4 seconds in her heat
GOLD 200m: world record
GOLD 4x100m: world record

The first Australian ever to win three gold medals at a single Olympics. The track and field preceded the swimming, at which Murray Rose performed the same feat

1964 TOKYO OLYMPICS
GOLD 400m: world record of 52.01 seconds

BETTY CUTHBERT

BORN
Merrylands, Sydney, NSW,
April 20 1938

DIED
Mandurah, WA,
August 6, 2017, aged 79

Honours
IAAF Hall of Fame (2012)
Athletics Australia Hall of Fame (2000)
Sport Australia Hall of Fame (1985)

World records

Event	Time (seconds)	City	Date
60 METRES	7.2	SYDNEY	FEB 27, 1960
100 YARDS	10.4	SYDNEY	MAR 1, 1958
220 YARDS	23.6	PERTH	JAN 18, 1958
220 YARDS	23.5	SYDNEY	MAR 8, 1958
220 YARDS	23.2	HOBART	MAR 7, 1960
200 METRES	23.2	SYDNEY	SEP 16, 1956
440 YARDS	55.6	SYDNEY	JAN 17, 1959
440 YARDS	54.3	SYDNEY	MAR 21, 1959
440 YARDS	53.5	MELBOURNE	MAR 11, 1963
440 YARDS	53.3	BRISBANE	MAR 23, 1963
400 METRES	52.01	TOYKO	OCT 17, 1964

light as a torchbearer inside the Olympic Stadium on the night Cathy Freeman lit the flame at the opening of the Sydney Games. With her wheelchair being pushed by her friend and triple Olympian Raelene Boyle, she wept at the reception from the 110,000-strong crowd. Perhaps she could hear what that ovation was really telling her. That she had done more than enough.

The MCG became the site of a towering 2.75m bronze statue that has her in full flight at those 1956 Games, the mouth wide open to suck in the big ones, the right knee raised waist-high, the arms pumping. When she attended the opening of the statue in 2003 in her wheelchair, back outside the stadium in which she had burst onto the

world stage, she became so embarrassed by the honour that she barely knew what to say. She wept then, too. Those magnificent statues around the perimeter of the MCG tell every one of the honoured athletes what they have done in their careers. They have made themselves unforgettable, they have touched a few hearts, they have inspired a few people, they have done bloody well, they can be content that they have done enough.

She was a devoted Christian. A dedicated fundraiser for multiple sclerosis. Australia's first inductee into the IAAF Hall of Fame. She believed God told her while she was doing the wedding at the family nursery to run again at the 1964 Games. She would tell Olympic historian Harry Gordon of her vic-

tory: "It wasn't really me running that day. It was as if my body had been taken over. He picked them (her feet) up and I put them down."

She never raced again. The silver medalist at Tokyo was Ann Packer from Great Britain. She was quoted in *The Pursuit Of Sporting Excellence* as saying: "When I spoke to Betty years afterwards, I realised that I wouldn't know if I could ever have won that race. She is a mystical girl with strong religious beliefs. I call her mystical because she has an inner understanding of herself, which would be very difficult for anyone else to touch."

Boyle yesterday told *The Australian*: "She was such a beautiful woman. The thing that really stood out with Bet was just how

'She was such a beautiful woman. She was an example of what a great athlete really is. To be really great, you've got to be more than a sportsperson with talent. You've got to have more to you than that. That was certainly Bet. She was so unassuming'

RAELENE BOYLE
TRIPLE OLYMPIAN



Clockwise from left: Betty Cuthbert having a rose named after her; with NSW relay teammates Gloria Cooke, Nancy Fogarty and Marlene Mathews in 1956; entering the stadium at the 2000 Sydney Olympics with Raelene Boyle; and anchoring the 4x100 victory in Melbourne



normal she was. She was very shy, she was humble to a tee and yet she was an extraordinary runner and the fastest woman in the world. She really was unbelievably shy and just a beautiful person. She was an example of what a great athlete really is. To be really great, you've got to be more than a sportsperson with talent. You've got to have more to you than that.

"That was certainly Bet. She was so unassuming and she loved the sport so much. And even with her MS, she treated that with great dignity and just accepted everything it threw at her. Her faith was a great part of her life. She was a great believer in God so she will be going to a place in which she won't be uncomfortable."

Australian athletes came from

far and wide yesterday to pay tribute. Olympic marathon runner Robert de Castella said "a very sad day" nonetheless provided the chance to celebrate the peerless career of "a wonderful contributor to Australian life". He applauded her "incredible resilience and fight" in the face of deteriorating health and called her a "true icon" of global sport.

Olympic swimming champion Dawn Fraser had been a frequent visitor to Cuthbert at her Aegis Greenfields nursing home in recent years. She recalled the greeting Cuthbert always gave her: "Dawnie, you've come to see me again!" Fraser described the fiercely independent Cuthbert as something unique. Fun. A "marvellous, marvellous lady" who used to

jump the fence at Ryde-Parramatta golf course to run sprints in the rough. She was not allowed on the fairway because her spikes would scuff the turf.

Olympian Jane Flemming pointed out the women's 400m for the current World Championships was held in London overnight, and that Cuthbert's times from a half-century ago would have put her on the cusp of the semi-finals despite her preparations being strictly amateur. Freeman thanked Cuthbert for "the inspirational memories". Her victory at the Sydney Games was in the 400m. "It's a very sad day, there's no doubt about it," Freeman said. "Betty is an inspiration and her story will continue to inspire Australian athletes for generations to come. I'm so happy I got to meet such a tremendous and gracious role model and Olympic champion."

The Australian Olympic Committee wrote that Cuthbert's uncertainty about making the Melbourne Games team prompted her to buy tickets to attend as a spectator if she did not gain selection. "History would show that instead of watching the world's best from the stands, she became the world's best on the track."

Freeman won the 400m on home soil. Cuthbert won the 100m, 200m and 4x100m on home soil. Excruciating pressure. Freeman collapsed on the track at Sydney as if the occasion threatened to suffocate her. The sigh of relief blew like a southerly buster. Cuthbert did it three times at a home Games. And won all three. The Australians had no right to win the relay.

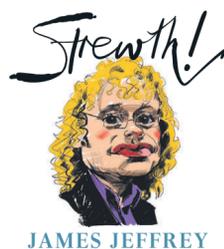
"Giving three other women, who had no chance of winning a gold medal on their own, the opportunity to actually hold and keep a gold medal and say they were on a team with Betty Cuthbert that won the 4x100m at the Melbourne Olympics — goodness me, any of us sprinters would have loved to be able to say that," Boyle said. "It's magical stuff in our sporting history. It will go down in the archives of sport in Australia as one of the great victories. It's up there with Dawn Fraser and Don Bradman. She was truly a great person of our country. We don't get them like that any more."

"Don't you love it when someone like Betty can just let their performances do that talking? That was exactly what she did. And then she wasn't exactly an underdog at Tokyo but converting up to the 400m from the 100m and 200m, eight years later — I can tell you that's not an easy thing to do. The long sprint hurts."

"It was the first 400m for women at an Olympics. She won. She brought the gold home. She was a beautiful young Australian woman who was and always will be the original golden girl. Her body collapsed in the end but we will always have the memory of her running across the track with such grace."

Cuthbert had a lot to gloat about as a fourfold Olympic champion. She never did it enough. The only times she publicly opened her mouth seemed to be when she was racing. As Gordon noted, it appeared she was roaring while she ran. She had a lot to complain about after her diagnosis of multiple sclerosis in 1969. She never did it enough. The woman who became her carer, Rhonda Gillam, relayed to *The Weekend Australian Magazine* two years ago a story of a wheelchair-bound Cuthbert, with no physical function apart from the movement of her left hand, being overheard in prayer in her nursing home. Have I done enough? The question had been replaced by what she viewed as a statement of fact. A couple of sentences that could prompt a reaction comparable to the MCG in 1956. Not a dry eye in the house.

"Thank you, Lord, for everything," Cuthbert said. "Thank you for spoiling me so much."



JAMES JEFFREY

No marital bliss

There was a certain peculiar poetry in the fact that the greatest rumbling over same-sex marriage emanating from the Coalition's broad church yesterday was from Nationals MP Andrew Broad. Broad informed his local paper *The Sunraysia Daily* he'd pull the pin and sit on the crossbenches if Liberal moderates succeeded in getting up a conscience vote. It was one of the ziestiest threats to quit since Graham Perrett promised just such a course of action in the event of Kevin Rudd's second coming. (Perrett took a more pragmatic approach when the Ruddsurrection took place.) Meanwhile yesterday, it was nice to see that on the day before the premiere of *The House*

—Annabel Crabb's new ABC series taking viewers on a behind-the-scenes tour of Parliament House — the powers that be in that building were reminding the press gallery only so much transparency was desirable. Following a request for reporters to set up in the spot near the Liberals' partyroom meeting — the same spot used by media during the now traditional bouts of prime minister-ousting — the Serjeant-at-Arms' office said no. Elsewhere, Labor frontbencher Tim Hammond revealed he can peer into the future — at least as far as the following day — when he tweeted, "For goodness sake, the Government should just get on and put a vote on marriage equality to the Parliament." This was attributed to "Bill Shorten,

federal Labor leader, August 8, 2017." Today's news, yesterday.

Towards the hungry sea

It was in June that we were treated to Malcolm Turnbull and Eddie McGuire comparing weight loss tips on the wireless. Turnbull: "Tell us what you've done, Eddie." McGuire: "You mentioned this a while back when you decided to get yourself fit. I remember asking and you said, you mentioned this Chinese doctor in Sydney who helped you get started ... his whole thesis is, it's not about losing weight necessarily, it's about getting you back to your natural shape again. So I did it, I knocked off 15 in about 3½ weeks ..."

Success breeds requests. As *The Daily Telegraph* has reported: "KIIS FM shock jock Kyle Sandilands has revealed he has tipped the scales at 135kg before asking media personality Eddie McGuire for help. McGuire made headlines this month after revealing he had shed a whopping 20kg ... following an extreme diet." Unfortunately, it's a bit tricky recommending the aforementioned doctor. As Strewth sadly mentioned last time around, he got pinged for unsatisfactory professional conduct early this year. So we can either point Kyle in the direction of Turnbull's original weight-loss tips to Strewth in 2011 ("There are billions spent every year to avoid the melancholy truth that the

only way to lose weight is to eat less. So the non-secret is: eat a lot less, in this case appropriately over Lent, until you get to the weight you want, then eat moderately to stay there. Continue to exercise at your normal rate"). Or we could suggest an encounter with those flesh-eating sea lice that made such a splash yesterday. It's drastic, but it could catch on.

Persian pollië-bashing

From AFP, a reminder that politics achieves different levels of madness elsewhere: "Iran's newspapers were dominated on Monday by accusations lawmakers had embarrassed themselves by clamouring to take selfies with EU foreign policy

chief Federica Mogherini during her visit to parliament." The article proceeds to deploy the most redundant "but" we've seen in quite some time. To wit: "But the ultraconservative *Kayhan* newspaper did not see the funny side. 'Those who are supposed to defend the rights of the nation against the enemy queue up to snap photos in a humiliating way with the violators,' it said."

All that Daz

Meanwhile on 3AW, a gathering of Darrens. Darren James: "I've never met one — Darren, that is — that's older than me, and I've checked your birthday and still no luck." Transport and Infrastructure Minister Darren Chester: "It was

a little sweet spot in history about 45-50 years ago when kids were named Darren, right." James: "Yeah, Darren." Chester: "I am cracking 50 very soon, and I don't meet many Darrens older than me, either." We popped on the Behind the Name website seeking further enlightenment: "The meaning of this name is not known for certain. It could be from a rare Irish surname or it could be an altered form of Darrell. It was first brought to public attention in the late 1950s by the American actor Darren McGavin (1922-2006). It was further popularised in the 1960s by the character Darrin Stephens from the television show *Bewitched*."

strewth@theaustralian.com.au