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Coach Ed Temple and the Tigerbelles

Yildiz B. Binkley, Reavis Mitchell, & Tara Mitchell Mielnik

Known internationally as a Hall of Fame track coach with a career that spanned over four decades, Coach Ed Temple was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where he excelled as an athlete, competing in high school varsity sports in football, basketball, and track. Following his high school graduation, Temple enrolled at Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College (now Tennessee State University), where his former Pennsylvania neighbor, Tom Harris, had become track coach. Temple ran track and studied Health and Physical Education at Tennessee A&I, and also met an A&I coed, Charlie B. Law, who became his wife. At about the same time, Coach Harris accepted a position at another school, and Temple graduated from A&I; President Walter S. Davis then appointed Temple as the women's coach to replace Harris.

In those early coaching years, Coach Temple coached track, worked in the University post office, continued his education, and started a family with his new bride Charlie B. Temple recalled in an interview that “for a hundred and fifty dollars a month, I coached the women's track team, ran the University post office, and went to graduate school.” One of his first runners was Nashvillian Jean Patton, who took first place in the 100 meters at the 1951 Pan American Games. Temple worked with rising track star Mae Faggs, who competed in the 1948 Olympics, and also worked with high school girls who were interested in running track, including Barbara Jones, as the A&I junior team. Faggs and Jones were part of the world-record setting 1952 Olympic gold-medal relay team, along with Catherine Hardy and Janet Moreau. Jones remains the youngest woman to win an Olympic gold medal in track and field.

Beginning in the 1950s, Earl Clanton, III, the college's public relations person, named the women's track team the “Tigerbelles,” an appellation which has remained with the team. Coach Temple and his wife Charlie B. became surrogate parents to the young track stars, ensuring that they continued to achieve both academically as well as athletically. The Temples helped the young women overcome the adversity they

faced by being both women and African-American athletes. They faced both stereotypes against women athletes and Jim Crow laws as they travelled to athletic competitions across the country. Coach Temple's Tigerbelles won the 1955 national AAUP track championship, the first time that Tennessee A&I had won an integrated national championship in any sport. Temple later recalled that as the team travelled back to Tennessee, they stopped to eat and were told that the restaurant "did not serve colored people." When the bus driver told the restaurant manager that these "young ladies had just won the national championship," they were permitted to eat.

Coach Temple taught his athletes credos that are applicable to all student athletes:

Accept hard work in practice with no exception.

Make the champion's choice. Improve or stand still.

Make weaknesses work for you by working to correct them.

THINK you can win; HOPE to win; TRY to win.

Never underestimate your ability. Who knows how far you can go?

Seek perfection. Few attain it, but all who seek it gain.

Under Coach Temple, the Tigerbelles achieved great Olympic success throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond. In addition to the gold medalists at the 1952 Olympics, six members of the Tigerbelles returned to the Olympics in 1956. There the entire US 4x100 relay team was composed of Tigerbelles Faggs, Wilma Rudolph, Margaret Matthews, and Isabelle Daniels. In a race that featured all three medal teams breaking the existing world record, the US team brought home the bronze medal. Teenage junior member Willye B. White earned a silver medal in long jump, the first time an American had ever received a medal in that event. White became the first American track and field athlete to participate in five Olympic games. Coach Temple was called upon to coach the US Olympic teams in 1960 and 1964, which included several of his Tigerbelles. Wilma Rudolph became the first American female athlete to win three gold medals in a single Olympics in 1960. In 1964, the 4x100 team took the silver medal. Edith McGuire added gold in the 200 meters and another silver,

finishing second to fellow Tigerbelle Wyomia Tyus in the 100 meters. Tyus became the first athlete, male or female, to win back-to-back Olympic gold medals, with her performances in the 100 meters in 1964 and 1968. Also in 1968, Tigerbelle Madeline Manning became the first American Woman to win gold in the 800 meters and, at that time, was the youngest to ever win. Overall, Coach Temple's Tigerbelles have received over twenty Olympic medals, including current TSU track coach Chandra Cheeseborough, who won silver in the 400 meters and gold in both the 4x100 and 4x400 relays at the 1984 Olympics.

Coach Ed Temple is one of America's all-time greatest coaches in track and field. In addition to his Olympic successes, his Tigerbelles have won thirty-four national team titles and thirty medals in the Pan American Games. In those days of both Jim Crow and the Cold War, he coached the 1958 US Women's track team for the first-ever US-Soviet track meet and, later, the 1975 team for the first-ever China-US meet. Coach Temple's honors are too numerous to mention but include an honorary doctorate from his alma mater; the Nashville Sports Council's trophy for best local amateur athlete bears his name; and a Nashville street has been named in his honor. He is a member of numerous halls of fame, including the Tennessee Sports Hall of fame (1972); the Tennessee State University Sports Hall of Fame (1983); the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame (1987); the USA Track and Field Hall of Fame (1989); the Ohio Valley Conference Hall of Fame (1995); and the US Track and Field and Cross Country Coaches Association Hall of Fame (1996).

He retired in 1993 after forty-three years of coaching at Tennessee State University. The father of two grown children, he now works to provide scholarships for low-income children to attend New Hope Academy in Franklin, Tennessee, through the Ed Temple Fund. He is also a member of the Metropolitan Nashville Sports Authority. Coach Temple opened doors for young African-American women athletes that had previously been closed, and as he led these women, he created a wealth of opportunity for his first athletes and the many hundreds that would follow in their fleet footsteps.



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