

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE2234

Robinson, Edith

(1906 - 2000)

Born 24 September, 1906, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Died 7 October, 2000, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Occupation Olympian, Track and Field Athlete

Summary

Edith 'Edie' Robinson made Australian Olympic history in Amsterdam in 1928 when she became Australia's first female Olympic track and field athlete. She took up running at the age of 14 (she ran for the St George Athletic Club in Sydney, New South Wales.) Selected to compete in the 100 meters, she did not make the final, but did run a personal best time in the semifinal, which she finished in third place. Robinson also ran in the 800 meters, but did not complete the race. Given that she had never trained for the event before, let alone competed in it, the fact that she made the 600 meter mark before withdrawing was an extraordinary effort.

Edith was a very popular member of the small team that travelled to Amsterdam, and because she had a background in dressmaking, she was popular and much in demand by male athletes who needed badges sewn to their shorts!

She officially opened the Olympic athletes village in Homebush, Sydney on September 2, 2000.

Details

Considering what the athletes had to endure in the lead up to the games, Edith Robinson's effort in 1928, by anyone's standards, was extraordinary. The Australian team travelled by ship for six weeks to get to Amsterdam and during this time, most of the team put on weight. "We couldn't train, we couldn't even walk on the first class deck,' Robinson reported in later years. 'We weren't even allowed to use the tiny canvas pool on board.' The situation did not improve much once they arrived. The accommodation was more than twenty miles distant from where they could train, and training 'sessions' could last anything up to twelve hours once travel time was included. The Australians were also quite unhappy with the greasy, inappropriate meals they were served. According to Robinson, their best meals were often those prepared by women team members after they had arrived back late from training.

Robinson was also involved in an event that was so controversial, it was banned from the Olympics for the next thirty-two years. Despite never having trained for the event, let alone competed in it, Edith ran in the 800 meters, after her male team-mates encouraged her to enter. She pulled out, exhausted, at the 600 meter mark. Other women were similarly challenged, but this is hardly surprising; the 800 meters is one of the most strenuous events in track and field. Nevertheless, the sight of these physically drained women was too much for some Olympic officials. So adverse was the publicity in the press about the matter that no race longer than 200 meters was run by women at the Olympics until 1960. The fact that photographs that accompanied some of the more sensational press coverage of the event were actually of women completing heats of the 100 meters only serves to highlight the extent to which public understandings of feminine behaviour impacted upon female athletes ability to perform at their best.

Events

1928 - 1928

Edith Robinson participated in the Amsterdam Olympic Games

Published resources

Book

A Proper Spectacle: Women Olympians 1900-1936, Daniels, Stephanie and Tedder, Anita, 2000

Edited Book

Australian Sport Through Time: The History of Sport in Australia, Cashman, Richard (Senior Consultant); Olds, Margaret and Etherington, Kate (Managing Editors), 1997

Resource Section

Women's 800 Metres Running: Too Female to Run, Too Good to Stop, Bellert, Marianne, 2000,
http://pandora.nla.gov.au/nph-arch/2000/S2000-Mar-2/http://brisbane-stories.powerup.com.au/women_sport/women_frames.htm

Site Exhibition

She's Game: Women Making Australian Sporting History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2007,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/sg/sport-home.html>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

[Eileen Wearne - photographs and papers mainly concerning the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games](#)

Author Details

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