

REMEMBERING THE HEROIC OLYMPIANS

Grainy black and white images of 'Golden Girl' Mary Rand in Tokyo in 1964 contrast starkly with today's high-definition shots of millionaire athletes. Norman Wright recalls his own Olympic heroes

WHEN THE Rio Olympics opens on August 5, it will be a glossy affair with plenty of millionaire, high-profile, professional athletes circling the track behind their national flags.

There will be heaps of controversy, from the Zika virus to drug allegations, and most of us will be watching it all on pin-sharp high-definition TV.

It was very different when the British Olympic heroes of our generation were competing. They were much less well known outside their sports, mostly amateur – that is, other than the Eastern Bloc and US college system. Controversy was usually about the suspect gender of East German female shot putters and we watched in mainly black and white, up to

a day after it happened live. When I think of the Summer Olympics, I immediately hear the faintly oriental BBC theme tune *Tokyo Melody* in my head and can see those grainy 1964 pictures with the unmistakable excited tones of David Coleman telling us that our 'Golden Girl' Mary Rand had indeed won gold.

On our 14in Bakelite telly you could just about make out a blurry figure in white heading down the runway and leaping into darkness to set a new world record of 22ft 21/4in. You can still see it on You Tube although the picture is much better today on my HD computer screen.

It brings back many warm memories of a more innocent age of sport when Coleman's commentary, rising ever



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Golden years: Anita Lonsbrough and, below, David Hemery (with 402 on his shirt)

higher in speed, pitch and enthusiasm, made you proud to be British.

Before Mary Rand, perhaps Britain's first 'Golden Girl' was Anita Lonsbrough. Aged 19 she won gold in the 200m breaststroke in an epic contest at the Rome Olympics in 1960 against the West German favourite



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Wiltrud Urselmann and set a world and Olympic record of 2min 49.5sec. The current record is nearly 30 seconds faster.

Anita, based in Huddersfield, was Britain's only women's swimming gold medallist for 48 years until Rebecca Adlington's heroics in the 2008 Beijing games. She became the first female BBC Sports Personality of the year, married leading British cyclist Hugh Porter and became swimming correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*.

Rome was the first Olympics to get live TV coverage via the Eurovision Satellite. By Tokyo 1964, TV coverage had improved and so had Mary Rand. She had come a disappointing ninth in the Rome long jump and just missed a medal in the 80m hurdles.

In Japan, though, Mary also won silver in the pentathlon and bronze in the 4x100m relay. Like Lonsbrough, she was voted BBC Sports Personality and made an MBE. Her room-mate in Tokyo, Ann Packer, magnificently won the 800m in a world record time of 2:01.1 (the current record is 1:53.28). Ann also became an MBE as did her husband Robbie Brightwell, a silver medallist in Tokyo.

The other star from Tokyo was Welshman Lynn 'the Leap' Davies, who won the men's long jump just short of 26ft 6in. It was another case of a white blur on the screen to David Coleman's rising excitement. Davies took silver in the 1968 Mexico Olympics by which time the pictures were much clearer. Davies was made MBE and later CBE for his services to athletics administration. He is the epitome of a sports hero – talented and dedicated but generous in his support to fellow athletes.

A club athletics long jumper I knew from school was encouraged by the Olympic gold medallist when they were both competing at a regular meeting. When asked about training regimes, Davies responded by posting him a copy of the one he was following at the time. I can't see that happening nowadays.

There were more heroes of that golden age of sport when the Olympics moved to Mexico in 1968. The brightest performance on the track was 400 metres hurdles winner David Hemery. He needed a world record time of 48.12sec to take gold

WHO ARE YOUR HEROES?

Who are your Olympic heroes and why? We would love to know so we can print a selection on our letters page. You can send yours to: Olympic Heroes, Choice, First Floor, 2 King Street, Peterborough PE1 1LT or e-mail: editorial@choicemag.co.uk.



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and the effort sent David Coleman hysterical. Briton John Sherwood won bronze and became almost as famous as Hemery when Coleman, in a frenzy of excitement, said: "Hemery takes the gold, Hennige of West Germany the silver and who cares who's third? It doesn't matter." For me, Sherwood was a hero for the way he took that in such good part.

Outside the Olympic stadium there were middleweight boxing golds for bricklayer and all-round rough diamond Chris Finnegan and for Rodney Pattison in the Flying Dutchman sailing class, a feat he repeated four years later at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

The Munich games, of course, will always be blighted by the terrorist massacre of Israeli athletes but, a couple of days before that terrible tragedy, a true British heroine was unveiled when Belfast's Mary Peters won the pentathlon. Again, she had to pull out a world record performance to seal her medal. Coleman

once again reached a crescendo in the final event, the 200m. He showed his other side with a dignified, restrained and brilliant commentary on live pictures as the hostage crisis developed.

The Moscow Games in 1980 produced a raft of gold medallists. It was the games of Seb Coe and Steve Ovett in the 1500m and 800m respectively; Alan Wells in the 100m; Daley Thompson in the decathlon; and swimmer Duncan Goodhew in the 100m breaststroke.

Coe and Thompson went on to Los Angeles in 1984 to win gold again. Also in the Californian sunshine, Tessa Sanderson won the javelin and Steve Redgrave the first of his five Olympic gold medals.

By the time the show moved on to Seoul in 1988 and Barcelona in 1992, a new generation's heroes were winning gold. David Coleman was still providing the soundtrack but for me, at least, nothing quite measured up to those black and white images from across the world.



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Above, Lyn Davies, right, Mary Rand, and, above, Ann Packer