

GEORGE BAIRD †

5 March 1907 - 4 September 2004

**The 1928
4x400m U.S.
relay team.**

George BAIRD, who ran on a pair of world record-setting relay teams, died September 4 in Rhinebeck, New York, at age 97. At the time of his death, BAIRD was America's oldest living track and field gold medallist.

George Hetzel BAIRD was born March 5, 1907, in Grand Island, Nebraska. After graduation from high school in Mason City, Iowa, the five-foot-nine (1.75m), 145-pound (66kg) BAIRD enrolled at the University of Iowa. As a junior, he placed fourth in the 440 yard dash at the 1928 NCAA Championships at Chicago.

A month later, BAIRD entered the U.S. Olympic Trials in Philadelphia. Although he failed to reach the 400 meter final, BAIRD qualified for the relay team by winning a runoff against John LEWIS and Rut WALTERS.

The 4x400 meter relay was the final event in Amsterdam. BAIRD ran the opening leg, and his 48.2 split gave the American squad a three-meter lead. Bud SPENCER, Fred ALDERMAN and Olympic 400 champion Ray BARBUTI completed the relay in three minutes, 14.2 seconds, breaking the four-year-old world record of 3:16.0

During a USA-British Empire dual meet in London six days later, BAIRD was part of another historic relay squad. He teamed with MORGAN TAYLOR, BARBUTI and SPENCER for a time of 3:13.4 for the 4x440 yard event, besting the global standard of 3:16 and two-fifths from 1921.



BAIRD graduated from Iowa in 1929. For a time he worked with his brother Bill, a world-famous puppeteer. Eventually he became an assistant professor of education at New York University, where he earned a master's degree.

Prior to the 2000 Games in Sydney, BAIRD and his 1928 Olympic teammate, Jimmy QUINN, appeared on NBC's Olympic Show. BAIRD and QUINN, who ran the second leg of the gold medal-winning 4x100 squad in 1928, were the two oldest surviving U.S. track and field medallists. Quinn, who died last July, was six months older than BAIRD.

Pete Cava