

The Acrobat on the Athletic Field: Eleanor Egg, New Jersey's Early Track and Field Champion and Record Holder

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Eleanor Egg of Paterson, New Jersey held National and Metropolitan District indoor and outdoor titles in the 50-yard dash, 100-yard dash, broad jump, high jump, and shotput during her career. Every year, from 1923 to 1932, she competed in the Women's National AAU Track and Field Championships. Miss Egg's early training as an acrobat in her parent's vaudeville act gave her a solid foundation upon which her athletic skills could develop. Among the various stunts she performed as a preschooler was the chair-balancing act in which she sat in a chair attached to a ten-foot pole that her father balanced on his chin.

Her talent as a track and field star emerged when she competed in the Paterson City Schools Track and Field Championships in 1922. Shortly thereafter, she began to win handily, defeating superb athletes from the United States and Canada. Twice she was co-holder of the American record for the 50-yard dash indoors. In late 1924 she tied Marion McCarthy's mark of 62/5 seconds. Then, in February, 1926, she equalled Canadian sprinter Rosa Grosse's time of 61/ seconds for that distance. At that same meet she also set a new American record for the high jump when she cleared the crossbar at 4 feet 10³/₈ inches. In addition, she held Metropolitan District records for the shotput in 1927 and 1929, and in the former year, she captured the Metropolitan District and National AAU titles in the broad jump, setting records at both meets. Her leap of 17 feet 1³/₄ inches set an American record. Eleanor Egg's most significant triumph, however, came at Jersey City in 1931 when she defeated the highly-favored Stella Walsh for the National AAU title in the 100-yard dash.

Miss Egg not only performed magnificently in individual competition, but she was also an effective and superb lead-off runner for a number of relay teams. The Paterson Girls' Recreation Association relay team, dubbed the "Flying Four," set an American outdoor record in 1925. That crew, led by Eleanor Egg, covered the 440-yard distance in 52.0 seconds. She was a member of a hand-picked American relay team that in 1926 set a world's record (52.9 seconds) running against a Canadian team. A year later, her own Paterson relay team broke that record by more than one second. In 1930 at the Jersey City Tercentenary, an ironic twist of fate had Miss Egg running for the Canadian team against the Americans. Canada's top runner, Rosa Grosse O'Neill, took ill, leaving the Canadians shorthanded: Eleanor Egg was selected to fill in. Running the first leg of the race, she provided the Canadian team with a lead that the Americans could not quite overcome. As a result

of her performance, she was named the meet's "most outstanding athlete." This was no small feat as she was selected over such notable athletes as Eddie Tolan, 1929 and 1930 National AAU 100-yard dash champion; Ray Conger, 1927 NCAA champion miler and 1930 AAU mile champion; and Barney Berliner, 1930 AAU pentathlon victor.

Torn ankle ligaments in 1927 hampered Miss Egg's performance in track and field competition during the 1928 and 1929 seasons, and may well have cost her a berth on the 1928 Olympic team. In spite of her injury she entered the Olympic trials, but did not make the team. Her competitors, led by Californian Alta Cartwright, believed that she deserved a spot on the team. Each of them donated \$100 in order to cover her expenses to Amsterdam, the site of the 1928 Olympic Games. Eleanor Egg, however, declined the invitation because she could not compete at full strength and would not be able to make a solid contribution to the team. Missing the opportunity to compete in the Olympics, no doubt, was one of Miss Egg's greatest disappointments.

Despite the fact that she did not compete in the Olympic Games, Eleanor Egg had a successful and remarkable career. When she retired in 1932, she had collected 227 medals, 22 silver cups, six statuettes, and a number of other prizes. To the City of Paterson, she became its heroine, the local girl who made good. The city honored her with parades, testimonial dinners, banquets, and special ceremonies. Following her 1931 victory over Stella Walsh, local citizens raised enough funds to send her by airplane to Chicago for a one-week vacation. As a lasting tribute to Eleanor Egg, the city commissioned noted sculptor Gaetano Federici to design and mold a bronze plaque of Miss Egg sprinting to victory in the 100-yard dash. In 1931 the plaque was placed in Paterson's new municipal sports facility, Hinchliffe Stadium, where it remains today as a monument to New Jersey's early track and field champion and record holder.