

Fanny “Bobbie” Rosenfeld: Canada’s Woman Athlete of the Half-Century

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Each year since 1978, Canada’s woman athlete of the year has received the Bobbie Rosenfeld Trophy. For many recipients, this award likely signifies a culminating moment in their athletic careers. The trophy also represents and is named after a genuine pioneer in the women’s sport movement in Canada in this century.

As Canada’s woman athlete of the half-century, Fanny “Bobbie” Rosenfeld contributed enormously to women’s sport, first as an athlete, then coach and finally as a sport journalist. Rosenfeld was born in czarist Russia in 1905, moved to Canada when she was an infant and lived in Barrie, Ontario. By the time she was in her teens she excelled in softball, track and field, basketball, ice hockey and tennis. When she moved to Toronto in 1922, she worked for a chocolate factory that later began to sponsor her many athletic endeavours. In 1925, for example, her employer sponsored the Patterson Athletic Club at the Ontario Ladies Track and Field Championships. The points tide was won by the “Pats” who had only one entrant in the meet: Bobbie Rosenfeld. However, the most significant athletic achievements for Rosenfeld, and for women in general in the 1920s, occurred in the 1928 Summer Olympic Games in Amsterdam, Rosenfeld won a gold medal as a member of Canada’s 4 × 100-metre relay team and a silver in the controversial 100-metre race. Rosenfeld also ran in the infamous 800-metre race where she clearly let a fellow team member finish ahead of her.

Unfortunately, shortly after Amsterdam, Rosenfeld was stricken by severe arthritis, was bed-ridden for eight months and she spent a year on crutches. She made a remarkable but short-lived recovery for a few years and permanently retired from athletic competition in 1933. During these critical years, Rosenfeld also coached and led the Canadian women’s track and field team to the British Empire Games in London. Despite her debilitating condition, she continued to be a central figure in Canadian sport, through the newspaper.

In 1937, Rosenfeld began writing a regular sports column in Toronto’s *Globe and Mail*. She covered most of the major sports of the day in a witty tone that sometimes included a harsh indictment of sport. More importantly, she specifically championed women’s involvement in sport and was likely one of the few prominent figures in Canadian sporting circles to do so. Her career as a columnist lasted over twenty years and she retired from the *Globe* in 1966. She passed away three years later lonely and in poor health.

To date, as far as this author knows, there is no comprehensive, scholarly biography of Rosenfeld. There are a few biographical sketches of her career in some texts and some scattered vignettes in archival material. This research will fill a void that is long overdue by chronicling the distinguished career of an outstanding Canadian women sports figure. It attempts to locate descendants of Rosenfeld’s family, athletes who were her contemporaries, and her working associates from the *Globe*. It also investigates archival material from the many associations Rosenfeld was affiliated with, and her sports column over a twenty-year period. Finally, it traces Rosenfeld’s association with the Jewish community in Toronto.