



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Delegate Magazine 1984

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Carol's major at Houston is radio and television broadcasting. She envisions herself in a television broadcast booth when her long-jumping days are over.

"Too often," Carol says, "athletes overlook the importance of getting a college education. I started competing on the national track circuit at a young age, and was fortunate enough to get advice from athletes as much as ten years older than I. They told me that what I do in the classroom is more important than records I set on the track. I tell young kids the same thing. The life of an athlete is temporary, so you have to be able to compete in the job market when the cheering stops."

Jeannette Bolden

[[image - Jeannette Bolden]]

"The degree means as much to me as a gold medal. Where I grew up, not many people had the opportunity to go to college, so it's really special to me.

When twelve-year-old Jeannette Bolden entered Sunair School for Asthmatics, her mind wasn't on sports, school, or her friends back home. Her main goal was surviving. Up to that point, Jeannette has spent most of her young life inside her Compton, California, home, venturing out for doctor's appointments or for school when she felt up to it. Her severe asthma problems prevented simple schoolgirl activities like playing jump rope.

Some ten years later, the same Jeannette Bolden ran the 60-yard dash in 6.0 seconds, setting a new world indoor record and closing the door on those who said athletics isn't for asthmatics.

"When I got to Sunair," Jeannette says with her usual warm smile, "I couldn't run one block without gasping for breath. I had always felt different from other kids, but at this school, all the kids were like me. The people at Sunair didn't try to cure our asthma, but they did give us the courage to live a normal life, as long as we took our medicine. I spent nine months at Sunair, and before I left I was swimming two laps in the pool each morning. Back home, I had a new outlook on life. I joined the track team at a local park and my love affair with the sport began."

Even in those early days, Jeannette was something special on the track. Thoroughly enjoying herself, she won nearly every race she entered. As a student at Compton's Centennial High, she became California's premier prep sprinter, winning the state 100-yard dash, she made one-year stops at Cal State University-Fullerton and Cal State University-Northridge before settling at UCLA. The Pacific Ocean breeze circling through the Bruin campus made breathing easier and her sprint times better. A two-time All-America at UCLA, Jeannette has a best of 11.16 in the 100 meters.

"Jeannette is a rare athlete," says UCLA women's assistant track coach Bob Kersee. "Her experiences in life have given her a rare form of courage. She is the captain of the UCLA team, and she leads by example. She works very hard despite having to take medicine three

times a day for her asthma. She is dedicated and believes she can win any race she enters. I guess after overcoming all the obstacles she has, running against the East Germans or the Russians is as easy as a breath of fresh air."

Jeannette was a member of the 1980 U.S. Olympic 400-meter relay team and, like most team members, was disappointed at not being able to compete in the games. But 1984 will be a special year for the young lady who already has overcome so many of life's obstacles. Not only will she have an excellent shot at a gold medal in the 100 meters, but she also will receive her B.A. in sociology.

"The degree means as much to me as a gold medal," Jeanette says. "Where I grew up, not many people had the opportunity to go to college so it's really special to me. I tell young women that it's hard to make it after track without a degree. It hasn't been easy, but as black people we've got to set challenging goals and we can't let anyone or anything keep us from those goals. We also have to expand our horizons outside our communities. The world has some interesting things to offer and we should know about them."

Reprint from Ken Bentley--Black Women in Sports--Courtesy of
Carnation Milk.

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