

CHAMPIONS

of American Sport



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Organized by The National Portrait Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution and sponsored by
Philip Morris Incorporated and Miller Brewing Company

America has paid tribute to her sports heroes in the stadium, the media, and even on the backs of bubble gum cards. The National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution offers a deeper dimension of tribute: an exhibition devoted to the great sports personalities our country has produced—from the early days when boxing was illegal, track an entertainment for county fairs, and baseball a brawling newborn, to our own Golden Age of athletic achievement. This is the first major sports exhibition ever mounted by the nation. It spotlights the men and women who—just like the politicians, the generals, the artists—have shaped our sense of ourselves and, in a special way, have lent color to our lives and reaffirmed our faith in what the individual can do.

We need our myths, our legends. What other field has produced so many? Joe DiMaggio at home plate, Willie Shoemaker in the saddle, John L. Sullivan in the ring. Jesse Owens and Wilma Rudolph on the track. Jim Thorpe and Babe Didrikson expressing their physical genius in countless feats of endurance and skill. In a nation as diverse as ours, who has not heard of coach Knute Rockne; or Babe Ruth, "The Sultan of Swat"; or Johnny "Tarzan" Weissmuller, who swam before he swung; or Ben Hogan; or Sonja Henie? And who, fifty years from now, will not have heard of Muhammad Ali or Billie Jean King? These are figures whose lives have left a special resonance in our memory, charismatic men and women who fascinate and inspire.

We also aim to breathe life back into several legends in eclipse: Isaac Murphy, the greatest jockey of the nineteenth century, until blacks ceased to dominate the field; Edward Payson Weston, a walker of epic spirit who met every challenge, including a punishing stride across the nation at age seventy; Mike "King" Kelly, the first baseball hero to win adulation and, in the process, a popular song, "Slide Kelly Slide"; and Jackson Haines, the nineteenth-century dancer-turned-ice skater who was the first great figure skater shaping the sport during his long stay abroad. With these stand figures outside the competitive arena who were nevertheless great sportsmen: the legendary boxing promoter Tex Rickard, the horse trainer James "Sunny Jim" Fitzsimmons, the umpire Bill Klem (with his satisfying sour face), and the brilliant baseball commissioner and curmudgeon Kenesaw Mountain Landis.

We understand all too well how many great sports figures the nation has produced and regret how few of them we have the space to include in our sampling. Where, for example, are Stan Musial, the legendary St. Louis slugger;

or Maureen Connolly, tennis champion; or Mendy Rudolph, prince of basketball referees; or Sam Snead, of the glorious golf swing; or Tom Harmon, football great of Michigan? Where are they and hundreds of others who gave their times a reason to cheer? Our answer can only be—and we ourselves feel the pang of the omissions—that we have not tried to define an ultimate list of one hundred American sports heroes and heroines (can one ever be made?), but to suggest an *overview* of many eras, sports styles, and roles on and off the field. We cannot include all of America's champions, so we have tried to make our few suggest the greatness of all.

The making of sports heroes is an American tradition we seek to reflect, not explain. Certain sports—baseball and football above all—have produced more nationally recognized figures than others, and so their contingents here are large. Other sports have come in for broad-based national attention only through the force of character of a particular individual, such as polo's Tommy Hitchcock; and we have tried to reflect that as well. We find, too, that certain eras have produced more than their fair share of champions—preeminently the Twenties and our own second Golden Age of Sport. Whether this is because greater numbers of superb players have bunched in one generation or another, or only because the nation was more willing to watch and reward them at those times, is a riddle worthy of the chicken and the egg. We cannot answer it, but we have allowed those eras sway in our final selection. And, finally, we have been influenced, too, by the disproportionate attention lavished on certain positions within a sport—and the personalities attracted to these positions. It is, above all, the sluggers and the heavyweights who fill the arenas and inspire the sports-writers. Americans are stirred by offense more than by defense, by aggressive power more than by patient strategy, by leaders more than by supportive players, by all-or-nothing winners more than by good losers. These are the athletes who crowd our selection.

Brought together here are some of the most dramatic and exhilarating individuals our society has produced. Their magic is hard to define but unmistakable. This, then, is not a history of dates, of all-inclusive events, of encyclopedic completeness; rather, it is a celebration of certain lives and their power to move us. It is, above all, a tribute to the heroic tradition of sports as a domain of the American imagination.

Marc Pachter



Casey Stengel

"A first-rate baseball mind; a man who loved baseball"

Player on such big league teams as Dodgers & Giants; 1926 ended his playing career, went on to manage major and minor teams; 1949 became Yankees' Manager and that year they won the world series; For 12 successive years, under his leadership, Yankees won ten pennants—a record five at one stretch—and seven world championships.

Casey Stengel, Rhoda Sherbell, cast after 1965 original, Polychromed bronze, Collection The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, © Rhoda Sherbell

Peggy Fleming

"Bambi of the Blades"

1964 before the age of 16 became the youngest U.S. Senior Ladies Figure Skating Champion in history; 1966-1968 held World Championship Title; 1964-1968 held U.S. National Championship Title; 1968 Grenoble Olympics received Gold Medal for woman's figure skating.

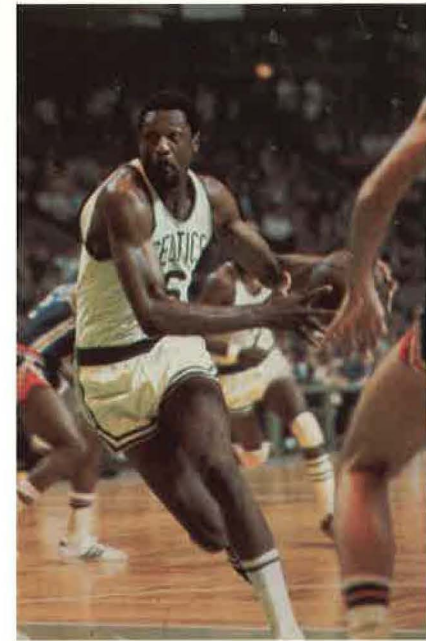
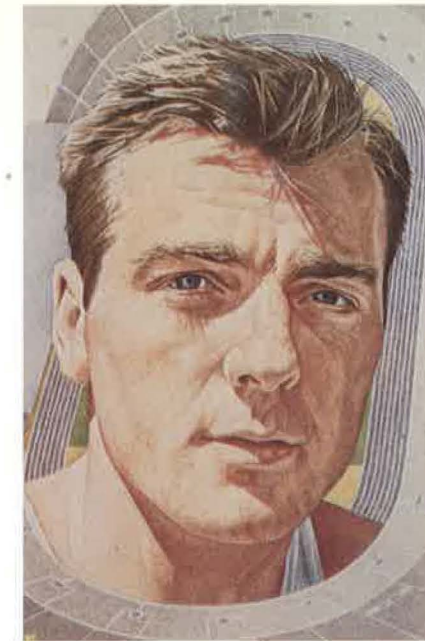
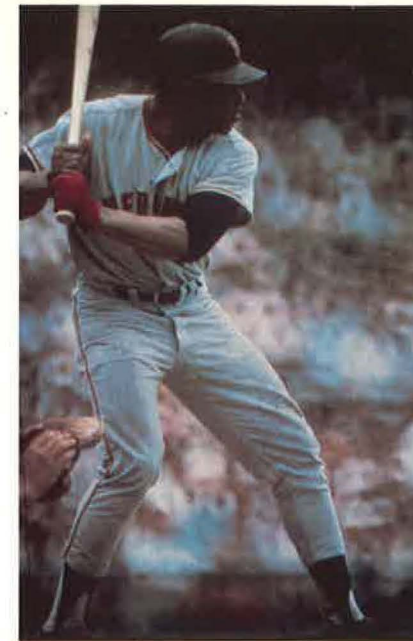
Peggy Fleming, John G. Zimmerman, 1968, photograph, Collection Sports Illustrated © TIME, Inc. 1968

Joe Louis

"The Brown Bomber"

Fight of June 22, 1938 defeated German Max Schmeling, became first black heavyweight to win support of the entire boxing public; Youngest boxer to win heavyweight championship;

Joe Louis, Betsy Graves Reyneau, 1946, oil on canvas, Collection National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

**Johnny Unitas**

"The man with the Golden Arm"

Between 1956-1960 quarterback for the Baltimore Colts, won 47 consecutive games; Twice played in Super Bowl; Elected to the pro-football Hall of Fame first year of eligibility; Played 18 seasons in which time he attempted 5,186 passes and completed 2,830, gained 40,239 yards, passed 290 touchdowns—a record greater than any other quarterback in the National Football League.

Johnny Unitas, Merv Corning, 1975, watercolor, Collection David A. Boss, National Football League Properties, Inc.

Sandy Koufax

"He was able to push and stretch himself into postures the human body was never meant to take."

1961 logged 18 wins to 13 losses, struck out 269 batters; 1961-66 four years led league in strikeouts, three years in victories; 1966 led in victories, innings played, strikeouts, shutouts, complete games; Pitched 4 no-hitters in 4 successive seasons; In 6 years had 129 wins, 42 losses; 1971 elected to Baseball Hall of Fame, youngest veteran ever.

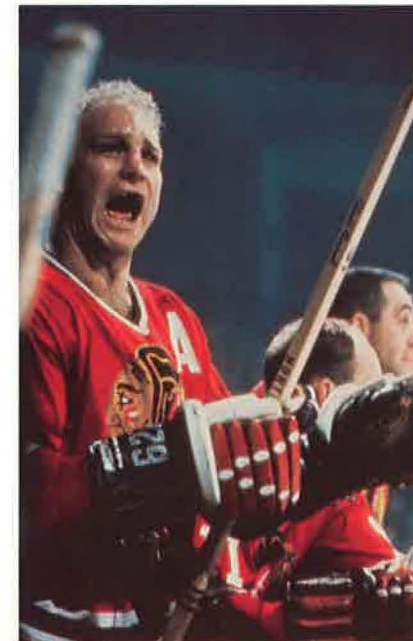
Sandy Koufax Pitching, Neil Leifer, 1965, photograph, Collection Sports Illustrated © TIME, Inc. 1965

Jack Nicklaus

"The only golfer in history to win all four major tournaments three times."

Qualified for National Amateur Championship by age 15 and won at 19; 1962 at age 22 beat top player Arnold Palmer for US Open Title; In last 18 years has won 5 Masters Tournaments, 3 British Opens, 4 PGA Championships; June 1980 took his 4th U.S. Open.

The Deadly Stroke: Jack Nicklaus, Donald Moss, 1975, acrylic and oil on canvas, Collection of the artist, © TIME, Inc. 1975 (for Sports Illustrated)

**Jim Ryun**

"The youngest athlete to break the 4 minute mile"

1964 at 17 timed 3:59 in his first major mile race; 1964 Olympics placed third in 1,500 meters; 1965 beat world record holder, New Zealander Peter Snell, with 3:55.3 mile; 1966 clocked 3:51.3 mile; 1967 broke his own record with 3:51.1 mile.

Jim Ryun Breaking the Mile Record by 2.3 Seconds, Rich Clarkson, 1966, photograph, Collection Sports Illustrated © TIME, Inc. 1966

Arthur Ashe

"Most significant Player of the Open Era"

1960-61 won U.S. Indoor Jr. Championship; First black to capture a national men's tennis title; Mid-1960's had 20 match winning streak; 1968 U.S. Championship at Forest Hills beat out all comers in First American Open tournament between amateurs and professionals; 1975 Master of Wimbledon, beat Jimmy Connors 6-1, 6-1, 5-7, 6-4.

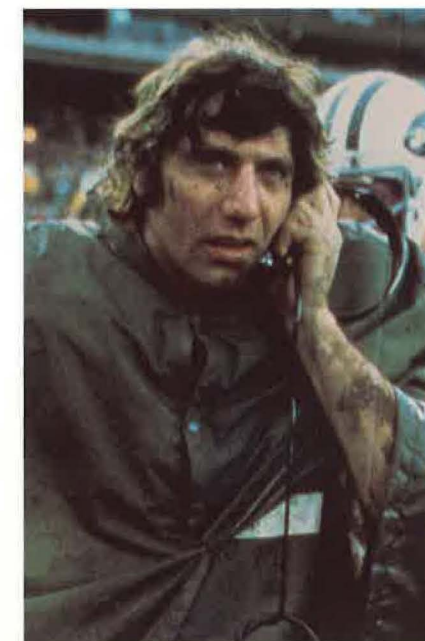
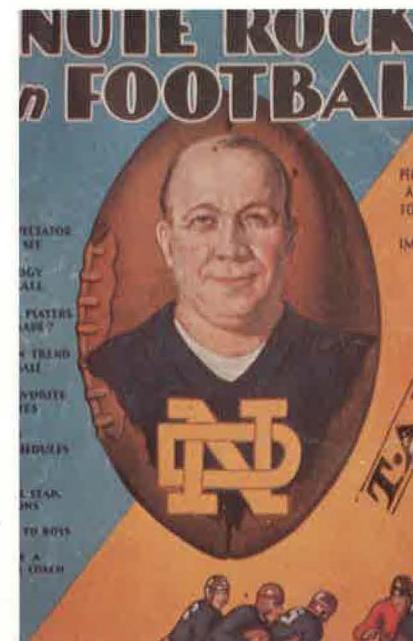
Arthur Ashe, Jeanne Moutoussomy-Ashe, date unknown, photograph, Collection of the photographer

Willie Shoemaker

"By the racing standard of horses brought home to victory and purses collected, there's never been a jockey like Shoemaker"

1949 at age 18 rode 219 winners, second highest number that year; Tied for first place next year with 388 winners; By October 1953 had 392 wins; By 1974 had over 7,000 victories; 1972 surpassed top jockey, Eddie Arcaro with 554 stake victories.

Willie Shoemaker on Spectacular Bid, Richard Stone Reeves, 1980, oil on canvas, Collection Roy Gene Evans and William M. Stuart



Bill Russell

"Dominating force in professional basketball of 1960's"

1956 signed on with Boston Celtics;
Named to East All-Star team 11 times;
Won Most Valuable Player Award 5 times;
1963 became captain of team;
1966 first black to be head coach of an NBA team.

Bill Russell in a Match with the New York Knicks, James Drake, 1969, photograph, Collection Sports Illustrated © TIME, Inc. 1969

Bob Mathias

"Only two-time decathlon winner in history"

1948 London Olympics decathlon winner with 7,139 points, youngest ever to win;
Exceeded Jim Thorpe's 1912 record in all events except 100 meter dash & 1,500 meter run;
1952 won the Olympic decathlon again;
1948-1952 National Decathlon Championship winner three times.

Bob Mathias, Ernest Hamlin Baker, 1952, tempera, Collection Mr. and Mrs. Robert Mathias

Willie Mays

"Most dynamic, most dramatic, most fantastic, most exciting performer in action today"

—Leo Durocher

Long term career from 20 year old Giants rookie to dean of baseball players at age 42;
Chosen most valuable player in 1954 and 1965;
Outstanding record of 660 home runs.

Willie Mays, Fred Kaplan, 1964, photograph, Collection of the photographer

SPONSOR'S STATEMENT

"Buy me some peanuts and crackerjack, I don't care if I never get back..." ...from the exhibition of outstanding American sports heroes and heroines of the past century and more, mounted by The National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution.

These heroes and heroines, with the legions of athletic idols they typify, occupy a special place in our lives and in our national psyche. To watch what they did so superbly well could be called a form of social escape—but not entirely, and this show does not seek mere outbursts of instant nostalgia for heroes and events vividly recalled, or vaguely remembered, or perhaps never even known.

Sports is lively, always contemporary and active. It is play and shared fun and then more: group drama, mass entertainment, community spectacle, politics. It is a feature of the times, inextricably woven into the tapestry of American life. From our days as colonies inching toward union, the spirit of American sports has been an integral component of the American spirit. For many, rooting for the home team and the local athlete was our first conscious exercise in group belonging and patriotism.

Philip Morris Incorporated, through corporate support of art, has helped to mine our country's rich lode of history for insights into our national traits. We have sponsored major exhibitions that travelled through the United States—and often, around the world—pertaining to American Indians, Western Art, Black Art, women, native folk art, and children. Now in The National Portrait Gallery we support a show of art about sports and more than 100 of its great figures.

We are honored to be associated with this exhibition. Long before any of us joined Philip Morris, we, like almost everyone else, were committed fans of the greats of sports.

Perhaps what we Americans like best about our sports idols is that we created them with our own zest and enthusiasm. They *belong* to us; we revel in their glory, take possession of their triumph, and hold them as trophies in our collective memory.

In the arena, on the track, wherever they play at whatever they play, they are our designated surrogates performing the impossible, striving for perfection and often achieving it. They are just like us, only more so: 11-feet tall and strong, fearless, fleet, keen of eye, daring and unbeatable.

This exhibition is one of a kind and we are glad we came to the game.

George Weissman

George Weissman
Chairman of the Board
and Chief Executive Officer
Philip Morris Incorporated

Eric Heiden

"Best men's speed skater in history"

1977 at Herenveen, The Netherlands, became men's speed skating champion of the world;
Declared a folk hero in Norway;
1980 Lake Placid Olympics captured five gold medals:
500-meter, 1000-meter, 1500-meter, 5,000-meter & 10,000-meter races.

Eric Heiden, Heinz Kleutmeier, 1980, photograph, Collection Sports Illustrated © TIME, Inc. 1980

A. J. Foyt

"The total race driver"

Since 1960, 7 times a national driving champion;
Four time winner of Indy Classic;
1972 winner of Daytona 500, U.S. top stock car race;
1967 teamed with Dan Gurney, won France's sports-car classic, Twenty-four Hours of Le Mans, first U.S. team to win.

A. J. Foyt, Heinz Kleutmeier, 1977, photograph, Collection Sports Illustrated © TIME, Inc. 1977

Bobby Hull

"1960's player of the decade"

Fastest skater in National Hockey League clocked at 28.3 mph skating with puck, 29.7 without;
Could slap a puck at 120 mph;
Continually surpassed leading records:

1959-60 led NHL with 39 goals,

1961-62 scored 50 goals,

1965-66 scored 54 goals,

1968-69 scored 58 goals;

Selected for All-Star Team 12 years;

Played 22 seasons, 1,447 games,

scored a total of 1,012 goals.

Bobby Hull, Neil Leifer, 1967, photograph, Collection of Sports Illustrated © TIME, Inc. 1967

Muhammad Ali

"The Champion: First fighter to win heavyweight title 3 times"

February 25, 1964 defeated Sonny Liston in 7th round, was declared new heavyweight champion;
May 1965 crushed Liston again in first round;
1970 lost to Joe Frazier after 34 victories;
1974 regained title against George Foreman;
February 25, 1978 lost to Leon Spinks but 7 months later regained title.
October 2, 1980 defeated by Larry Holmes.

Muhammad Ali, Andy Warhol, 1979, acrylic and silk screen on canvas, Collection Richard L. Weissman

Joe Namath

"Football's greatest newsmaker"

1965 played for Alabama in the Orange Bowl;
Signed on to the NY Jets with highest contract in football history;
1968, his greatest season, culminated with Miami Super Bowl III where with 28 passing attempts, he completed 17—final score 16-7, first Super Bowl victory for Jets.

Joe Namath on Sidelines at Shea Stadium, Neil Leifer, November 1974, photograph, Sports Illustrated © TIME, Inc. 1974

Knute Rockne

"Made football an American mania"

Head football coach for Notre Dame, a team which played before a million spectators each year;

In 13 years lost only 12 games, had five undefeated seasons, six seasons defeated only once, never a losing year;

A master of motivating a team and drawing extraordinary action from them.

Knute Rockne on Football, a Notre Dame magazine, 1931, The Sports Immortals Collection of Joel Platt