

This Day in History... October 14, 1873

Birth of Olympian Ray Ewry

Raymond “Ray” Clarence Ewry was born on October 14, 1873, in Lafayette, Indiana. An eight-time gold medal winner, Ewry was one of the most successful Olympians of all time.

Ewry was an orphan by the time he was five and contracted polio when he was seven, requiring the use of a wheelchair. Fearing he might be paralyzed for life, Ewry exercised his legs every day until he didn’t need the wheelchair. Once he could walk, he started a jumping regimen to help strengthen them.

After high school, Ewry went on to attend Purdue University from 1890 to 1897. During his time there, he was made captain of the track and field team and played on the football team. He successfully led the track team to their first national track title and personally broke several records. After earning his graduate degree in civil and mechanical engineering, he briefly taught engineering before moving to New Jersey where he worked as a hydraulics engineer

Ewry also joined the New York Athletic Club where he proved his talents in the standing high jump, standing long jump, and standing triple jump. These events are no longer in practice, and differ from modern events in that the athletes didn’t take a running start before their jump. Ewry earned the nickname “The Human Frog,” for his unparalleled jumping abilities.

Ewry competed in his first Olympics in 1900 in Paris. He won gold medals in all three standing jumps – on the same day! Four years later, Ewry again claimed gold in all three events. The standing triple jump was removed from the Olympics after that year’s games, but Ewry continued to excel in the remaining two competitions.

Ewry overcame polio to become one of the greatest Olympians of all time.



In 1906, Ewry competed in the Intercalated Games in Athens, Greece and once again won gold in the two standing jump events offered. Though organized as an Olympic event, the International Olympic Committee doesn’t officially recognize the 1906 games in their medal counts. Ewry participated in his final Olympics in 1908, winning two more gold medals for the standing jumps. Overall, not including his two medals from the 1906 games, which the IOC doesn’t, Ewry won eight Olympic gold medals, making him the 12th most successful Olympian of all time.

Ewry also held several records for many decades... He was the only Olympian to win three gold medals in one event until 1968. He also held the record for winning three gold medals in two events for 108 years. His record for most individual gold medals – for non-relay events – was broken after 100 years and 23 days in 2008 by Michael Phelps. Ewry still retains the record for the most Olympic golds with a 100% record – he won gold in every Olympic competition he ever entered.

Outside of the Olympics, Ewry also won 15 Amateur Athletic Union track and field titles between 1898 and 1910. It may have been more if the standing long jump hadn’t been discontinued for a six-year period. The standing long jump was discontinued in international competitions in the 1930s, but Ewry still held the record of 11 feet 5 inches.

Ewry continued to compete until he was nearly 40, narrowly missing a chance to compete in the 1912 Olympics. He then returned to working as an engineer, helping to design boilers for US naval ships during World War I. He was also the lead engineer on the construction of an aqueduct that delivers water from the Catskill Mountains to New York City.

Ewry died on September 29, 1937, in New York City. He was later inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame and the US Olympic Hall of Fame. His hometown in Indiana has also named a youth center after him and installed a statue of him at the high school. A section of highway in Indiana was also named in his honor – the Raymond Clarence Ewry Memorial Parkway.



From the Gold Medal Olympians booklet issued in 1990.

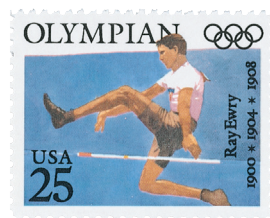
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