

# THOMAS W. COURTNEY



Courtney Born August 17, 1933, died August 22, 2023 an American track & field athlete who won two Gold Medals in the 1956 Olympics died in Naples, Florida on August 22, 2023, days after his 90th birthday.

Courtney grew up in Livingston, NJ, and went to Fordham University on a track scholarship. Track & Field magazine rated him number one in the world in both 400 meters and 800

meters in 1956 and 1957. He held seven world records and six American records in distances from 400 meters to 1,000 yards. In 1956, he won the gold in the 800 meters and 4x400 relay in the Melbourne Olympics

While at Fordham he developed an intense rivalry with Arnie Sowell of the University of Pittsburgh and the 800 meters became the marquee event in indoor track meet circuit which consisted of over a dozen major meets as well as outdoor meets in the US and Europe. The competition caused Courtney to redouble his training and he credited it with his subsequent successes. The two were a study in contrasts, Courtney was a brawny 6' 2" and weighed 185 pounds, Sowell was a willowy 5' 11", weighed 130 pounds and ran like a feather.

In the 1956 Olympic 800-meter final in Melbourne, Australia, Courtney and Sowell battled each other over the last turn, perhaps starting their finishing sprint too early with 200 meters to go. Courtney passed Sowell with 120 meters, but both were tying up. Derek Johnson of Great Britain passed them with 50 meters left. At that point, Courtney dug deep into his inner reserves and launched a second finishing kick, catching Johnson at the tape, by one-tenth of a second. It was the most dramatic event of that Olympics. Never had a runner been passed in the last 50 meters only to come back and win.

Courtney was so exhausted that he passed out after the race and the victory ceremony had to be delayed for several hours. After the race, Courtney said he if he lived he would never run again. But he did a few days later in the 4 x 400-meter relay. He was the anchor leg and turned a small lead into a blow-out victory, for his second Gold Medal.

He was not originally on the relay team. The US Olympic Trials at that time were held over two days, now they are held over seven days, same as the Olympic competition. The 400-meter event was held five minutes after the 800 meters and Courtney was too tired to enter the 400. The team for the relay was determined by the finish of the 400 meters at the Trials. Courtney petitioned the coaching staff to put him in the relay since he was the American record holder at the event and had won the AAU 400-meters that year. The Olympic coach, Jim Kelly, of University of Minnesota, said Courtney could be on the relay if he beat all four members of the relay team plus the two alternates. Courtney beat the six at a warmup competition in Australia two weeks before the Olympics, including his teammate Charlie Jenkins, of Villanova, who won the Olympic 400-meters.

From 1957 to 1959, Courtney coached track at Harvard while getting an MBA there. This made him a professional under the rules of the AAU then and not eligible to compete any more. At the height of the Cold War there were a series of US vs. Russia track competitions. The US State Department requested that the AAU let Courtney come out of retirement in 1958 and 1959 to participate in those competitions, which he won. He was an American hero. His humility and hard work won him many fans.

After his running career, Courtney went on to a remarkable career in investment management. He worked at Kidder, Peabody & Company in New York City, Peninsula Insurance in Jacksonville, Florida, Mackay Shields & Company, back in New York. He moved to Boston, MA to become President of the Boston Company Institutional Investors and then moved to Pittsburgh, PA where he was President of Federated Institutional Investors. After that he had his own investment firm, Courtney Associates and served on the boards of twenty-five mutual funds with several mutual fund families. He was chairman of the board of Oppenheimer Funds, Chairman at Pimco Funds and Audit Chairman at the Aquila Funds. He was a Director of the Financial Analysts Federation and a Chartered Financial Analyst.

Tom Courtney was the son of James and Dolores Courtney. He had four brothers: James, Brian, Dennis and Kevin. He grew up in Livingston, NJ., and attended Grover Cleveland High School in Caldwell, NJ. He attended Fordham University. As a top college runner he anchored the Fordham two mile relay team to a new world record in 1954. In 1955 he was the Intercollegiate 800 champion and was on the cover of Sports Illustrated. He was elected to the National Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1978. Also in 1978 he was elected to the original Hall of Fame at Fordham University. In 2011 he was elected to the Fordham Hall of Honor.

Tom married Margaret (Posy) L'Hommedieu in 1963. They had three sons: Thomas W. Courtney, Jr. and his wife Vien and four children, Andrew, Sophie, Nicholas and Henry of Corona del Mar, CA; Peter L'Hommedieu Courtney and his wife, Elizabeth, and two children, Marielle and Lyon of Southport, CT; Frank Arnold Courtney and his wife, Donna, and three girls, Marguerite, Francesca and Josephine of Sewickley, PA.

Tom lived in Sewickley Heights, PA and Wyndemere in Naples, FL. He was an avid tennis player and golfer. He won the Senior Golf Championship at Allegheny Country Club and won five doubles championships in tennis, the last one at age 79 with his son Frank as his partner. He was an active participant at Saint Mary's Church in Aleppo, PA and Saint Elizabeth Seton Church in Naples, FL. He considered his three visits to Medjugorje, Yugoslavia where the Blessed Mother Mary was appearing to six youths every day, to be the most rewarding experiences in his life.

The family will receive friends at **FULLER FUNERAL HOME**, 1625 Pine Ridge Road, Naples, FL on Saturday, August 26, 2023 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. A funeral mass will be held in Sewickley, PA in a few weeks.

In lieu of flowers the family suggests memorial donations to be made to: (1) Fordham University, contact Kristina Dzwonczyk, Director of Donor Relations at 212-636-7451, (2) the United States Olympic Committee, One Olympic Plaza, Colorado Springs, CO 80909-5760, and (3) Avow Hospice, 1095 Whippoorwill Lane, Naples, Florida 34105.

For online condolences, please visit Tom's Tribute at [www.fullernaples.com](http://www.fullernaples.com)

Send condolences [post-gazette.com/gb](http://post-gazette.com/gb)