

John Walter Beardsley Tewksbury

1900 Olympic Gold Medals

WHEN?
1876-1968

WHERE? Ashley, PA.



EVENT
1900 Olympics

VOCABULARY
meter
IC4A

John Walter Beardsley Tewksbury graduated from the University of Pennsylvania dental school in 1899 and practiced dentistry for thirty-four years in Tunkhannock, Pa., until his death in 1968. Although he had a thriving dental practice, he was well-known in the area for another reason—he won five Olympic track medal—a record number of wins that was not equaled until late in the 20th century (Penn Archives). He was recognized as a world champion and was co-holder of the 100-meter world record at 10.8 seconds.



Greg Russick photo credit

The son of Anderson and Mary Tewksbury, Tewksbury was born in Ashley, Pa., on March 21, 1876. His father was a surgeon in the Civil War and had opened a medical practice there. The family moved several times before finding a permanent home on West Tioga Street in Tunkhannock. Several sources state Walter attended Wyoming Seminary where he gained a solid academic foundation before he moved on to Penn. While at Penn, Walter was challenged to a footrace on campus by a well-known racer from Boston. When Walter won that race, Penn track coach Mike Murphy took notice and eventually convinced him to join the team (Examiner). As a member of the University of Pennsylvania team he won four intercollegiate (IC4A) 100- and 220-yard dash and 200-meter championships in 1898 and 1899. He also set an indoor record in the 60-yard dash at Madison Square Garden.

At the Olympics, he won two gold medals (200-meter dash and 400-meters hurdles), two silver (60- and 100-meter dashes) and a bronze for the 200-meter hurdles. He tied the world record in the 100-meter dash in the semifinals though he came in second in the finals. The 400-hundred-meter hurdle race was not like what is now experienced in the U.S. Telephone poles were placed at intervals around the track with a water barrier acting as the last hurdle. Tewksbury won the race in 57.6

seconds just 0.4 seconds off the world record. He defeated Henri Tauzin who had never lost in that race (Britannica). What makes the victory even more remarkable is that Tewksbury had never competitively run that race before but practiced for it by running around a Tunkhannock cemetery jumping over tombstones.

According to the Luzerne County Hall of Fame honoring his achievements the following anecdote was told:

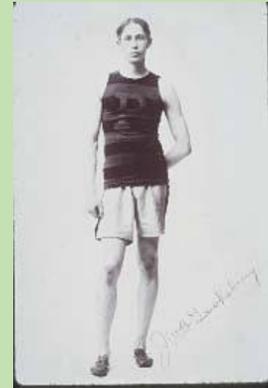
“ At a banquet climaxing the Olympiad, a member of the British royal family who watched the Olympiad, a member of the British royal family who watched the games said he thought that Tewksbury deserved something better.

“Well, sir, I’d certainly like one of those French motorcycles,” Tewksbury said. “I’ll see to that you get one,” he was told. “I got more enjoyment out of that motorcycle than anything else, Tewksbury recalled. “There were almost no cars around at the time and I could make that ‘cycle go close to 40 miles an hour.”



At the time of his passing in 1968, Dr. Tewksbury was the oldest living Olympian. His wife, the former Marion Metcalf passed in 1964.

In 1996, he was elected to the National Track and Field Hall of Fame and the Luzerne County Sports Hall of Fame in 1991.



ONLINE RESOURCES

[Britannica](#)

[Luzerne County Hall of Fame](#)

[PA Historical Marker](#)

[Penn Archives](#)

[Wyoming Examiner](#)