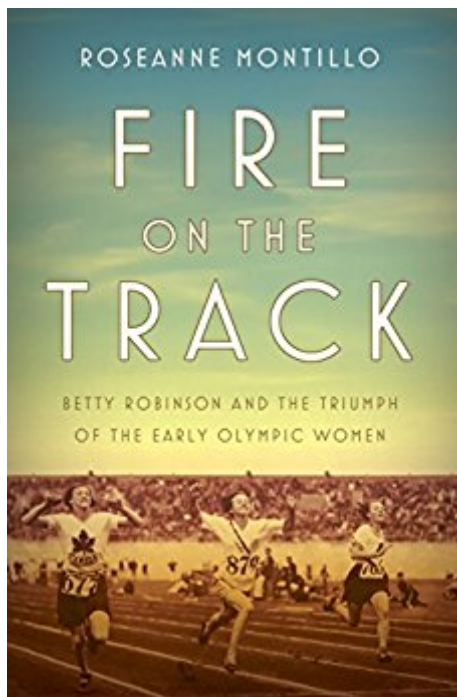




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# Fire On The Track: Betty Robinson And The Triumph Of The Early Olympic Women



## Synopsis

The inspiring and irresistible true story of the women who broke barriers and finish-line ribbons in pursuit of Olympic Gold. When Betty Robinson assumed the starting position at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam, she was participating in what was only her fourth-ever organized track meet. She crossed the finish line as a gold medalist and the fastest woman in the world. This improbable athletic phenom was an ordinary high school student, discovered running for a train in rural Illinois mere months before her Olympic debut. Amsterdam made her a star. But at the top of her game, her career (and life) almost came to a tragic end when a plane she and her cousin were piloting crashed. So dire was Betty's condition that she was taken to the local morgue; only upon the undertaker's inspection was it determined she was still breathing. Betty, once a natural runner who always coasted to victory, soon found herself fighting to walk. While Betty was recovering, the other women of Track and Field were given the chance to shine in the Los Angeles Games, building on Betty's pioneering role as the first female Olympic champion in the sport. These athletes became more visible and more accepted, as stars like Babe Didrikson and Stella Walsh showed the world what women could do. And miraculously through grit and countless hours of training, Betty earned her way onto the 1936 Olympic team, again locking her sights on gold as she and her American teammates went up against the German favorites in Hitler's Berlin. Told in vivid detail with novelistic flair, *Fire on the Track* is an unforgettable portrait of these trailblazers in action.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is divided into three sections, the first covering the first Olympic games that included track events for women (1928, Amsterdam), the second focused on the second set of events (Los Angeles, 1932), and the third and most compelling, the much-storied 1936 Berlin Olympics, held under a sea of swastikas. Despite the title, the book is not a biography of Betty Robinson, who -- apart from being the first woman ever to win a gold medal in an Olympic track event -- is not especially interesting. The author's attempts to recreate the life experiences of an Illinois teenager in the 1920s feel contrived and flat, and Betty comes across as a pretty girl who likes to run, makes at least one horrific mistake, and then inexplicably (or so the author suggests) marries a Jewish man and drifts out of the public eye. Far more intriguing are Betty's contemporaries: Babe Didrikson pops in briefly, but it's Stella Walsh and Helen Stephens whose stories are compelling enough to overcome the clunky and sometimes tortured writing. (Example: "Helen often encountered Bert Riel, whom Betty's family had not known she had been dating..."). And, please, let's not keep referring to pantyhose, which hadn't been invented in the 1930s -- unfortunate that the author's extensive research did not prevent her from this repeated gaffe. Although the book is not being promoted as an examination of evolving attitudes toward female athletes, that's where it shines. Except for Betty, always lovely, the women were derided for their appearance, shortchanged financially, their efforts constantly denigrated as inferior to those of men, ie not much has changed in 80 years. The book also touches on the question of "what makes an athlete female and thus eligible to compete?" -- an issue in the 1930s as it is today. The depiction of the Berlin Olympics, including a few surprising Hitler anecdotes, is riveting. I had a hard time getting into this book, but it's a quick read, and the last section repaid my efforts. My ARC did not include pictures and I kept going online to check out the moments captured by the camera. I assume the final version will be illustrated, which will make for a better reader experience.

If you've a soft spot for true "triumphed against all odds" stories, especially sports ones, then you'll probably enjoy "Fire on the Track: Betty Robinson and the Triumph of the Early Olympic Women," by Roseanne Montillo. In fact, Betty's particular one is strikingly close to what you might find on a TV-movie character arc, but then life is said to be stranger than fiction. The evolution of women's track and field events at the Olympic was a difficult, often grueling journey from initially seeing the

women competitors as a sideshow of sorts to viewing it as equally legitimate as the men's events. Not just Betty Robinson's story, but other luminaries like Babe Didrickson, Stella Walsh (who eventually competed for Poland) and Helen Stephens are intriguingly portrayed here, as well. Betty Robinson was just a teenager when she began training with high school track coach, Charles Price and one who might not appear at first glance to be the kind dedicated enough to train for and ultimately triumph at the Olympics - twice. Attractive, popular with her peers and involved with multiple extracurriculars, Betty had little experience when she arrived at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics to compete. However, she had the speed (and the self-confidence) to make her mark; it was something that would happen afterwards that would truly test her. Her competitors, who she would meet for the next Olympics in Berlin, 1932, meanwhile were undergoing ordeals of their own, including sexism, lack of funds (this was the Depression-era), and family opposition. 'Fire on the Track,' also delves into the misogyny displayed by sports journalists, the double-standards for men and women competitors back then, and the political machinations undergone in order so that the US women's team could compete. The "comeback" of Betty is interesting enough to be its own book, but including the other true stories - while diluting the focus on just one "star" - helps flesh out what it was like for women athletes during that period. The women's stories are told from what I would describe as a rather intimate viewpoint, this works, but there are a few scenes where the events being described were intimate enough to make me feel a little uncomfortable. However, overall "Fire on the Track," is a fascinating account of both the athletes who pioneered their entry into this sport and the background of the others who also shaped it.

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