

# THE WORLD'S GREATEST SPORTSMAN

## His Faith in God

Some people think that greatness is something which they inherit from their parents. Some even think that, on their own, they can work and struggle in life to become great. But an ancient Italian writer once said that no man can be great except by the power of God. And truly, real greatness comes only when we give our special gifts or interests to God for Him to develop.

Rafer Lewis Johnson is one man in the world who has done that. By yielding his whole life, including his interest in sports, to Jesus Christ, he has become the greatest all-round athlete in the world. Those who know Rafer Johnson, and many others who have only heard of him, cannot help liking and admiring him. Even his sports opponents in different parts of the world respect him.

Many things about Rafer Johnson are attractive. He is 6 ft. 3 in. tall, weighing about 14 stone, very nice-looking and well built. Except when he is running or taking part in sports events, Rafer is usually smiling and cheerful.

In secondary school and university he was games captain, leading his football, basketball, and baseball teams in several victories. He himself became champion and record-holder in many events. Despite all his interest in sports, Rafer was a good student academically. His excellent classwork, in addition to his high sense of responsibility, made it possible for him to be appointed senior head boy in secondary school and president of the whole student body in the university.

He entered the University of California as a medical student, hoping to specialise in dentistry. But he later changed his major to education, in which he got an honours degree. He then went on to post-graduate work in physical education, international relations, and political science.

For several years now in America, his homeland, and in other parts of the world, Rafer Johnson has made many goodwill tours, and has been the speaker at many social occasions such as dinners and youth rallies.

But what sort of man is he, really? How did he come to be so outstanding? What makes him so different from many other athletes? How, exactly, did Rafer Johnson climb to the top to become so famous and respected?

Born in 1936 at Hillsboro, Texas, the son of a food-factory worker, Rafer grew up as an ordinary care-free village youngster. His parents were not rich. They had only one hired room which was partitioned with a curtain. There, the whole family lived. Some years later the family moved into Kingsburg where Rafer had most of his primary and secondary education.

It was in his school days in Kingsburg that he developed his special interest and ability in sports. But he did not become a star until October 29, 1953, when he had the greatest experience of his life. Rafer was then seventeen.

That day was a Saturday. It was a warm evening. Having been invited to a Bible Club dinner by a group of Christian students, Rafer went reluctantly. Nothing

very special was done during the meeting. But when a pastor, who was the guest speaker that evening, preached on Christ's suffering and death because of each person's sins, Rafer Johnson wept. He thought the pastor was referring mainly to him because a lot of the sins mentioned were what he had committed. To his heart's joy he heard the pastor say that anyone who felt guilty and needed forgiveness should stay after the meeting and receive Christ into his life, for He was ready to forgive anyone who repented of his sins.

Johnson stayed after the meeting. He confessed that he was a sinner and asked the Lord to come into his life. "I don't know when I was happier," he said afterwards. "I felt great. In a very short time, I knew I could depend on my Saviour at all times. No matter how big or small the problem, He is always present and ready to help me. I fully agree with Philippians 4:13 which says, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me'."

Three months after his new birth in Christ, he was elected honorary mayor by the 800 young people in the Youth for Christ Convention. Speaking of that occasion Rafer said, "I, along with other teen-agers, had a fire in my heart to spread the gospel to everyone we knew."



This young fellow, who could well be a future champion, is Baby Kirby, of Murrin Bridge