

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert Beamon

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Beamon, Bob
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert Beamon,
Dates:	April 16, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:30:32).
Abstract:	Long jumper Robert Beamon (1946 -) is the Olympic gold medalist who set the world record for the long jump in the 1968 Olympics; he has been inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame and the Olympic Hall of Fame. Beamon was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 16, 2002, in Miami, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_049
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Olympic gold medalist and record-breaking track and field star Bob Beamon was born on August 29, 1946, in Jamaica, New York. When he was eight months old, his mother, Naomi Brown Beamon, died of tuberculosis. On account of his stepfather's incarceration, Beamon's maternal grandmother, Bessie, became his primary caregiver.

Beamon's childhood was set against a background of violence, gangs and drugs. During a fight at school, Beamon struck a teacher and was expelled. He was sent to a juvenile detention center and then an alternative school for delinquents in New York. At this school, he learned discipline and began to look away from street culture. Beamon used sports as a means to focus his attention and energy toward positive goals. He regularly broke track records at the local and state levels. After graduating from high school, Beamon attended North Carolina A&T to be close to his ill grandmother. When she died, he transferred to the University of Texas-El Paso, a school with a prominent track and field team.

In 1968, Beamon qualified for the Olympics in Mexico City. Four months before, he had been suspended from the University of Texas-El Paso track team for refusing to compete against Brigham Young University, a Mormon college with racist policies. This left Beamon without a coach. However, Olympian Ralph Boston began to coach him unofficially. On October 18, 1968, Beamon made Olympic history when he broke the world record for the long jump. Beamon jumped 29 feet, 4 ½ inches, beating the previous record by nearly two feet, setting a record that stood for twenty-three years, and becoming the first man to jump more than 28 feet.

Beamon graduated from Adelphi University in 1972 with a degree in sociology. In 1999, Beamon and his wife, Milana Walter Beamon, co-wrote a book about his life, *The Man Who Could Fly*. He has been inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame and the Olympic Hall of Fame.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert Beamon was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 16, 2002, in Miami, Florida, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Long jumper Robert Beamon (1946 -) is the Olympic gold medalist who set the world record for the long jump in the 1968 Olympics; he has been inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame and the Olympic Hall of Fame.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Beamon, Bob

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Beamon, Bob--Interviews

African American athletes--Interviews.

Track and field athletes--United States--Interviews.

Mothers--Death--Psychological aspects.

Grandparents as parents.

Fathers and sons.

Urban youth--New York (State)--New York.

Student expulsion--New York (State)--New York.

Role models--United States.

Youth--Substance use.

Youth--Sexual behavior--New York (State)--New York.

Jamaica High School (New York, N.Y.).

Jamaica (New York, N.Y.)--Social conditions.

University of Texas at El Paso.

Jumping--Training.

Olympics--Participation, African American.

Olympics--Records.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Long Jumper

HistoryMakers® Category:

SportsMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert Beamon, April 16, 2002. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Beamon, Section A2002_049_001_001, TRT: 0:30:51 ?

Bob Beamon talks about his family origins and structure after the untimely death of his mother from tuberculosis. Being raised by his stepfather's mother, Beamon explains the difficulty of being emotionally rejected by his stepfather and his having to live apart from the main family unit. He then talks about having to use the local pimps and hustlers as his early role models, since the media was filled with stereotypical portrayals of blacks. Beamon also relates how he eventually had to rely upon himself because he did not have access to positive role models. Lastly, he shares a story of his expulsion from school after bringing weapons for 'Show and Tell' and his family's reaction to the situation.

African American athletes--Interviews.

Track and field athletes--United States--Interviews.

Mothers--Death--Psychological aspects.

Grandparents as parents.

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Urban youth--New York (State)--New York.

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Role models--United States.

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Youth--Sexual behavior--New York (State)--New York.

Jamaica High School (New York, N.Y.).

Jamaica (New York, N.Y.)--Social conditions.

University of Texas at El Paso.

Jumping--Training.

Olympics--Participation, African American.

Olympics--Records.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Beamon, Section A2002_049_001_002, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Bob Beamon recounts his low self-esteem as a young boy and details his early experimentation with sex, alcohol and smoking. He then recalls his involvement in gangs and violence and the lack of parental intervention. Beamon talks about his educational experiences after being transferred to an alternative high school for troubled teens. After making the decision that his participation in sports was a more constructive outlet for his energy, Beamon recalls the successes he had after being transferred to Jamaica High School in Jamaica, New York and the teachers who made an impression on him. Beamon then talks about his boyhood friend, 'Bro' Patterson, and their shared appreciation of music. Lastly, Bob Beamon talks about his development into an athlete at Jamaica High School and his track and field accomplishments while there.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Beamon, Section A2002_049_001_003, TRT: 0:30:51 ?

Bob Beamon talks about his popularity in school and whether it was due to his athletic ability rather than his personality. Beamon shares a story about how Olympic champions visited his high school in Jamaica, New York, and how it inspired him to become an Olympic athlete. He then details his achievements in the long jump and triple jump and which track & field records are still intact. Beamon then discusses his college experience at the University of Texas at El Paso and talks about his respect for his college recruiter and coach Wayne Vandenberg. Lastly, Beamon talks about a mental technique he used to visualize his jump. He also talks about the out-of-body experience he felt upon breaking the world record and winning the gold medal at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico.