

## Police Athletes of the Past:

### JOHN ELLER

If you should pass the corner of 63rd Drive and Carlton Street in Queens, don't be surprised to see a lean white-haired gentleman racing around the lawn with a grass cutter, hopping over shrubs like a jack rabbit, or climbing a ladder to the roof like a youngster, because it will be the former world's champion hurdler, Jack Eller, still in the pink of condition at sixty-seven years of age.

Former Patrolman John Eller spent thirty-seven years in the department assigned to patrol and motorcycle duty and the warrant squad during which time he earned the title of a "good cop," fearless and honest. He has seven excellent police duty awards and twenty-one citations for stopping runaway horses. At the same time he made a phenomenal track history that stands as one of the greatest sport achievements of all time. At his home where he lives with his wife, Barbara, Mr. Eller avidly follows all of the major track events on his television set.

A native son of Manhattan, he was born and raised in the neighborhood that is today Harlem. His parents were frugal people who were blessed with four sons—all of them fine athletes. Their father was a cutter and designer of men's clothes, but found time to aid in developing and encouraging his sons to track athletic perfection.

Ex-patrolman Eller started his athletic career at the age of seventeen as an oarsman. He never did entertain any notion of becoming a track man until he joined the National Guard at eighteen. During a two week training period with the Guard he entered a foot race and came in so far ahead of the field that he wasn't long deciding about where he would find his greatest athletic success.

As an oarsman at nineteen, he had been headed for certain fame. His first major competition was in a doubles race. Teamed with a well-known rowing figure, Jim O'Neil, Jack won the Metropolitan Rowing Junior Championships. The same year, he rowed in

the four man shell and also won the championship. That team was known as the "Augustine, O'Connor, Eller, Callahan Quartet," and added glory to the reputation of the famous Metropolitan Rowing Club.

As a member of the 71st Regiment of the National Guard, he aspired to be a basketball star. But his victories in intra-regimental track games ended the budding basketball career, and started him on the track. After making a fine showing at the 220 yard distance and collecting a score of trophies, the young Mr. Eller decided to go in for timber tapping in the high and low hurdles.

In both flat and hurdle running, some of his records are still standing with the possibility that they may never be broken. These are: 0:28.8 for the 220 yard indoor high hurdles on a ten-lap track; 0:27.6 on a turn; 0:15.6 for the 150 yard flat race indoors; 0:27.4 for the 250 yard low hurdles. All of these titles were earned after he joined the department in 1905.

Recognizing today's sports program in the department through the Police Sports Association, Patrolman Eller reminisces about the championship the department didn't win in 1906 when Patrolmen Matt McGrath, Pat McDonald, Egon Erickson, Martin Sheridan, Simon Gillis and himself won individual championships for their clubs which if added together would have been more than enough to win a team title.

For comparison with today's standards, the Police Games of 1916 at Sheephead Bay offer conclusive proof of Patrolman Eller's greatness. In those games he ran the 120-yard low hurdles in 0:13.8. That record existed until the great Olympic Champion "Spec" Townes shaved one-tenth of a second from it in 1936. The present record was set in 1949 by Harrison Dilard at 13.6.

His career as an athlete spread over 21 years and was interrupted only by a

two year hitch with the Y.M.C.A. in France in World War I. While with the A.E.F., he conducted track meets and took on all comers as a middle-weight boxer. His reign of twenty-one years as a track star is remarkable. He was national 220-yard champion in 1907, 1908, 1910, 1911 and 1912.

For all of his competition, Eller trained on his off time, but because of a fierce competitive spirit he racked up a total of forty-three Metropolitan, National and Foreign Championships in hurdling and sprinting.

His greatest disappointment came in 1912 when he was selected to represent the United States at the Stockholm Olympic Games. During training for those games, he tore a tendon in his left leg. Despite the injury he finished in second place, but his hopes of winning an Olympic Crown had faded.

The first pentathlon championships in the United States were held in 1911, and he was the first man to capture that crown. Victory to him was an obsession, and when competing, he would consider himself a failure if he didn't win at least three championships each year.

Perhaps the greatest show of recuperative power in athletics was turned in by Patrolman Eller in 1912. It almost resulted in his discharge from the department. After making an arrest, a patrol wagon in which Patrolman Eller, his partner, and their prisoner were riding overturned. His partner was killed, and Patrolman Eller, himself, sustained a possible fracture of the skull. Nine days later, while on sick report, and under doctor's care, he went to watch the Metropolitan Championships in Madison Square Garden. His partner, and his own lawyer Lawson Robertson saw him in a box and tried to persuade him to run so that their club could win the championship. Persuasion didn't work, and the two great hammer throwers, Matt McGrath and Pat MacDonnell were summoned. They lifted him out of the box, carried him to the dressing rooms, and changed his clothes. With no alternative, the recuperating officer was entered in the 220-yard high hurdles, and broke the world's record. But to Jack Eller this wasn't his greatest triumph.

The event that is outstanding in his mind is the last race he ran for the U.S.A. Waters, present track coach of the P.S.A.

While assigned to motorcycle duty, Patrolman Eller was escorting the Prince of Wales in 1923. After reach-

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ing their destination at 8 p.m. one evening, Eller was dismissed for three hours with instructions to pick up the Prince at 11 p.m. Hopping on his motorcycle, Eller went to the 71st Regiment Armory where the Met AAU Indoor Championships were being held. Coach Waters who was leading the Loughlin Lyceum A.C. spied Eller on his way into the Armory, and told him that Loughlin would win the championship if only Jack would run with the half mile relay team. To make Eller's importance more impressive, Waters volunteered to allow Eller to pick the team, and be its captain, if only he would consent. The forty-year-old cop finally consented. He picked the team, and Waters asked how they'd run. The order of running that Eller proposed was exactly opposite to what Coach Waters would have, but as captain of the team, Eller had his way. His spot was anchor man and his opposition were the Metropolitan 220 yard Senior and Junior Champions. The race started and when the anchor men got the stick, Eller was in third place yards behind. However, with a burst of speed, he headed for the tape and won by a distance of three yards. It wasn't until the next day that the Prince of Wales learned that his motorcycle escort had won his last championship as a track star. The Prince was disappointed because he wasn't present to see his escort in action.

Jack Eller's enthusiasm today for athletics is as great as it ever was. He amazes his neighbors with his ceaseless energy and splendid condition. The only regret he has is that he isn't coaching youngsters. The confidence that made him one of the greatest athletes of all time is still present when he tells you that with any fifty youngsters of high school age, he could develop a championship team. If his son is criteria, Patrolman Eller is right. He was the only school athlete ever to win fifteen major letters in high school. His father handled his training at home and without great rigidity made him a great athlete.

To aspiring athletes in the department, this champion states: "They must punish themselves two or three days each week with faithful practice, love their sport, and in their spare time play handball as a conditioner."



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