

The best-remembered athlete from the 1948 Olympics was the Dutch athlete Fanny Blankers-Koen. Yet there was another remarkable woman Olympic Champion from those Games:



Both Sides Of The Life Of Micheline Ostermeyer

Micheline Ostermeyer (1922 – 2001) was a great-niece of the French author Victor Hugo ('Les Miserables'; 'Hunchback of Notre Dame'). She was born in France but spent much of her early life in Tunisia. Her father influenced her enthusiasm for sport, and her mother passed on her love of music, starting Micheline on piano lessons at the age of 4. At 14 she left her family's home in Tunisia for her professional music education at the Conservatoire de Paris; on the outbreak of World War II, she moved back to Tunisia where she performed a weekly half-hour piano recital on Radio Tunis.

In Tunis, Micheline began participating in sports, competing in basketball (an obvious sport for a woman of 5ft 11ins.) and in track and field events. After the war, she was able to re-start her training at the Conservatoire, and started taking part in French athletics, eventually winning 13 French titles in running, throwing and jumping events. In 1946, she placed second in the shot put at the European Athletics Championship in Oslo, as well as winning the Prix Premier at the Conservatoire.

The 1948 Summer Olympics were Ostermeyer's finest hour as an athlete. She was an obvious selection for the Shot, but a few weeks earlier had started to learn Discus, and finished third in the French trials: the selectors decided to select her for that event as well. Their third-choice athlete reached the Bronze position, then improved to Gold in the final round. She also won Gold in the Shot (and gave a Beethoven recital for her teammates that same evening). On the final day of the athletics events in the Games, she took Bronze in the High Jump, becoming the first Frenchwoman to win three medals in a single summer or winter Olympic Games.

She won two bronze medals at the 1950 European Championships (including on 80m Hurdles behind Fanny Blankers-Koen). But she was suffering injuries; the USSR women were beginning their ascendancy in Throws; and the French musical establishment had become decidedly sniffy about her commitment to a 'frivolous' activity like athletics. So she retired from athletics to devote herself to music, and to a career of touring as a solo and concerto performer. After the death of her husband, she went into teaching; she died in 2001.

This film excerpt at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZP1cIPnujc&t=45s> shows both sides of her life.