

THE POST-STANDARD SUNDAY, AUGUST 7, 2016

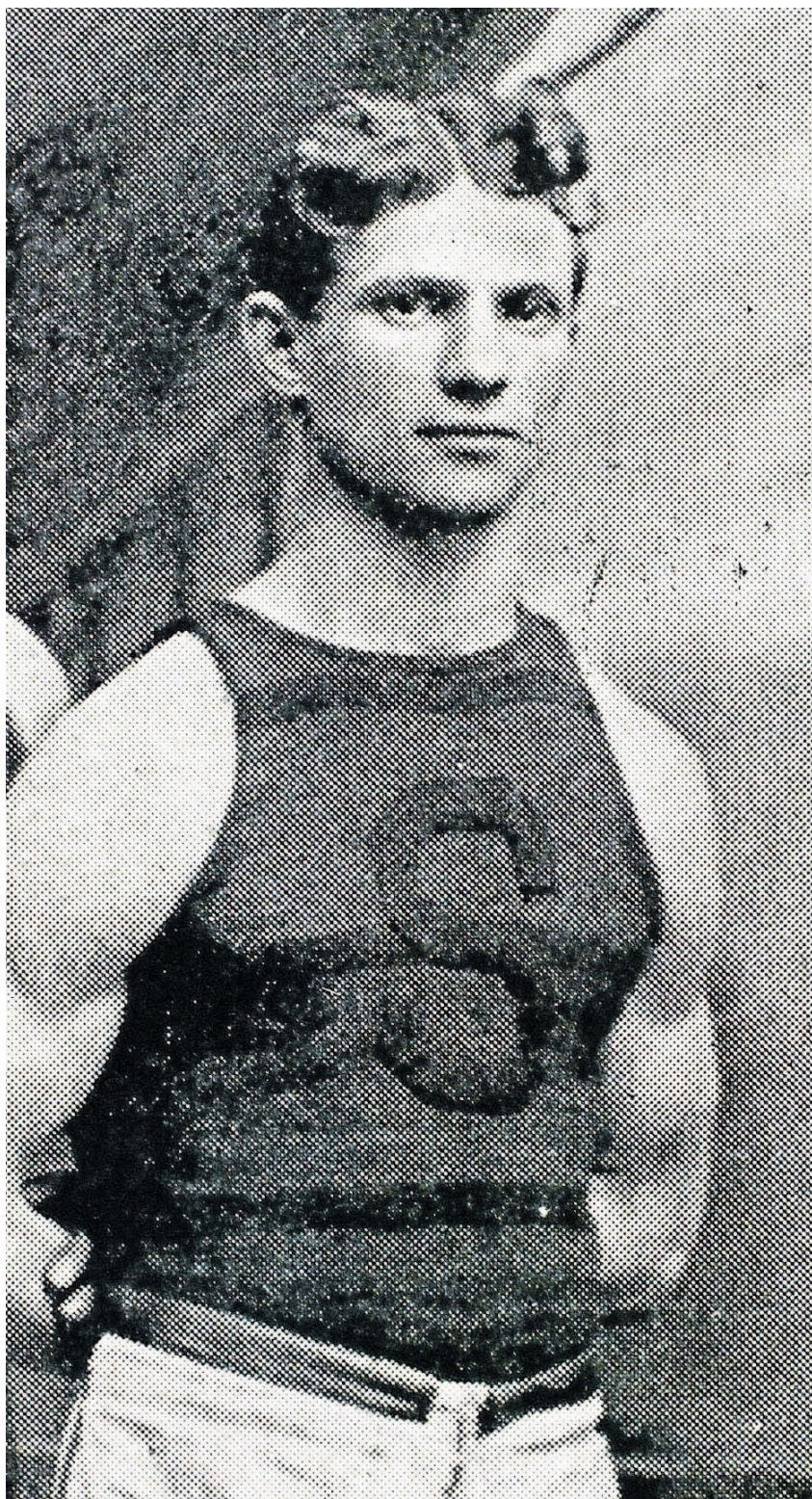
empire



*The best SU
Olympian few
remember*



Myer Prinstein



Syracuse University sports star Myer Prinstein from a group photo in the SU yearbook showing the Paris Exposition Team of 1900. *Courtesy of Syracuse University*

How SU gold medalist made peace with a rival

By Marnie Eisenstadt MEisenstadt@syracuse.com
and Johnathan Croyle JCroyle@syracuse.com

Myer Prinstein's son, Eddie, called him "Daddy Longlegs." And with good reason: Those long, bouncy legs powered Prinstein, otherwise unremarkable at 5 feet 8 inches tall and 145 pounds, to a pile of Olympic wins that have not been repeated a century after Prinstein's feat.

Myer Prinstein is the best Syracuse Olympian no one has ever heard of. The Syracuse native and Syracuse University alum is the only person to win gold medals for the long and triple jumps in the same Olympic games.

That was at the St. Louis Olympics in 1904, where he jumped 14.35 meters in the triple jump and 7.34 meters in the long jump. Prinstein also competed, and medaled, at two other Olympics.

Prinstein's story, which survives mostly in bits of archived news clippings and his grandson's memory of passed-down anecdotes, is that of an immigrant who competed for the love of the sport.

The early modern Olympics were not the organized, orchestrated show of the best of the best that they are these days. Prinstein's team for the 1900 Paris Olympics did not have enough money to pay for a ship to take its athletes across the ocean, according to several reports. An oil baron heard their story and let them ride on an oil steamship, the story goes.

Prinstein's grandson, Dan Prinstein, of New York City, recalls hearing stories of the Olympians practicing their

SEE SYRACUSE, T4



Long after Myer Prinstein had traded his track spikes for business shoes, he was teaching his son about sportsmanship — like a man who made lifelong friends with his rival would.

SYRACUSE

FROM T3

jumping and running on the ship's deck as it steamed across the ocean.

FROM POLAND TO SYRACUSE

Myer Prinstein grew up the son of a Jewish grocer and baker on the edge of what is now Syracuse's South Side. He was one of nine children in the family. Prinstein was born in 1878 in the mostly Jewish town of Szczuczyn, Poland. Prinstein's parents left Poland when he was a small child during a time of widespread violence against Jews in the region. Later, during World War II, most of the town's residents were killed in the Holocaust.

Jacob and Julia Prinstein brought Myer, his two sisters and two brothers to the U.S., according to historical records. They entered the country through New York City, but almost immediately got on a train to Syracuse, where Prinstein's mother had family, Dan Prinstein said. Myer's parents had four more children after coming to the U.S.

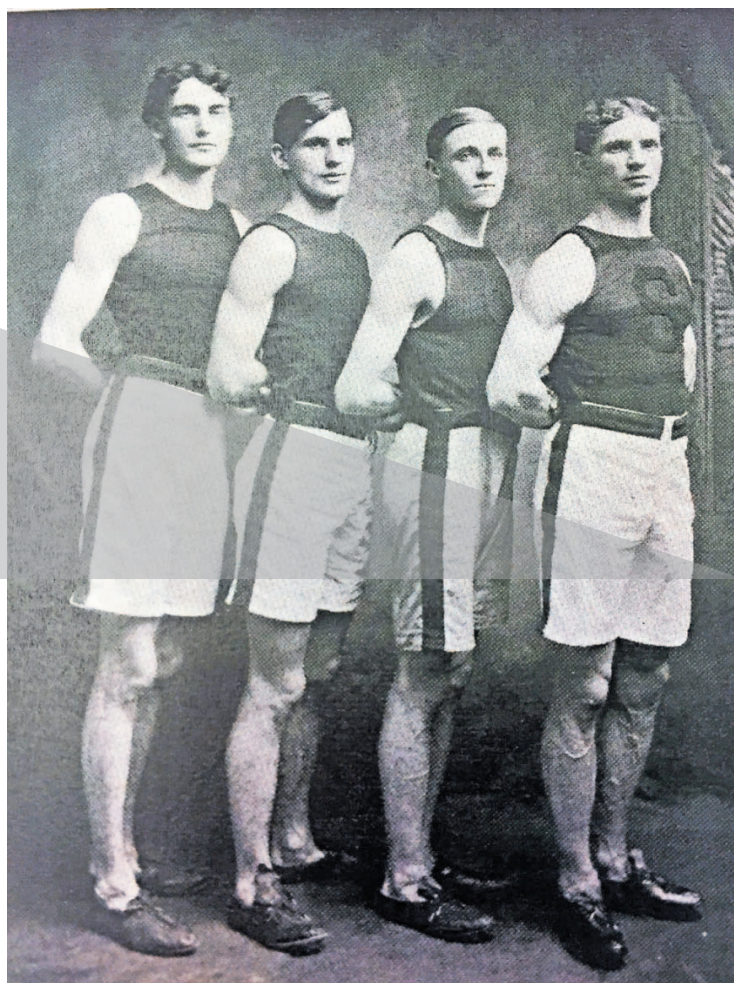
The Prinstein family's home and grocery store were at the corner of what was then Orange and Harri-

son streets, according to U.S. Census records. The area was home to many of the area's Jewish immigrants. There were a half-dozen synagogues within a few blocks, according to street records now housed in the Onondaga Historical Association. Like Prinstein's family, most families in that area had come from Russia and Poland at a time when Jews were being persecuted.

The Prinstein family home and grocery store no longer exist. Orange Street later became McBride Street, but the block where Prinstein grew up now holds office buildings and parking lots in the shadow of I-81.

Prinstein's older brothers, Lyons and Moses, became optometrists, according to historical records. Prinstein attended Syracuse University to study both law and liberal arts, according to Syracuse University records.

At SU, Prinstein joined the track team. His best events were the triple jump and the long jump. In 1900, Prinstein, still studying at Syracuse University, headed to the Paris Olympics. The team had trouble getting money to make it across the ocean to Paris, so they caught a ride on the steamship owned by an oil baron. Records from the time don't indicate who the oil man was, but



Myer Prinstein with the Syracuse University team for the Philadelphia relay in 1901. Prinstein, a Syracuse native, competed in the 1900, 1904 and 1906 Olympics and is the only Olympian to have received medals for the long and triple jumps in the same Olympics. *Syracuse University Archives*

it's possible it was John Archbold. Archbold, who later became the president of Standard Oil, had his own oil business at the time and was the president of Syracuse University's board of trustees, according to records. He and his family gave the money for Archbold Stadium and Archbold Gym.

THE 'PUNCH'

While Prinstein was in Paris as a member of the U.S. Olympic team, he was also representing Syracuse

University, which was a Methodist university at the time. That meant no competing on Sunday, even though Prinstein was Jewish.

Prinstein's rival was Alvin Kraenzlin, a University of Pennsylvania dentistry student. The men jumped that Saturday. Prinstein was winning. Penn allowed students to compete on Sundays. Prinstein could not. The story goes that the men had an agreement: They would let Prinstein's win stand and

SEE SYRACUSE, T5

SYRACUSE

FROM T4

Kraenzlin wouldn't jump.

Kraenzlin, though, jumped. And he won. Prinstein was mad. Depending on the account you read, he punched or shoved Kraenzlin. Kraenzlin's new jump pushed Prinstein to second place. Kraenzlin won gold; Prinstein only silver.

Prinstein also won gold at the Paris Olympics for his triple jump.

History has made much of the punch, but it is a story with more than one layer.

Dan Prinstein, Myer Prinstein's grandson, never met the Olympian. But Myer Prinstein's legacy of sportsmanship, perseverance and kindness still lived large in his widow's home.

Dan Prinstein said his grandfather didn't punch Kraenzlin, he shoved him. He was mad. But neither man held a grudge. They were friends and stayed friends. And their wives remained friends for decades after the track stars died.

Dan remembers being at his grandmother's home in Queens, where he went every Sunday for dinner as a child, and hearing Henrietta Prinstein say that Mrs. Kraenzlin had just called. She was asking about Eddie, Henrietta and Myer's only son (and Dan Prinstein's dad).

Eddie, whose real name was Elsner, was 9 when Myer Prinstein died. Prinstein, 45, had been ill with a heart problem for years leading up to his death, according to records and his grandson.

After leaving Syracuse University, Myer Prinstein practiced real estate law in New York City. Then he went into business selling the legal forms to lawyers, Dan Prinstein said.

Myer Prinstein competed for a time as part of the Irish-American Sport Club. He was in the 1904 St. Louis Olympics, where he won gold for both the long and triple jump. And Prinstein won the gold for the long jump at the 1906 Olympics in Greece. (Back then, the Olympics didn't always occur in four-year intervals.)

A MAN WITH NO EQUAL

Myer Prinstein's love of sports also brought him to his bride, Henrietta Northshield. She was at one of Prinstein's competitions in New York City when the two were introduced. She was a New York City school teacher until their marriage in 1908, Dan Prinstein said.

Eddie was their only child.

Henrietta Prinstein did not remarry after her husband died. She told her son that no man could measure up to Myer Prinstein.

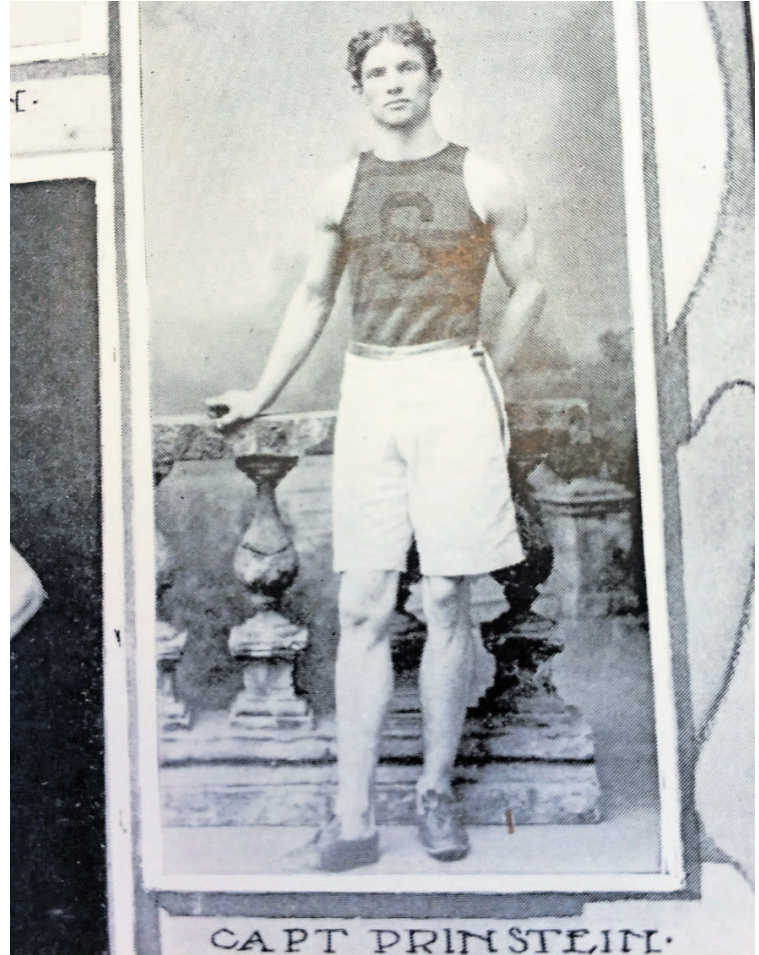
Dan Prinstein said his grandfather was a man who quietly persevered, finding his own path when one hadn't been cut for him. He competed with the Irish athletic club when there was no athletic backer for Jewish immigrants. When there was no passage to Paris available, he and his teammates found their own. He started his own business, and he and his wife were among the founding members of their temple in Queens. Sometimes, he didn't know when to stop: He broke his wrist cranking his old Model-T Ford, trying to get it to start, his grandson said.

And, while Myer Prinstein had long traded his track spikes for business shoes by the time his son, Eddie, came along, he taught sportsmanship like a man who made lifelong friends with his rival would.

Dan Prinstein remembers his father telling this story often: The neighborhood bully was playing with a ball across the street from Eddie. Myer was sitting in a chair nearby. The ball rolled over to Eddie, who did nothing. Aren't you going to throw it back, Myer asked his son.

Eddie's response was no, that boy is never nice to me.

Myer, who had befriended his own rival years before, ordered his son to throw the ball back to the bully. And, decades after his death, Myer Prinstein's son, Eddie, told that story to his own three sons often to remind them of how a true sportsman behaves.



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Onondagan/Syracuse University Archives