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The John Carlos Story

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John Carlos
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At the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, John Carlos stood on the medalists' podium and thrust his black-gloved fist into the air to make a political statement. Carlos, the bronze-medal winner in the 200-meter sprint, and gold-medalist Tommy Smith, both representing the US, stood together with heads bowed and fists raised to protest the lack of equality for all races in America and elsewhere.

Together they shocked the sports world. Their protest was met with such outrage that they were suspended from the national team and banned from the Olympic Village, the athletes' home during the Games.

The John Carlos Story tells about the Olympic incident and much more about the life of this man, who said, "How can you ask someone to live in the world, and not have something to say about injustice?"

John Carlos was born and raised in Harlem and showed early athletic talent and social consciousness. He noticed that famous black musicians like Satchmo, Ella Fitzgerald, and Lady Day, who played in local nightclubs for mostly white audiences, had to use the back entrances. He saw the poverty around him and became the Harlem "Robin Hood" who convinced his friends to help him rob trains during the night, as the cars sat waiting to be unloaded, and then handed out food and clothing to the poor. While rail yard detectives and New York Ctiy police eventually caught up with them, the teens could usually outrun their pursuers—especially John Carlos.

As a boy he wanted to be a world-class swimmer, but discovered that the public swimming pools were too crowded with families playing and trying to cool off during the hot New York City summers, and no private swim clubs would allow blacks in their pools. He next tried boxing but his mother said no son of hers was going to get his face and body bashed in. Running as sport only occurred to him when he found he was faster than everyone else around. "Running is what you did to get away from bullies or the police," he said. "It never crossed my mind that track and field would be my calling."

But it certainly was. A poor student due to a learning disability, Carlos was an outstanding athlete who made it to college on a scholarship. He dreamed of being in the Olympics. How he became an Olympic athlete and an intense advocate for civil rights is told in *The John Carlos Story.*

An inspiring book filled with the names and anecdotes of other famous athletes and politicians, like Martin Luther King, Jr., this is a good look at the most well-known Olympic Games medal ceremony of all time and what led one man to infamy. More than just another great sports story, it's a fascinating look at a pivotal time in America's history.

PENNY HASTINGS (August 30, 2011)

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