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Three Olympic Medalists

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One evening at the beginning of November: Lynnette Love sits outside the Howard taekwondo practice room bandaging her sore feet, accepting the congratulations of one club member after another for the gold medal she brought home from the Olympics and talking about what it's like to be back.

"It will be difficult to get back to normal," she admits, "because you're put up on this pedestal and kind of have a red carpet rolled out for you and now you have to go back to humdrum things."

Put on a pedestal she was. A Washington Post reporter wrote that Koreans "have found their sensation: Lynnette Love." With her mass of braids pulled back from her forehead, chiseled features, elegant carriage and 6-foot-2½-inch height, the 31-year-old athlete tends to stand out in any crowd.

Add to that all the international records she's set in taekwondo competitions and a kicking style that's like a controlled explosion and it's not hard to understand why she became the darling of South Korea's many taekwondo aficionados. Nor did reported U.S./Korean tensions at the Olympics seem to threaten her place on the pedestal—even when she won that gold by defeating a South Korean opponent.

Back home there were other markers of instant celebrity: joining the throng of Olympians at a White House ceremony hosted by President Reagan; attending a press conference with Mayor Coleman Young of Detroit, her hometown; being honored by the Detroit City Council, her high school (Cass Technical) and college (Wayne State); being similarly honored along with silver medalist Debra Hooper Holloway by the Prince George's (Md.) County Council; receiving the very public congratulations of her employer, Maryland Federal Savings and Loan Association, via a large ad in The

Washington Post ("Lynnette won her GOLD medal in Seoul after thousands of hours of training, hard work and dedication. The same dedication that she brings to her job as customer service representative in our Marlow Heights branch office.")

"So, yes," Love repeats, "it will be hard to get back to normal."

But the Olympic experience may also open some new doors for the three medalists. Love and Holloway, a receptionist at a Washington, D.C., exercise studio, hope to open their own taekwondo school in Fort Washington, Md., soon. They believe the demand is there. The two have been teaching popular taekwondo classes there at a local recreation center for more than a year. As a result of their Olympic fame, those classes are overflowing.

"That's the next new goal on my horizon that still is exciting and still gives me a lot of hope, a tough challenge and something to look forward to," says Holloway. She's speaking that same evening in that same setting. Nearby are her three children who often come to practice with her.

"I'm interested in teaching children, especially," she remarks. Sounding much like her mentor Dong Ja Yang, she adds, "I think the discipline that taekwondo can offer young people helps them to be strong enough to ward off the temptations that they face on the street."

The oldest of the three medalists (33), she graduated from Howard in 1977 with a major in human nutrition and food. Her former husband, John Holloway, was a national and international taekwondo champion while a Howard student and now runs his own taekwondo school in Silver Spring, Md. Given this dual heritage, how do the three Holloway children feel about all this taekwondo stuff?

"They all do taekwondo, also. They're not all enthusiastic about it," answers their mother. "Baaqia hates it," she says with amusement of her 10-year-old daughter who is totally engrossed in a book during this conversation. "Shadia is indifferent," she says of her 9-year-old daughter who regards the conversation with some interest. "Rami loves it. You can't keep him down," she says of her 4-year-old son who, on cue, demonstrates some fancy kicks and punches along with a bit of acrobatics, grinning all the while.

Sharon Jewell, the 28-year-old bronze medalist, seems to have changed her life the most since the Olympics.

"I've been doing a lot of public speaking since I've been back," she explains in a phone interview from her family home in Little Rock, Ark., where she's stopped off for a visit. To elementary and high school students, she delivers a message about the importance of self-esteem and self-motivation, of academics going along with athletics, of furthering their education and staying away from the drug scene, she says.

Jewell, who graduated from Howard in 1985 with a major in sociology, says her plans for the near future do not include returning to her old sales job at a suburban Washington, D.C., department store. Instead, she says, she'll be working on drug prevention programs with different police departments, continuing the speaking engagements and, as of next September, attending law school.

"Even though taekwondo is a sport, if you utilize it right it gives you the opportunity to open doors for what you want to do," she believes. "I guess you could use the three of us as an example of that."

Yet that wasn't why they took up the sport, one that has drawn increasing numbers of women participants not only



Lynnette Love soon after receiving her medal.



Debra Holloway (right) in action at the Olympics.



Sharon Jewell with young fans.

in the U.S. but worldwide. Nor when they initially took up the sport did they have any inkling it would literally enable them to see the world. Jewell, for instance, has competed in championships in Surinam, Ecuador, Denmark, Spain and four times in South Korea. In December, she, Love, Holloway and most of the 13 other members of the U.S. Olympic taekwondo team were in Peru for the Pan American taekwondo championships.

While the three women's paths to the ancient Korean martial art were different, once they became involved they seemed to have experienced a similar spark of recognition: this is it. Their stories:

□ Shortly after her graduation from high school, Love, a former basketball player, was looking for a way to stay fit. Driving past a school with an open door, she noticed people doing jumping kicks. Intrigued, she stopped in and talked to the instructor. Thus began her serendipitous introduction to taekwondo.

In 1985 she was working in New York City, practicing taekwondo and taking modern dance classes in the evenings, when she learned that taekwondo would be in the Olympics in 1988. She decided to come to Washington to train with the strongest taekwondo club and under the strongest coach she knew.

If taekwondo achieves full-fledged Olympic status in 1992, she plans to compete. If it's still just a "demonstration sport," she isn't quite sure. Then she adds, "I think it would be very difficult not to compete in taekwondo because I've been doing it for over 13 years. In order for me to keep it going, even in my memory, I have to teach children. I have to give everything that I've learned back. I can't see myself just sitting it on the shelf."

□ Holloway's introduction to taekwondo was more routine. She had studied it as a Howard student, with motherhood gave it up, and then resumed it as a way to get some exercise. "Once I really got involved, after that first year, I knew it would always be a part of my life," she says.

She stuck with it even after suffering a facial fracture last year during a match at the world taekwondo championships in Spain. "That was a very serious injury," she says. "A rare injury. It really made me reconsider whether I was going to continue. After weighing the accident factor I figured the Olympic goal was important enough for me to pursue it."

Postscript: in her final Olympic match she had to fight with a broken little finger on her left hand. She'd broken it in the previous match and reportedly tried to put it back in place herself, unsuccessfully. She had to have surgery in Korea but, she says, "it's doing well."

Holloway lost the gold to a competitor from Taiwan. Asked how she felt at the time, she answers, "There was the joy in having succeeded this far, the disappointment of not winning the gold, the relief that it was over. I'm not dissatisfied with my performance because it was the best that I had to work with at that time. If I chose to retire now from competition because of demands of personal life then I want to be happy with my performance and not have to wish that I could have/would have done this, this or that."

□ Jewell initially took up taekwondo on a bet 12 years ago. She explains: "Every year my sister and I would meet some friends from Virginia at national NAACP conventions. They were into the martial arts and my sister and I were into classical ballet. So we agreed to show them some ballet movements in

order to help give a little more grace to their art and they agreed to show us some self-defense techniques and some of the basic kicks of their art. We bet that we would go home and take up the other's discipline and when we saw each other the following year we would see which one had taken it up and stuck with it. I won the bet."

She came to Howard on an academic and track scholarship, took taekwondo as a class, found out there also was a taekwondo club and started "sneaking" down to club practice, she says. "Coach [William] Moultrie [her track coach] found out about it and it was like, 'Well, now, you're an athlete; you have a track scholarship; and we don't want you to injure your feet; so cease and desist the taekwondo.'"

"So I stopped for a little while and then started sneaking down to practice again. I got caught a couple of times. I think the big break was when I actually invited Coach Moultrie to one of our tournaments and he said, 'O.K., you're not going to bruise your feet; I see you know what you're doing.' He pretty much gave me, I guess, his 'blessing' in taekwondo and track."

While Jewell is disappointed not to have won the gold (a Dutch competitor did), she is philosophical about it. "I guess it was not my day. Maybe in 1992. If all goes well—health goes well, training goes well—God willing, I'll be there." □