



## #22: The Fastest Man from Humble

The Texas Tornado! The Texas Flyer! The Dixie Flyer! These were the names that the sporting world bestowed upon Claude Odell Bracey, Jr., the fastest man to come from Humble. Bracey was a track star from Humble High School. Upon his graduation in 1926, he enrolled at the Rice Institute (now Rice University) as an engineering student. But it was his ability as a sprinter that gained him national prominence. At 6 feet, 160 pounds, Lacey was a lanky fellow, but he was a natural runner. In high school, he was fast yet suffered from a slow start in races. Training under Rice track coach Ernie Hjertborg improved his running abilities, and he was soon recognized at the national level. Bracey was a jewel to the Rice Institute athletic program, and was their first prominent athlete.

Running for the Rice Owls, Lacey won both the 100-yard and 220-yard sprints at the 1928 NCAA Men's Track and Field Championships. Thus, he became Rice's first national intercollegiate champion. He qualified for the U. S. Olympic Team, and traveled with them to the 1928 Summer Olympics in Amsterdam. He ended up placing 5th in the semi-finals of the 100-meter race, becoming the first Olympian from Rice, and from Humble! Compared to the average student at Rice, Bracey was more of a recluse than one who thrived in fame. He seldom left the campus, except mostly to visit his parents or make a trip downtown and back. He never wore formal clothes, didn't dance, and only dated one or two girls. Also, surprising, he didn't heavily train, and spent his summer vacationing rather than practicing running. He said running came naturally for him as long as he took care of himself and ate reasonably. In 1929, he tied the world record of 9.5 in the 100-yard sprint, and then the next day beat the record with 9.4. On March 30, 1929, major (and minor) newspapers across the country made mention of Bracey's breaking of the world record with his 9.4-second run. Legendary Notre Dame football coach Knute Rockne said, "Bracey is a streak." Adding that, "He is as good as any of them off the marks and runs the last 40 yards of the '100' faster than any man I ever saw."

Bracey left Rice in 1930 without a degree, but continued to run. He attempted to qualify for the 1932 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. He did well in the first two trials, but suffered an appendicitis attack and was not able to compete in the third qualifying trial. He retired from running, and married Estelle Rawls from Louisiana at the end of 1932. By 1939, he had divorced Estelle, and married his second wife, Anna Bess Singleton. The couple moved to Buckeye, Arizona, where Bracey worked for the Harold Goodman Sheet Metal Works Company. Sadly, Bracey died at the young age of 31 in September 1940. He was at home when his gun accidentally discharged, killing him instantly. He left behind a wife and 10-month old daughter. He was buried in Bellville, Texas, where his parents had lived. His achievements as a runner were honored in 1970 when he was inducted into the Rice Athletic Hall of Fame.