



April 1, 1933 -- February 2, 2009

### Dr. Donnis Thompson Highlights:

- International track & field star competitor and Coach of the U.S. National Women's Track Team, where she coached hundreds of athletes, including nine Olympians, world and national recorder holders and six participants in the Pan American Games.
- Worked with Representative Patsy Mink to craft the Title IX legislation that opened opportunities for women and girls sports participation.
- A trailblazing pioneer who was the first Women's Director of Athletics at the University of Hawaii. Under her leadership, the UH program grew from a two-sport, one-scholarship program with a \$5,000 budget to a 12-sport program with a budget of over \$4 million and athletic scholarships of \$1.5 million.
- A member of the University of Hawaii Sports Hall of Honor, inducted in 1988.
- A member of the Hawaii Hall of Fame, inducted on February 6, 2007.
- Served as Hawaii's first woman Superintendent of Education and authored the innovative "Vision of Excellence", a ten year blueprint for public education.
- Author of three books on track and field.
- A past Chair of the AIAW National Track and Field committee.
- 30 year career at the University of Hawaii, retired in 1991.

### **Challenge overcome**

Dr. Thompson stands at the starting point of a spectrum, where the very concept of serious women's collegiate sports on par with the men's did not even exist. At the other end of that spectrum are female athletes today who have no concept of life without sports. Dr. Thompson herself said, she was "hiding" from continuing a battle for women's sports when her fledgling track and field program at UH was canceled even though the team finished third at the nationals with three All-Americans. She retreated to her research work and concentrated on moving toward her personal goal of a full professorship at the university. She was completely focused until a navel got in her way. A female student knocked on her door, in tears because she had been kicked out of swim class for showing her navel. Dr. Thompson quickly called the medical school to ask the difference between a women's navel and a man's. That's ridiculous, she was told. Dr. Thompson already knew that, but it was

the answer that sent her fully into the fight. She remembers thinking, “This was discrimination on campus. It was like a spear that went through me. I said, I can’t hide anymore. Women have the opportunity to participate and this is ridiculous. I was a victim and other women were victims and it was just wrong. Someone had to speak out.” That “speaking out” led her to organize students and colleagues along with high school teachers to take their fight to the legislature. The funds they won were the beginning of the Wahaine sport program as we know it today.

### **The passion and vision that drives Dr. Thompson**

She had an amazing personal strength and commitment that is reflected in everything she did even to her final days. Of the program she built at UH she said, “it was built on dignity with a lot of help and the community embraced it.” Moving through life with dignity and a love for community epitomizes Dr. Donnis Thompson.