

A History

Around the Course and Down the Track with “Doc”

A Conversation with

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“Native American Perspectives on Life and Coaching”

Doc: Who were the early pioneers of Native American Coaches in NM?

Daniel: As I was growing up, Joe Cajero was a pioneer coach of Native Americans. He had a running club in the 60’s known as the Jemez Running Club. We attended races all over New Mexico, races in Dulce, Father’s Day Runs, etc.

Bruce: For me, the early pioneers were actual athletes I would hear about—those many athletes I would hear about from the far and immediate past.

Mike: I am sure there were plenty of Native American coaches in all sports in Indian country in New Mexico before my time. I can speak of some coaches in my earliest recollection. In baseball at the Albuquerque Indian School was a gentleman by the name of Sam Arquero, he was from Cochiti. I remember him when the AIS came up to play us at St. Catherine’s Indian School. Then, another name associated with AIS was a Mr. Herman Agoyo Cata, San Juan. Further back in the late 40’s was a gentleman named Joseph Nicodemus Montoya from San Juan Pueblo (Okay-Owingah) who was listed as a coach/band teacher. My mother said he was a coach and band instructor at St. Michaels Indian Mission School in St. Michaels, Arizona, where I lived for a short time. Mr. Montoya was my grandfather.

Doc: As you were growing up, what do you remember that lent itself to your Native American heritage and the cross-over to the sports of cross country and track and field?

Daniel: I started running as a young child. Running alongside my two older brothers, Leo, who was an excellent runner in hurdles; my other brother Tito, who was a sprinter, would run from the south of the village where we had our sheep corral. In our tradition in the fall we have “foot races” which determine who is the fastest runner in a short distance of ½ mile to 2 miles.

Bruce: Running is a part of our culture, and it is so synonymous with track/cross country here in New Mexico and in the Southwest. Every tribe has some connection with running. It’s imbued in everything we do. I think every tribe and family have stories of runners in their past which makes up a huge part of who we are. So, going into this arena of sport was a very natural progression.

Mike: My elementary and grade school years were spent in Bluewater, NM, Laguna Day School and Los Lunas, NM. I cannot remember any one thing regarding running, and because my father was a migrant seasonal worker, we were constantly moving; and consequently, the Native cultural upbringing was primarily through my mother and occasional visits back to Old Laguna Pueblo. I do remember a boy running after the school bus one day in Bluewater and thought, what an awesome feat, just to run all that distance. He might have been a fourth or fifth grader; getting on the bus, he was sweating, but hardly out of breath. Another running related event happened at Los Lunas Grade School when our 6th grade teacher, Mr. Vivian Otero, because of an assembly running late, asked me and another student to go out to the playground field and stake out a running oval. He excused us from the assembly and told us where to find the hammer and stakes. I believe we staked out a 2 to 3-hundred-meter oval. I remember running the circuit a couple times before the rest of the students came out – so much for my introduction to track and CC.

Doc: Who were the Native American coaches or individuals who had a strong influence or mentored you?

Daniel: Growing up as a child attending the meeting halls, I listened to the elders speak of running, which is a part of life; they would send runners to other villages as a messenger, since there weren’t cars, bus, or shuttles back then.

Bruce: Most coaches who had a strong influence on me were non-native. My junior high and high school coaches were Fidel Torres, Ray Serna, Benny Gallegos, Leland Abreu, and Rudy Pacheco. A Native coach today is Steve Gachupin who I would read about as a kid; and I still get to see during the CC season. Another one is Mike Gorospe. It’s always so good to share his good-nature! As for athletes, Frank Shorter and Billy Mills were an amazing inspiration to me in addition to members of the Colorado Track Club. Collectively, it was the many teammates, fellow runners, and the athletes whom I have coached who have been a huge source of influence to me.

One person that comes to mind is our PE coach at the Intermountain School in Brigham City, Utah. Between our 1st and 2nd grades, about 30 of us were sent to summer school in

Brigham City. We had never been away. It was a boarding school, and we later learned that it was run in military fashion – including marches down these very long hallways to breakfast and dinner. Then, there was the playroom – with loads of massive marble bags, bright red scooters, and toys of every imaginable color. It was also the first time I experienced what toothpaste tasted like! I do not remember our PE coach's name. What I do remember is how he would take us out to the track and have us run one time around. The track seemed so immense and time literally stood still when we were making our way around it. It was my first memory of a track. In 2000, I drove to the Olympic Trials in Sacramento via Oregon, Washington state, and into California. I stopped in Brigham City and actually found the remnants of Intermountain School. It had been demolished and all that remained were outlines of the foundations. I actually was able to find where the track once was, and here I was now a high school track coach.

Another person who comes to mind is Benny Romero of Taos Pueblo. He was a trackman who would tell me stories of the great Adolph Plummer at University of New Mexico, and was the longtime PE teacher at Taos Day School. Though he did not coach me per se, I would go to his office in junior high, where he always had shelves of books and magazines like Scholastic Coach; and I would read these articles about training methods and of high school athletes in far away places like California and Illinois. I would be reading about the David Merricks and Terry Williams of the era (high school stars) in places like Lompoc High School or South Eugene High School. I would spend hours pouring over these articles, and he would even let me take some home to read. Many years later, a member of the Lompoc High team named Roger Hanson (who I had read about) and I ended up on the Colorado University team together during my freshman year!

Other immediate people who influenced me were some of the older guys from Taos Pueblo – the late Bernard Lujan who held the Taos High school record for 2 miles (9:57); Marcelino Trujillo – record holder for the mile (4:36); and John Archuleta 880 record holder – (1:59.2). I tried so hard to break those records and came up short. Others are my older cousins Sam Gomez and the late Ned Lawrence Gomez. They were so fast at our footraces! Then there were my teammates including Louis Archuleta (there are so many to name). Another one who comes to mind is the late Harry Mondragon (Taos/Laguna) from Santa Fe High. He and Ric Rojas had these epic duels in the sand that Ric still talks about today.

Then, there were the legends whom I would hear about, those stories coming out of Albuquerque Indian School and Santa Fe Indian School, for example, the Lujan brothers – Big Jim, Henry and Jimmy K, who all ran at Albuquerque Indian School in the 30's, and who also all ended up at Bataan in WWII.

Mike: My earliest recollection of a track and field related coach was at Los Lunas High School in the early 50's – the Coach's name was Nick Madrid. I marveled at his attention to detail as he coached a high school jumper, measuring and marking the jumper's distance

at the cross bar. For some reason, I was at the high school before classes started in the morning. Coach Madrid's patience and instruction with the jumper in the "Western Roll" technique was real intriguing to watch. I also watched a high school meet there when the Albuquerque Indian School participated and won the medley relay. The anchor was an Apache Indian, Dominic Peso, from Mescalero, New Mexico, coached by the legendary Coach Ken Freberg. I did my student teaching under Coach Freberg in the fall of 1965 in Physical Education and Chemistry under Lowell Smith.

My first encounter with a Native American coach was a gentleman by the name of Wilfred Toya who was Laguna/Jemez, graduated from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona. Coach Toya was a PE teacher and coached flag football, basketball, and track at Gila Vista J.H. School in Yuma, Arizona. In high school at St. Catherine's Indian School, Mr. Joe Abeyta (Laguna/Isleta) coached baseball and basketball. In track and field, Coach Bob Chavez (Cochiti Pueblo) coached me all four years. I certainly admired both coaches; and in Coach Chavez's case, I saw a real sense of duty and commitment. He worked full time with the NM Highway Department at the airport in Santa Fe, but found time to coach full time in the mornings and after school. Mind you, I was not much of an athlete, barely a couple inches over 5 feet; Coach Chavez had me high jumping, pole vaulting, and middle distance running – a '62' in the 440 and a 2:14 in the 880. At St. Joseph's College on the Rio Grande (University of Albuquerque '66), I had Coach Ernie Smith, Dr. Walter Neiderburger, and Mr. Joe Kloeppe in baseball. I happened to be in the gym in the spring of my freshman year when Coach Kloeppe asked me, "Aren't you going out for baseball?" I had a glove in my vehicle, and so I played collegiate baseball for four years. I can say this with all honesty because I know it can't be true: I'm the only Native American to play and letter in college baseball all four years and graduate.

After high school and college, I had several Native American coaching colleagues and associates whom I greatly admire. Coach Emmitt Hunt at Laguna-Acoma (Laguna) cross country and track and Coach Erwin Sice (Laguna) who I recommended to the sisters at St. Catherine's coached cross country, basketball, baseball, and track. Coach Francis Abeyta, deceased, (Laguna-Isleta/Santa Clara) baseball, basketball, cross country, and track at St. Catherine's. Coach Mike Parton football, basketball, and baseball at Albuquerque/Santa Fe Indian schools. Numerous other Native coaches are close associates and friends of mine, such as, Coaches Dan Chinana, Edwin Shije, Joe Cajero, and Steve Gachupin all at Jemez Pueblo. Randy Hunt from Laguna and Joe Aragon (Acoma) coached at Laguna and Grants. Then, there are Mike Daney at SIPI and currently Joe Calabaza and Ed Aragon, Santo Domingos, who both came from our SFIS running programs doing great coaching jobs.

Doc: How did your family influence you to get involved in cross country and track and field?

Daniel: As a child, my uncle Lizardo, who also was a sprint runner, encourage me to run; he would say running is a part of life, our tradition.

Bruce: When we were kids, our mom who was Diné, would take us to Navajo land in Sawmill and Ft. Defiance. One evening (I was about 7 years old), my uncle Lafe Damon took me on a run down to this sheep corral and back. I think it was more of a dare to see if I could finish. It was not more than ½ mile away; however, it seemed so far away. I experienced cross country pain for the very first time and remember trying to finish by the setting sun. Family stories included my late uncles Gilbert and Tom Damon (Albuquerque Indian School graduates and Korean War veterans) who were apparently quite athletic. My mom used to say that I took after them.

My greatest influence and support were my parents Tom and Doris Gomez. They were always so supportive and constantly praying for us when we were growing up. They all wove a web of thankful influence on me.

Mike: I do not think my parents ever encouraged or discouraged me to participate in extracurricular activities. Actually, it was rather difficult, as my Dad was a seasonal farm laborer, a vegetable field share cropper, and a citrus grove care taker. We picked grapes, plums, apricots, pears, peaches, and strawberries from Glendale, Arizona all the way up to Fairfield and Yuba City - Marysville, California. I think Coach Toya in Yuma, Arizona spoke on my behalf to find time to participate. Then, St. Catherines in Santa Fe, New Mexico where athletic involvement was simple because of boarding situation. We found some time, but the working sunup to sundown mentality from my mother and father contributed to my work ethic.

Doc: Did you ever face any obstacles due to your Native American Heritage?

Daniel: As a Native American, there are always lots of obstacles you face every day, could be a little misunderstanding to a complaint.

Bruce: The obstacles I faced were to me more challenges. However, coming from a small town and going to a school like Colorado University was a big adjustment. Making those small steps and passing classes in a sea of high academic achievers was hard, yet so fascinating.

Mike: No obstacles from the cultural or Native heritage aspects, but that part of my growing up lagged somewhat. When I came back to high school and college, I stayed with relatives in Laguna Pueblo; and so I was exposed to and participated in some of Laguna's Native cultural and traditional activities.

Doc: Did you ever face prejudices or bias as an athlete or coach being Native American?

Daniel: Once we were faced with prejudice in Indiana in the 70's when the white runners asked us where we found our uniforms and if we had stolen them from other white runners? We all just chuckled.

Bruce: As far as prejudices and bias, I was accepted into the running community more than anything, so this was not an issue. I arrived at Colorado University on a bus (my late parents took a collection and saved up to get me a bus ticket and to have cash to get to school), carrying a small suitcase with 2 pairs of pants and shirts with my old training shoes. I attended CU/Boulder on an AIPC (All Indian Pueblo Council) academic scholarship. It was not an athletic scholarship. While at Colorado University in the 70's, I was fortunate to train with some of the nation's finest runners including Olympic Marathon Champion Frank Shorter and members of the Colorado Track Club (Pablo Vigil, Ric Rojas, Ted Castaneda, Steve Flanagan to name some). During my freshman year, I came under the tutelage of coaches Ken Swenson, who was the American record holder at 800 meters at the time, and Don Myers, who was one of the top Colorado University track athletes in the 60's. I was certainly not a star when I arrived at Colorado University (4:44 mile and 10:20 for 2 miles) compared to those with 4:08-4:16 and 8:57-9:20 credentials on the team. However, I found a foothold, a means of staying in school, and in attaining a college degree in a very welcoming environment. The running community was so good to me. It was because of running that I was able to graduate, and I am forever grateful to the sport and to all whose paths I've crossed and have helped me on the way. This journey continues on through my coaching and in organizing running events. I continue to meet interesting and wonderful people through running. Last fall, September 2016, there was a cross country runners of 60's, 70's, and 80's reunion at CU/Boulder, and I always wanted to thank the guys on that team in 1974 for their impact they made on me that fall. It was a moving personal moment when I was able to do that at the reunion.

Mike: I do not think I ever experienced any negativity because of my Native heritage; I may have imagined it somewhat while in US Naval Reserves. My CO did not approve of my Sunday drilling time because of my coaching on Saturdays. I received unsatisfactory ratings on my evals.

Doc: What are the "positives" in our sports today for our Native American athletes and coaches?

Daniel: The positives for the future are that Natives have always been strong runners and emerge at a young age to adulthood. Athletes run for their wellness, to represent their school, community, family name, and keep the tradition alive.

Bruce: The positives are that there are more opportunities for young people. The reservoir of knowledge and culture is there and will continue to contribute to the sport. There is certainly a lot of room for more coaches and my hope is that more young people will consider coaching/teaching as a career track. It's a good one and there is so much more that can be done.

Mike: The participation and career opportunities are unlimited – a most rewarding experience for all athletes in all sports as well as coaches – the realm of running, however, is special because by its very nature running requires a high degree of self-motivation and

discipline which ingrains into the runner a self-starter mentality, and I think running in its pure sense parallels the type of individual a person is – self-starter, genuine self-motivation, discipline, strong sense of character, and a high degree of self-worth and confidence. With their running accomplishments, these people are a positive force in our society – hopefully, good citizens and good careers.

Doc: What do you predict for the future of cross country and track and field for the Native American athletes and coaches in “The Land of Enchantment”?

Daniel: Coaches have strong faith in running and traditions. It comes from the heart within yourself. You can strive for a college scholarship in running and achieve your goals while you get your education and keep your tradition alive making for a bright future for Native American athletes and coaches of cross country and track and field in the “Land of Encantment.”

Bruce: The future is more a matter of a continuum – of keeping this tradition going. There certainly is more that can be achieved. The history of New Mexico running is steeped with names that I remember as a kid when my interest in the sport began. Those names like Sando, Magdalena, Waquie, Armijo, and Neha, (to name a few), evoked a sense of awe in me and still continues to do so to this day. Then there are those whose names we do not know. Those who sacrificed and helped in times of need and periods like the Pueblo Revolt who were no doubt brave, quiet, and strong. This will all continue.

Mike: If you think about it, in the late 70’s, we were throwing a softball for the girls as a field event; now, we have them throwing the javelin. Mid 90’s, we introduced the triple jump, and then came the pole vault for the girls. There will be changes; what, I don’t know, maybe, replace the 800M relay with distance relay like 4X800M or a 4X1600. Eventually, we’ll have a version of 400M hurdles for boys and girls. In cross country, we may lengthen the distances of the boys and girls courses – 6k for the girls and an 8K for the boys (something similar to the college ranks). We may see more dual meets, rather than large invitational. How about pre-state qualifying sectionals or regional cross country races?

Doc: What is your secret to “success” as a coach?

Daniel: Secret success as a coach? “You have to love to run.” Discipline.

Bruce: I feel that I do not have any secrets to success. For one, success can have many meanings. If anything, the least we can do, however, (without sounding too cliché), is always “doing from the heart,” to always be kind, and to love these young people for who they are. It is also important to stay humble when you win, and to still be gracious when expectations come up short. There are lessons in winning and in losing. That is the mark of a true champion.

Mike: Coach, you and I know there are no secrets – no short cuts in this profession – like the comments in question No. 7, hard work, dedication, motivation, discipline, passion and drive, is what we try to instill in each of our participants. I like to say we start from the ground up with an individual. Physically teach them the basics, warming up, stretching, start with small, slow intervals and gradually work up, increase the distance, increase the time, then, when they're ready, start the speed work. Mentally, work on the individual's approach to running, reinforce constantly the mind set with positive motivations, and praise. Build confidence. Know your participant's strengths and weaknesses, then customize your approach. Out work your opponents, if that's possible.

Doc: What do you want your legacy to be?

Daniel: My legacy? I have to laugh at this one. I said I could just hear my former athletes, who I coached at Jemez Valley High School, saying "Coach Chinana is mean, he's always yelling at us, go faster, do it like this..." That is my legacy, with a chuckle. Or could it be that as a coach, I've been successful in bringing home five State Boys Championships, four State Girls Championships, 12 District Boys Championships, 16 District Girls Championships, nine Coaches of the Year Awards, last, but not least, 2016 NMHSCA Hall of Fame Award.

Bruce: I wish my legacy to be that I was kind.

Mike: Figuratively, I carried the flaming torch, the Pueblo Revolt's Knotted Cord, the St. Catherines, the St. Josephs, Albuquerque/Santa Fe Indians School's relay baton; let someone, Native or otherwise be the outgoing runner. I ran hard, I ran fast, I ran with a clear mind and a good heart, hopefully, imparting good will and peace toward everyone, especially my immediate and extended family. My running path has been made beautiful with the love shared with all my contacts; and as I approach the exchange zone, the outgoing runner better be in acceleration zone.

We thank Daniel (Tobacco Mound), Bruce (Morning Walking), and Mike (Little Mountain) for their thoughts and service to the sports of Cross Country and Track and Field in "The Land of Enchantment" and to all Native American coaches, athletes, and families who helped us all get to where we are today.

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