

LEST WE FORGET

By

Ron Singleton

I do not know how many times I have been asked to write down some of the events that I have experienced during my fifty years of track and field endeavors. The following is an attempt to do justice to the many requests.

I started my track career at Chico, California in 1955. We had two meets and I remember them well. I was a sprinter and long jumper then. The term long jump was not what we call the event in those days. It was known as the broad jump. Title IX has long since changed that and many other aspects of our sport. I remember running bare foot at the meets. One of the reasons I was sort of fast was because we ran on sand tracks and they were hot! You could not let your feet stay in one place very long.

The long jump board was a six inch width 2x4. You had to have good eye sight to see it much less hit it without scratching. That started my love affair with track and field.

We moved around a lot during 1956 and finally settled in Hobbs. I had gone to school there until we moved briefly to Tatum and then to Chico. The only thing I can remember about the ninth grade track season was in Ft. Sumner. I had to run the 220 yard dash. If you had been to Ft. Sumner in the early years that meant that you ran the full 220 yards down the straight-a-way. Interesting race, I did not think it would ever end. That was one of the odd races that we used to run in the 50's.

I have been blessed with truly great coaches in my career. In 1957 I met the first of the two men that had a tremendous influence on my life. That would be Gene Wells. He was a great coach and role model.

He had just come to Hobbs from Oklahoma and was about to make a name for himself on the track. My first day in track my sophomore year he walked me out to Hobb's Bermuda grass track. That's right, you had to move the track before track meets. Coach informed me that I was going to run the 880 yard run for the Eagles that year. I quickly told him I would die if I had to run that far, after all I was a sprinter and a broad jumper. His great influence prevailed and I won our first meet with a blazing 2:10. I, also, ran on the mile relay that won. I was hooked! This was during the time that our classification was A and our District consisted of Carlsbad, Roswell, Artesia, NMMI, Clovis, Lovington, Portales, and Tucumcari. We stayed within that area except for the State Meet in Albuquerque, some things never change.

I would like to tell you how Coach Wells gave out track shoes during this time. We were told to go to the equipment room and get shoes. All the track spikes in those days were solid black Riddels or Wilson shoes. All of the shoes were in a big box and you had to sort through the box and find two, preferably a right and left one, that fits. Shoes in those days were very unique. The spikes were one inch long and permanent. You threw the shoes away and got another pair when the spikes wore down.

The track meets could get interesting during the 50's. We had telephone poles on the inside of the track. I remember a fuse box that stuck out at head level just as you started into the North curve at Hobbs. You could ring your bell if you did not pay attention, but the best one was at Clovis. Coach Wells called me aside at Clovis to tell me to watch out for the telephone pole that was in lane one. I thought he was trying to be funny until during a race I saw the lines take a sideways run and there in the middle of lane one was a telephone pole. You did not want to get caught on the inside of the pack coming up that straight-a-way or you were dead meat.

Clovis, also, had a field house that sat inside the North end of the track. Many athletes that went into the curve ahead were not ahead when they came out from behind the field house. We called that tactics in those days. Anyway, it encouraged you to run fast during that part of the race.

The State Meet was held in Albuquerque at Zimmerman Stadium. It was the University of New Mexico's track. I think the student union now sits on that site. I ran a lot of races on that track. The fans got to sit on steel bleachers on the West side. You could fry an egg on them in May. The finish line was at the middle of the track and we ran yards not meters back then. Zimmerman Stadium was a real cinder track. Let's take a minute and talk about getting ready for a track meet. You had to line and mark the track with chalk. That could be a real experience if you could not pull the chalk bucket in a straight line. You had to get the pole vault pit ready. That meant that you turned the sand over and threw some hay in to break the fall. We did not vault high in those days. It never failed that you got everything done and it would rain or the wind would blow and you would have to do it all again. All weather tracks were still a few years away.

Highland High School was the track power during my high school days. They could split their team and go to Amarillo and Alamogordo and win both meets. They were real good. That meant they had a good coach, my next mentor to be.

After two 880 yard state championships I got to go to UNM to run for Hugh Hackett. If ever there was a legend in track and field in New Mexico, it would have to be Coach Hackett. He put the UNM program on the map, and he did it with New Mexico kids and a liberal sprinkling of outsiders.

We had our Adolph Plummers, Larry Kennedys, Clarence Robinsons, Bernie Rivers, Dickie Howards, and other out of state athletes but the majority of my teammates were from New Mexico. We did not do too badly. We beat teams like; USC, Kansas, Abilene Christian, and others during those years.

I left UNM and came to Carlsbad to teach and coach forty-three years ago. I have been involved ever since. I have a million different stories, some humorous and some serious, to tell my grandsons. It has been a great run and I hope that it continues a little longer. Well maybe a lot longer.

I do need to say something before I close about cross country. We did not have cross country while I was in high school. My first experience was when I went to UNM and Coach Hackett informed me that I was going to run cross country in the fall; what an experience. I can see now what the sport did for me and what it does for all those that run it now. It gave me strength and endurance to face any task that life can throw at me and it has served me well during my forty-three years of coaching. The sport actually started the year after I graduated from high school. I was looking through the 2005 State Program last week and noticed that the first State Champion in class A was Lloyd Goff, and the second was John Baker, and the third was Tony Sandoval. What a small world. On the wall in my PE office is a picture of the 1963 Western Athletic Conference Cross Country Champions; from left to right they are; Ron Singleton (Hobbs) 9; Lloyd Goff (Highland) 7; Tony Sandoval (Albuquerque High) 13; John Baker (Manzano) 3; and out of stater; Ed Coleman (New Jersey) 1. What a small world.

Cherish your memories and do not forget to share them when you get a chance...

CHAPTER TWO- Bud this is for you.

While visiting with a close friend, Gwin " Bud" Henry at the first Lobo Reunion last year, he mentioned his Father's illustrious track career. Bud's Father actually won the 220 yard dash and was third in the 100 yard dash at the National Championship held in Louisiana during 1910. Bud relates that his Grand-father sold two mules to get the money for Gwin Sr. to go and run in the meet. What is unique was that they used a small spade to dig starting holes on the track for their starts. Gwin Sr. took a false start and was penalized by having to move back one stride and redig his hole, again. After calming down he proceeded to place third in the 100 yard dash with a two stride penalty. Something to think about, instead of one false start and you are out penalty in New Mexico. What a privilege to count the Henry's as friends.

At the start of my article I mentioned two great coaches that I have been associated with as an athlete. I would be remiss if I did not mention a third. Although he probably was not a paid assistant to Hugh Hackett he was still a dynamic influence in my life. I am referring to Gwin " Bud " Henry. He was always there and could be counted on for anything the track program needed.

Thanks Bud for all you have done and continue to do for Lobo Track and Field

