**50 years of Men’s Track and Field thru the eyes of former coaches**

**Don Hermsen – Head Coach (1963 – 1971)**

I started the program for boys track in 1963 because I was the only staff member who had any interest and the administration (Ralph Buchmann) felt a school our size should have track and field. I was “the" coach until Larry McCready signed on in 1972. He came rolling onto campus in his flame throwing vette and was fresh out of the Los Angeles striders camp for Olympic hopefuls. It was hard to argue that he should not take over the program. Besides he had that smiley face and nobody wanted to piss him off.

 As I stated, Mr. Buchmann felt track would be a good thing for W.D. So in the spring of '63, you realize that's 50 yrs. ago, we put out the word and found about 15 athletes willing to be pioneers. Never did promise them any great knowledge, but did insist we would have fun! We learned together.

When we initiated the track program, our facilities were a patch of grass up on the hill. I found some info on laying out a 440 yd track, this was before internet, and I realized we had just enough room for a track with 110 yds. on the straight away and 110 yds. on the curves. I chalked the marks, hammered down some permanent marks and presto, our track emerged! We spent a lot of time figuring the lane adjustments for the staggered assignments, all done with a few kids and a 100 ft. tape. We were on a very tight budget, like $0. We wore old basketball uniforms and the kids bought their own sweats. Made for a rather rag-tag look, but the kids really enjoyed the opportunity to participate. Our pits for the High Jump and Pole Vault consisted of bales of hay, two deep for the high jump and three deep for the vault. We went to the saw mill in Graf and hauled multi loads of sawdust to fill the pits. Woodshop class made our original planting box for the vault and made our toe board for the shot put. Metal shop class welded a ring for the discus throw. I believe it’s still used for the Ring the football team runs threw to start the football games. For the hurdles, the school bought four hurdles and the rest we made in the shop using aluminum tubing, bent to shape and weighted with melted lead, acquired from tire shops. We never did paint them! Metal shop made us a brass shot, melting down brass fixtures acquired from local plumbers. Dave Barr, former shop teacher, made a form and poured the brass. It wasn’t quite right, so we had to melt some more lead and bore out the brass shot to get the proper weight. We started with one starting block (store bought) and one baton. I made our starting shells by collecting spent shells from various starters at meets. Popped out the old caps, reshaped them, filled them with black gun powder, and plugged them with paraffin. You always got a puff of smoke, sometimes a real BIG puff if the shells cross-fired in the gun, causing all the shells to go off. When we put in out Limestone Track, the layout was done by contractors and the new track was exactly over the old grass track. I did salvage the grass and sodded around my new house with it. 16 athletes with no assistant coaches. I usually averaged 20-25 athletes per season.

I don’t recall the exact number of meets we attended. We ran at Maquoketa, West Delaware, Waterloo Columbus, Panther Relays at SCI (State College of Iowa) (currently UNI), and Prairie Relays at CR. We hosted the EIC (Eastern Iowa Conference) meet because we had a ¼ mile lay-out on the grass.

Members from the 1963 team: this is as good as I can remember, Tony Wagner-shot and football throw. Cliff Pfab- shot and 440 and 220, Ron Soppe- sprints, Tom McQuillen- sprints, Gene Koelker- low hurdles, Terry Kerker- middle distance, Jerry Schueller- distance, Bill Pins- sprints and shot, Paul Biermann- high jump, Jim Ruden- 220 and 440, Rod Mozena- 440 and 220, Rich Hoeger- high jump, Bob Harris- hurdler, Dean McDermott-middle distance, Pat McCarthy- sprinter, and Pat Hall- pole vault.

 The football throw was a wide open event. We did the pole vault, using an aluminum pole, 400 sprint relay (55-55-110-220), high-low shuttle hurdle relay. Pole vault and high jump pits were sawdust, so the high jumpers did the Western Roll rather than the flop and pole vaulters came down feet first.

We didn’t put Drake on our schedule. State qualifiers: 1965= Jerry Schueller –mile- 4:27; 1966 or 1967= Jim Ruden – 440 – 50.2; 1968= Dean McDermott -880 – 2:01 & 440 – 50.4; 1968= Herb Astchgen – 100 & 200; 1969 or 1970= Dave Koerperich – 440 – 50.7

In the pole vault, Rick Knapp and Ron Kettleson were two pretty good vaulters. Bob Harris and Jerry Brown were tough in the high hurdles. Rich Hoeger was the best 1 legged high jumper, he made 5’5” on one leg. Rich was a Polio victim but had the courage to jump with one good (really good) leg!

At the District meet at Cedar Falls, Jerry Schueller was leading for 3 laps but a kid passed him in the front straight away and as the runner blew by him I could hear Jerry yell at him, “Bet you don’t win!” He was right!!! We had a pretty good 4 X 400 team at Cedar Falls expecting to medal but boredom set in as they had to wait for the final heat of the day. The final heat came and went by and WD was still waiting in the chute and the meet was over and it was time to go home.

Down at the Prairie Relays in CR, Bob Harris had 2nd fastest time in the prelims as he got beat by a kid from CR Jefferson. Bob was happy to be in line for a medal until at the start line, the Jefferson kid was asking everybody their best time and got to Harris and simply said I beat you in the prelims, so I guess I’ll just run for the record. Wrong words to say to a big red-head! Harris blew him away at the start and won by a sizable margin.

At Districts at Tipton in Herb Aschtgen’s big year, he qualified with fastest time in the prelims, so lane 3 on a six lane track was his. Before the finals, a down pour hit and lane 3 had a 2 inch lake settle in. Herb got out of the blocks in good shape, but slipped in the water and went down to a hand and knee about 20 yds out and went from 1st to 6th. Now he really turned on the jets and went on to win going away. Herb only ran his senior year, after transferring from Cascade. Bob Davidshofer told me I had to get him out because he was the fastest he ever saw. Well we did get Herb out but had to settle for runs in 110 & 200’s. He ran them back to back at one meet, but refused to go the 440. Herb was credited with 10.1 in the 100 for our school record, but really turned 9.7 on two occasions. At Maquoketa Valley, he ran 9.7 but the finish string was held at the girls shuttle hurdle finish which was about 1 ½ yds long. Herb also ran 9.7 at Manchester West Delaware on their new cinder track. The only problem was the officials were watching Tim Cannon, the West Delaware stud. They had him at 10.0, but didn’t see Herb cross about 3-5 yds ahead of him, so they gave herb 10.1 and second place. He ran a 21.8 at Maquoketa Valley on their 220 yd straight away. Herb ran 22.4’s on many other occasions. Herb placed fifth in the State indoor 55 yd run for his 1st run in a meet.

Our 1st runner to score at a State meet was Dean McDermott as he ran 2nd in the State meet at the old field house in Iowa City. We would have placed in the mile medley too, but terry Kerker ran into the final chute 1 lap early after leading to that point.

In a meet at Maquoketa, our throwers were exposed to great throwers from Preston. They came running over to tell me I had to come over and watch this little kid from Preston. He was 6’1” and 185 lbs., but he could deliver. Happened to be Al Feurbach, future Olympian.

**Larry McCready – Head Coach (1972-2009)**

I started coaching track and field at WD in the spring of 1972. I started with about 20 athletes and all of our meets were run away until about 1976. We would practice on the grass, on the streets, black top parking lot, and the halls. We were at the mercy of the weather every day. Around 1975 Steve Findley became my assistant coach and continued to coach until we both retired in 2009. In the summer of 1976, we built our agriculture lime track. Larry Fangmann, Jerry Spoden, Randy Ressler, Duane Calvert, and I built the 440 yard track. This was before track and field went to a metric system. The all-weather track was put in 2001. What an outstanding addition to Buchman Field. We owe many thanks to the Booster Club and alumni for the improved facilities at Western Dubuque High School.

In the late Seventies we started Bobcat Relays with six boy’s teams. The next year we added six girl’s teams and the meet continued for many years. When state qualifying went to performance results, we moved the meet to Dubuque Senior on Dalzell Field. When we got our all-weather track the meet came back to WD. The Bobcat relays continue today in two separate boys and girls meets because of scheduling issues.

 WD was in three conferences: The first Big Bend, second updated Big Bend and now the present WaMaC. We won two Big Bend Conference Meets. Many years we finished second to Central Clinton DeWitt. North Scott, and Pleasant Valley were very good in the first Big Bend.

 Our team members always numbered somewhere between 35-50 athletes. Those are good numbers I feel. With just two coaches it made practices interesting. When the boys and girls coaches divided to coach individual events we could do a better job. Our athletes worked hard and always competed at a high level. One of our goals as coach’s (McCready and Findley) was to coach all the school records and we did that except for the 200m Dash. We had the opportunity to coach two state champions: Bryan Featherston – 400m Hurdles and Ben Grant – 3200m Run. We had many Drake Relays qualifiers and State Meet qualifiers.

 I would like to thank all of the athletes, coaches, workers at home meets, parents, and administration for their support during the years we coached.

**Steve Findley – Assistant Coach (1975-2009)**

I started in 1975 when the assistant resigned at the semester. Coach McCready asked me to join him with the opportunity to coach on a grass track. 2nd year Coach McCready helped install an Ag lime track and then we hosted the first Bobcat relays. Ralph Buchman gave us the authority to run the meet as we wanted. Coach Hermsen was the start clerk and I was the finish clerk for 35 years. All-weather track made us better coaches as well as having better athletes. (In some cases)

Some track highlights: Carl Hartman was our first state qualifier in the 180 yd. lows. We stayed in Newton at my parents to save money. We had 2 state champs and numerous state place winners. The team of 1985 was strong in all events. We won all our meets but one, but we were in the 4A class and had tough state competition. The team of 2004 finished top 10 at state and was also strong in multiple events.

The coaches were very cooperative and made both the boys and girls programs fun to work with. Coaches Ross, Hermsen, Demmer, and Digmann were a tremendous help to both programs.

Some funny moments and there too many to list: Sprinter dived at the finish line because they put out a rope to strangle him, in the starting blocks and baton broke in half, in one meet we dropped the baton in all 3 short relays, our anchor runner dropped the baton in the 4 x 100 but still finished, our 2nd runner fell off the track as he turned to get the handoff and ran off the track, and at state going out and watch the jets take-off and land at the Des Moines Airport. Just some thoughts and as I reflect back I loved being assistant boys track coach at WD.