

Preface

Missed the greatest ever female athlete from Chico [Tonya (Alston) Burns]—CIF High Jump Champion, UCLA Track, walk on to UCLA women's basketball, NCAA High Jump Champion.

—Response by Chuck Sheley to the author's query about whether I had correctly identified all the Chico High School coaches and distance runners associated with the sports of track & field and cross country in the 1970s, who had been inducted into the *Chico Enterprise-Record* Athletic Hall of Fame. I omitted Tonya Alston who, although not a distance runner, deserves special mention for her accomplishments.

Photo Preface-1



Baton Pass from Chuck Sheley to Charlie Moseley (University of Alabama 4th NCAA 1962 high hurdles and long jump) at all-comers meet in Medford, Oregon, 1964. Gobi Track Club consisted of Siskiyou U.S. Forest Service Smokejumpers.

It would be disingenuous to write a book about distance running in Chico in the 1970s and not highlight the significant achievements and influence on this era by Coach Chuck Sheley. Chuck is a legendary figure in the world of running in northern California and rightly so. He was, when he started what would be a fifty-year coaching career, and

remains today, a focused, no-nonsense, all-business individual. If you phone him at home and get his recording, you will hear, “This is Chuck Sheley. Leave your message please.”

We, his athletes in the 1970s, generally knew that Chuck had been a hurdler. He was listed on the Chico High School Track & Field Record Board with a time of 19.3 for the 180-yard low hurdles (an event no longer run), and we knew that he had run a 49.2 second quarter mile while an athlete at Chico State. We did not know that the quarter mile capped off his senior year at Chico State in 1960, nor that he had competed in the NAIA national championships his freshman year, and the equivalent of today’s Division II the remaining three years. We also knew that he had a bum knee from being a former smoke jumper (someone who parachutes out of a plane to fight forest fires in remote areas), and thus could no longer run.

Photo Preface-2

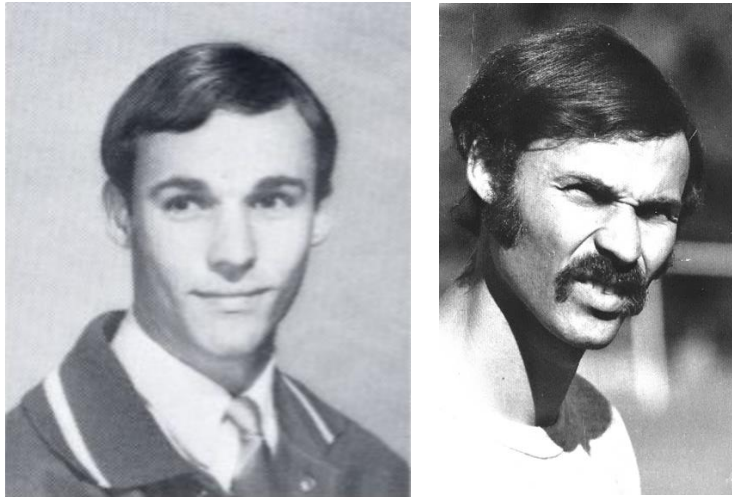


At left: Chuck Sheley in parachute harness, with helmet at the ready, being airlifted somewhere to “jump fire.” Right: Years later, Coach Sheley observing a track meet. Courtesy of Chuck Sheley and Dale Edson

When the decade of the 1970s began, Chuck was a physical education (PE) teacher at Chico Junior High School and also head of the PE Department. One of the other PE teachers, Keith Lockwood, had also been a smoke jumper, and there was an ex-Marine on the PE staff as well—all devoted to ensuring that we got our full allotment of exercise each day. In the fall of 1971, Chuck took over as head Chico High School Cross Country Coach from Jack Yerman, and in spring 1972, as head Track & Field Coach as well, while retaining his teaching

position at Chico Junior High School. When this occurred, Bob Noe, Chuck's assistant coach at Chico Junior High, assumed those duties, aided by Al Holzhey, a math teacher at the school, as assistant coach.

Photo Preface-3



At left: Chico State Wildcat Bob Noe, pictured in 1967 as a member of the Block "C" Society, composed of Varsity letter winners. He played baseball. Right: Coach Bob Noe, squinting in bright sunlight, and sporting the long sideburns and mustache style common among many young males in the 1970s.

The Record 1967 – Chico State Yearbook Collection, and courtesy of Bob Noe

Coach Yerman had earlier succeeded the legendary Mel Jones in these positions. Melvin Richard Jones had served as a Radarman aboard the amphibious attack transport USS *Mellette* (APA-156) in World War II, and earned the Purple Heart Medal for being wounded in combat. Following the war, Jones first attended Marin Junior College, then transferred to Chico State, where he participated in baseball, track, and boxing, becoming a Far Western Conference boxing champion in 1950. Mel was the founder of the Chico Invitational Track Meet in 1958 and in 1998 the Chico High Track was dedicated as the "Mel Jones Track and Field Complex." Mel passed away on September 3, 2019, at age 94, greatly beloved in the Chico community.

An even more legendary figure at Chico High in the 1970s was Olympic Gold Medalist Jack Yerman. Then a history teacher, he had, years earlier in 1960, teamed with Earl Young, Glenn Davis, and Otis Davis at the Rome Olympics to win the 4 x 400-meter relay in 3:02.2. While I was a student at Chico High School (1973-1975), I did not have the pleasure of having Mr. Yerman as a teacher, but I remember him

occasionally showing up at track practices in his Olympic sweats and running workouts with our quarter-milers.

Photo Preface-4



Jack Yerman, circa 1962.
Star Presidian, Volume 10, Number 39, p. 7

As anecdote to this overview, I recently discussed with Mike Buzbee (someone readers will become acquainted with later), what it was like having had Yerman as a cross country coach in the late 1960s. Mike remarked, “Well, he was not a true distance coach. He thought we were slow.” After I stopped laughing, I responded, “Well, if you were a 46.3 400-meter runner,” (Yerman’s time in winning this event at the 1960 U.S. Olympic Trials at Stanford University), “you might also think that high school cross country runners were slow.”

Before progressing on with this overview of *Toe the Mark*, it is important to highlight that Chico was a relatively small community back in the 70s. In 1970, the population of the city proper was 19,580. Over the decade, the number of people living within the city limits grew to 26,716 by 1980. At that time, Chico was mostly known for Chico State College (later University) which, founded in 1887, is the second oldest campus in the California State University system; and Bidwell Park, one of the largest municipal parks in the nation. Currently, it is also known for the Sierra Nevada Brewery, which was established in 1979; and as

the hometown of Aaron Rodgers, quarterback of the Green Bay Packers professional football team.

THE NORTHERN SECTION

For high school athletic competition, the State of California is divided into the ten sub-divisions, termed Sections, which are identified in the following map.



Chico High School, and crosstown rival, Pleasant Valley High School, are in the Northern Section (commonly called the North Section), which begins to the north-northwest of Sacramento, and extends to the Oregon border minus the northern coastal region.

LASSEN HIGH SCHOOL DOMINANCE IN THE 1960s

As shown in the following table, Lassen High School dominated the sport of Cross Country in the North Section (NSCIF) in the 1960s. Lassen High is in the town of Susanville, located 101 miles to the northeast of Chico, at an elevation of 4,186 feet. This elevation, in conjunction with the hilly terrain, is conducive to developing very good Cross-Country runners. In the 1970s, Chico High had a relatively short and flat 2.55-mile home course. Following a two-and-a-half-hour van or bus ride along winding canyon roads, you arrived in Susanville for competition, and were often treated to cold and very windy weather, along with as many steep hills as the geography allowed Lassen High School's coach to incorporate into their home course.

We liked to get the Grizzlies (Lassen runners), who were our major competitors, down to Chico and on our flat, fast course; whereas they liked to get Panthers (us) up there in their thinner air and hilly terrain.

CHICO HIGH SCHOOL AND CHICO JUNIOR HIGH CROSS COUNTRY SECTION CHAMPIONSHIPS

<u>NSCIF BOYS CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONS</u>				
<u>Year</u>	<u>Varsity</u>	<u>Junior Varsity</u>	<u>Small School</u>	<u>Freshman</u>
1965	Lassen	Lassen		
1966	Lassen	Chico		
1967	Lassen	Lassen		
1968	Lassen	Lassen		Chico Jr.
1969	Lassen	Lassen		Lassen
1970	Lassen	Lassen		Lassen
1971	Lassen	Lassen		Chico Jr.
1972	Lassen	Chico		Chico Jr.
1973	Chico	Chico		Chico Jr.
1974	Chico	Chico	Weed	Chico Jr.
1975	Chico	Chico	Weed	Chico Jr.
1976	Chico	Chico	Weed	Chico Jr.
1977	Pleasant Valley	Paradise	Weed	Chico Jr.
1978	Chico	Lassen	Weed	Chico Jr.
1979	Paradise	Anderson	Big Valley	Nova

<u>NSCIF GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONS</u>			
<u>Year</u>	<u>Varsity</u>		<u>Junior Var</u>
1974	Enterprise		
1975	Lassen		
1976	Chico		
1977	Chico		Chico
1978	Shasta		Lassen
1979	Shasta		Chico Jr.

Chico teams made a couple of inroads in the 60s when the Chico High junior varsity won the section meet in 1966, and Chico Junior High freshmen won it two years later in 1968. However, things did not begin to change until autumn 1971 when the Chico Junior High School team, of which I was a part, won the Freshman Section Championship. This was followed by a Junior Varsity Championship the following year after we had moved on to high school, and then two consecutive Varsity Championships in autumn 1973 and 1974.

This string of wins by basically the same group of runners—there was some shuffling around, with both departures and new additions—might appear reasonably impressive, and we were proud of our accomplishments. However, we barely squeaked out some of the team wins over Lassen, and the best group of Chico runners ever, had not yet left their mark on the northern California and national high school running scene. These were the “Charlie’s Angels” (a nickname derived from a popular television series at the time, and Chuck Sheley’s first name, Charles). This collection of extrordinarily talented, dedicated, and disciplined young ladies included:

- Suzanne (Richter) Reade: finished 5th in the mile at the State Meet in Bakersfield in 1978 with a time of 4:52.42; future stand-out UC Cal-Berkeley runner and All-American
- Jill (Symons) Hernandez: holder of swimming age-group world records and Olympic Trials competitor in 1976, and later Chico State All-American in Cross Country
- Luanne Park: competitor in the 1984 U.S. Track & Field Trials and later a triathlete and legendary ultrarunner
- Darcy Burleson: daughter of Chico State Track & Field Head Coach Larry Burleson, and niece of Dyrol Burleson, a several-time Olympian and former U.S mile record holder; ran Cross Country at Chico State
- Joan Gregg: Swam for UC Davis and also ran Cross Country
- Julie Selchau: Post-high school accomplishments unknown
- Stacey Shols: Post-high school accomplishments unknown

More about these individuals later in the book. It's worthwhile here to highlight the local swimming program from which Jill Symons, and other cross-over athletes, such as Joan Gregg, emerged. As previously mentioned, Chico was then relatively small and offered no elite athletic facilities. The Chico Aqua Jets trained at a modest-sized swimming pool at Bidwell Junior High School (the cross-town of Chico Junior High School), but from this "patch of water" came a host of champions.

These included: Jill Symons, who at age sixteen, competed in the U.S. Olympic Swim Trials in the 100-meter butterfly (16th) and 400-meter individual medley (13th); and David Santos, whose chance to make the Olympic Team was denied by the U.S. boycotting the 1980 Summer Olympics because of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. His brother Roque Santos did make an Olympic Team, and competed in the 1992 Games in Barcelona, Spain. Finally, in 2004, Haley Cope won a Silver Medal at the Olympics in Athens, Greece.

CHICO HIGH TRACK & FIELD

Track & Field programs at high schools, colleges, and universities with "powerhouse" cross country programs are greatly advantaged by having distance runners who can collectively "rack up" many points in the middle-distance and distance events at track meets, thereby contributing significantly to their teams' overall scores. However, each of these events takes a lot out of the athletes, so most distance runners run a single race at a meet or perhaps two.

Sprinters, who by virtue of their leg speed are usually also jumpers, typically compete in four events. Accordingly, an exceptional athlete can individually score a lot of points. Their efforts are often rewarded by much public acclaim and recognition.

To the credit of the *Chico Enterprise-Record* Hall of Fame, of the below listed six athletes associated with Chico High School Cross Country and Track & Field in the 1970s, three are distance runners. Chuck Sheley believes that Jamie Starmer and Tonya Alston are the greatest all-around track athletes ever produced by Chico High School. The distance runners listed were the top three members of “Charlie’s Angels” who, in addition to being ranked second in the nation in cross country, were exceptional track athletes.

***Chico Enterprise-Record* Hall of Fame**

Coaches	Distance Runners	Sprinters/Jumpers
Chuck Sheley	Suzanne (Richter) Reade	Jamie Starmer
Bob Noe	Luanne Park	Tonya (Alston) Burns
Dale Edson	Jill (Symons) Hernandez	Mike Sherrard
Cherrie Sherrard		

Photo Preface-5



At left, Chico High School Girls Track and Field Coach Dale Edson holding a stopwatch with one of her team members standing alongside her. Courtesy of Dale Edson



Above: Chico State Women's Track Coach Cherrie Sherrard (wearing a track suit), pictured with Trainer Tara Lepp in 1980. *The Record 1980* – Chico State Yearbook Collection

Cherrie (Parish) Sherrard, a superlative athlete and Olympian who competed in the 80-meter hurdles at the 1964 Summer Games in Tokyo, coached at both Chico High School and Chico State College. Her son Mike Sherrard—who later played professional football as a wide

receiver for the Dallas Cowboys, San Francisco 49ers, New York Giants, and Denver Broncos—was a football/basketball/baseball player in high school, but ran sprints his senior year.

I believe that former Chico High distance runner Doug Avrit should also be inducted into the Hall of Fame. He is the greatest male prep distance runner to ever come out of Chico, setting school mile and 2-mile records of 4:16.5 and 9:11.9, respectively, in 1977 (which, as of this writing, remain unbroken). He was twice an All-American while at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and finished 13th in the marathon in the 1984 U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials. Also competing in these trials were former Chico High athletes Luanne Park, Tonya Alston, and pole vaulter Jerry Mulligan. Suzanne Richter qualified for the trials, but was unable to participate owing to an injury.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DISTANCE RUNNERS

The following table identifies the high schools that won North Section Varsity Boys and/or Girls Track & Field Team Championships in the 1970s. Even a cursory look at it reveals the close relationship between Chico High’s previously identified dominance in cross country (XC) and associated track and field (T&F) prowess. Section Championships in T&F coincided with or followed those in XC. Nearly all of the members of championship cross country teams returned, in the spring of those same school years, to compete in track & field, and score lots of points.

NSCIF (NORTH SECTION) VARSITY BOYS AND GIRLS TRACK & FIELD TEAM CHAMPIONS

1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
Lassen V Boys	Pleasant Valley V Boys	Pleasant Valley V Boys	Chico V Boys	Shasta V Boys
			Wheatland V Girls*	Wheatland V Girls**
1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Chico V Boys	Chico V Boys	Chico V Boys	Enterprise V Boys	Chico V Boys
Lassen V Girls	Lassen V Girls	Chico V Girls	Chico V Girls	Chico V Girls

* First NSCIF Girls Semi-Final Championships

** First NSCIF Girls Section Championships

Shaded area indicates there were no Girls Championships these years

An outlier to this pattern was Pleasant Valley High School winning the 1971 and 1972 North Section Track & Field Championships without great success in the preceding sport of cross country. This signifies that these track teams had very talented individuals scoring a significant number of points in many events other than distance running.

ROAD RACING; MIKE AND PAT BUZBEE'S VENUE

Nor-Cal Running Review
JULY 1973 (No. 42)

NCRRR POINT RATINGS

Below are this month's leaders in the NCRRR Long Distance Point Race. To figure your point rating, merely divide your average placing in races by the number of races run. Count a tie as an average (tie for 2nd is worth 2.5, etc.). For example, if your average placing is 4th over a total of five races, then your rating is 4/5 or 0.8. For our totals we count only the top ten finishers in each race (top six in the senior division...must have reached his 40th birthday). The NCRRR reserves athlete, Bill Gookin. The top open and senior runners follow:

OPEN: (Total races, Average place, Rating) -- (1) Dan Anderson (16, 3.625, 0.227), (2) Bill Seaver (10, 3.100, 0.310), (3) Phil Camp (7, 2.403, 0.347), (4) Darryl Beardall (13, 4.923, 0.379), (5) Jon Anderson (6, 2.667, 0.444), (6) John Butterfield (10, 4.600, 0.460), (7) Dave Garcia & Jim Nuccio (2, 1.000, 0.500), (9) Mike Buzbee (6, 3.167, 0.528), (10) Rich Kimball (8, 4.250, 0.531), (11) Ritchie Geisel (3, 1.667, 0.556), (12) Bob Darling, Steve Dean & George Stewart (4, 2.250, 0.563), (15) Mitch Kingery (4, 2.500, 0.625), (16) Pat Buzbee (5, 3.200, 0.640), (17) Ken Scalmanini (9, 5.944, 0.660), (18) Doug Butt & Ross Smith (7, 5.000, 0.714), (20) Duncan Macdonald (3, 2.167, 0.722), (21)

In 1973, the well-known "Buzbee twins," Mike and Pat, were college students at Chico State University, having graduated from Chico High School in 1969. They had run cross country and track in high school and continued to participate in these sports for a while at Chico State, but they then turned to road racing. They were also Chico High assistant coaches, which mostly involved their running workouts with us when they had the time. Mike and Pat worked to put themselves through college and graduated with double majors in Math and Biology and Math and Geography, respectively. They also boxed for Chico State and were conference champions in two different weight classes; but as Pat recently told me, "We mostly fought each other."

When I was a high school athlete, I once asked one of them how they ended up running the marathon (26.2-mile race), to which his reply was, "Well, if you don't have much speed, they move you up from the mile to the 2-mile, then the 3-mile, then the 6-mile, and pretty soon

you're running the marathon." The Buzbees were scrappy, competitive, hardworking—but with little leg speed. Because of this, we sometimes referred to them as "one-speeders."

This joking did not diminish our respect for their accomplishments at the longer distances. A measure of how good they were can be gleaned from the rankings on the preceding table, excerpted from the July 1973 edition of the *Northern California Running Review*. The *Review* was a monthly magazine which evolved into the *California Track & Running News*, and later a website. As indicated, monthly rankings were calculated by dividing a runner's average place in a race by the number of races run (which had to be sanctioned by the *Review*). Readers who followed running in that era will recognize the names of many great runners. I will mention only three.

Three big names in California high school distance running in the mid-1970s were Roy Kissin, Mitch Kingery, and Rich Kimball. Kissin, from San Ramon Valley High School in the San Francisco Bay Area, would finish eighth at the 1975 IAAF World Cross Country Championships. This race was held during his senior track season on March 16th in Rabat, Morocco. A year earlier, Kissin had travelled to Chico to compete in the 1974 Chico Invitational Track & Field Meet hosted by Chico High School at Chico State. He won the 2-mile in 9:22.3, and I was a distant third with a time of 9:46.1.

In the *Nor-Cal Running Review* ratings, sandwiched between Mike Buzbee (9th) and Pat Buzbee (16th), were Rich Kimball (10th) and Mitch Kingery (15th). A little over a year later, at the 1974 California State meet, Kimball won the two mile in 8:46.6, then about one hour later, narrowly won the mile in 4:06.6. In the 1960s and 70s, road racing was a significant part of the "off-season" for many prep athletes, so it wasn't surprising that Kimball and Kingery were competing in longer races. Kingery was particularly well-suited for such. In 1973, though only a sophomore at San Carlos High School, he ran a 2:23:47 marathon, a new prep record.

Enough said about Pat and Mike, who will periodically reappear throughout the book.

CHICO STATE (CSUC) WILDCAT CROSS COUNTRY

The best performance by a Chico State Men's XC team in the 1970s came in 1973, with a Far Western Conference Championship. (There was then no Women's program.) The schools comprising the conference were Chico State, Humboldt State, Hayward State, Sacramento State, San Francisco State, Sonoma State, and UC Davis.

CSUC Men's Far Western Conference Team Finishes

1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
3rd	3rd	3rd	1st	3th
1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
no team	4th	5th	6th	7th

Mark Shuman was Chico's top runner at the conference race, with a 4th place finish. He and three teammates, identified below, made "All-Conference" by virtue of their top fifteen finishes.

Wildcats Garnering All-Conference Honors in 1973

Mark Shuman	Greg Griffen	Jim Price	Tom Brown
4th Place	7th Place	8th Place	10th Place

As evidence of the talent of members of that 1973 team, nearly fifty years later, Brown's best performance as a steeplechaser (competitor in a grueling 7 ½ lap race over mostly immobile barriers and a water jump) in track & field is still among those of the Top 10 Wildcats, ever.

My memory of Mark Shuman, from running workouts with Chico State athletes occasionally, was that early in the season in XC and T&F, he ran behind his teammates as he worked into shape. "Shu," as the other runners called him, got better and better as a season progressed and, near the end, would qualify for the National Championships and compete in them. He was an All-American in cross country.

For the 1973 cross country season, Shuman went on to finish 4th at the NCAA West Regional Championships, and 23rd at the NCAA Division II Championships.

Five other Wildcats earned All-Conference honors in the 1970s; they are identified below, along with their respective finishes at the championship meet:

1970	1971	1972	1974	1978
Mike Dailey	Kim Ellison	Mark Shuman	Tom Brown	Tom Olson
7th	2nd	5th	7th	10th

WILDCAT TRACK & FIELD

Attending Chico State Track & Field meets and watching from the stands as Wildcats performed was quite exciting for Chico High athletes. The most electrifying event came in 1972, when Kim Ellison, in his senior year at Chico State, toed the starting line in preparation for an attempt to break the magical 4-minute mile mark. No Wildcat had ever

accomplished this feat, and fans filled the stands, eager to watch the race—which had been well publicized in local media. This race, and an introduction of Kim and his brother Kerry’s remarkable running careers, are the subject of Chapter One.

In addition to that of Tom Brown, the performances of three other 1970s-era Wildcats in middle-distance and distance events still rank (as of this writing) in the all-time top ten at Chico State.

Among Chico State Men’s T&F All-Time Top 10 Records

800 Meter Run			
Name	Time	Year	Current Place
Gene Meyers	1:49.40	1969	5th
1,500 Meter Run			
Kim Ellison	3:43.30	1971	3rd
Gene Meyers	3:47.10	1971	9th
3,000 Meter Steeplechase			
Tom Brown	8:55.20	1974	4th
Karl Schaechterle	8:57.30	1976	6th

HALL OF FAME TEAMS AND ATHLETES

The scope of this book, and space limitations, only allow some coverage of Wildcat Track & Field distance runners, and not the full gambit of runners, throwers, jumpers and others that make up a team. It is noteworthy that the Chico State Athletic Hall of Fame includes under Team Recognition:

- 1970-79 Men’s and Women’s Track & Field teams
- 1975 Men’s T&F NCAA Championships 3rd-place team

Three superlative distance runners who competed in the 1970s, earned Hall of Fame honors. Their names and year of induction follow:

- Kim Ellison – 2000
- Gene Meyers – 1999
- Toni Ruggle – 2016

With this overview of running in Chico in the 1970s complete, it is now time for readers to proceed into *Toe the Mark*. The book is written in the first person; not because I was a particularly noteworthy athlete, but instead to serve, hopefully, as a more personal means of introducing athletes and events and, in some cases, to provide additional context.

Map Preface-1



Section of northern California; from just south of Yuba City north to the Oregon border, and east to the Nevada border