



Dick Sunderleaf ran the 440 for Oregon 63 years ago, today he recalls his days as part of the Ducks running tradition begun by Bill Hayward.



Bill Hayward, Oregon track coach from 1903 to 1947, established a program that flourished on mutual respect between athletes and a coach who could get the best from them.

The man in the white hat

Coach Bill Hayward made a lasting impression on Oregon track, recollects one early athlete

One wintry day back in 1918, a skinny freshman from Portland — Dick Sunderleaf was his name — was jogging a few laps around the Kincaid Field track on the University campus. He was trying to get back into shape after suffering a kidney injury during football practice.

Track coach Bill Hayward was watching the kid run, and stopped him.

"Do you smoke?" he asked.

"No, sir," the kid replied.

"Do you drink?"

"No, sir."

"Then," said Hayward with a knowing twinkle in his eye, "you'll run the 440."

Sixty-three years later, and only 440 yards from that very spot, Sunderleaf recalled Hayward while Oregon's track team met Cal Berkeley at the field named in the coach's honor.

"He had an amazing knack for being able to watch an athlete's coordination and movements and just being able to tell what he'd be good in. And he was usually right," said Sunderleaf, now 81 and still working as a

Portland architect. He got his B.S. from the University in 1923.

Hayward coached at Oregon from 1904 to 1947, as well as being on the coaching staff for six Olympic games.

Sunderleaf said Hayward's workouts also reflected his knowledge of what was best for the athletes.

"We did a lot of distance and cross country running in the early spring," he said, "and there wasn't a lot of pressure. But then, around May, he put on the white hat."

The white hat?

"The white hat. When he put that on, everyone was worked real hard," said Sunderleaf. "We'd have races — several of them — in practice. That's the only time he'd wear that hat, when he wanted us to work. And we did."

Sunderleaf ran the first leg of the mile relay as well as the quarter. His best 440, according to the 1922 Oregonian, came against Oregon Agricultural College in Corvallis, when he won "in a walk" at 51.2.

"We ran on Kincaid Field my first season, then Hayward Field was built," he said. Kincaid

Field used to be where Chapman Hall is located. The first Hayward grandstand, erected in 1919, was demolished eight years ago and replaced by the new west grandstand. The east stand was added in 1924.

"I remember my first race," he said. "In the spring, Hayward worked me out in several events, but I hadn't run the 440. When the time came for the 440, Hayward told me to get in there."

"I said, 'Mr. Hayward, I've never run this race in my life!' But he told me to do it, so I asked him how to run it. He said, 'See this line here? Stand behind it, and when the gun goes off, you run.' That's all he told me!"

"So I got the pole, and I was really nervous, but I came in first. The freshmen and the varsity ran that race together — there were two other freshmen and three varsity quartermilers — and I beat the varsity."

"When I came home (Sunderleaf lived in the old Kappa Sigma house), they tubbed me. They filled a tub with ice and water and they kept dunking me into it."

But Sunderleaf soon got used to water. "We ran on dirt, so it got real muddy, but we

ran in the rain anyway. At the University of Washington, the track faces the lake. One meet, the gale winds were coming across, and there must have been two inches of water on the cinder. If you weren't running in front, you got all black from the wet cinder flying all over you."

But, Sunderleaf remembers, Hayward kept the athletes loose despite bitter conditions.

"He'd rub us with capsicum vaseline — I think it was made with hot pepper — and it'd keep us warm. He'd also put us in hot tubs and put in absorbine."

Sunderleaf did some work as a rubdown artist for the team, and Hayward once surprised the masseuse Sunderleaf on a road meet.

"I didn't think I was going to run, and I was rubbing a quartermiler when the third call came. Hayward came up to me and told me to run in his place."

"It surprised me, and it didn't make the other guy too happy, but I didn't get as nervous that time because there wasn't any time to think about it."

"I got nervous the night before meets. I

couldn't sleep, and I'd kick around on the bed all night long."

Sunderleaf said that Hayward was always coming up with similar clever ways to deal with his athletes.

"He had one high jumper, Skinny Hargreaves, who smoked cigars all the time. Hayward would catch him smoking off campus. Skinny would see Hayward coming, and he'd put the cigar in his pocket."

"But Hayward knew what was going on, so he'd stand there for 30 minutes, talking to him, so it'd burn a hole in his pocket."

"Another time, a movie star named Lucille Love came to Eugene. A sprinter had a convertible car, so he cut practice one day and drove her around the city. Hayward found out and called him up, and the first thing (Hayward) said to him was, 'Hi, Lucille.'"

"He was always doing things like that to keep us in line. He was strong on discipline, but he wasn't too hard-nosed about it. He had an interest in people, he didn't play favorites — and I liked that."

"He'd get the best out of his athletes. Those who stuck with him appreciated that he was a

good coach."

Apparently there was mutual respect between the athlete and his coach. Hayward was quoted in a 1923 Emerald story as saying, "I wish I had more men like Sunderleaf, always plugging, never giving up. That's what we need right now."

Sunderleaf is still plugging away — he's been an active member of the Multnomah Athletic Club in Portland since the 1930s and still plays handball there three times every week.

"I like to stay in shape and to stay competitive. Hayward helped us appreciate that attitude."

"I've looked back all these years, and I feel good to know that I made some contribution, however small, to the same track program that Hayward was a part of. It was good to be a part of a winning program. The winners make history, and the losers make excuses."

But, Sunderleaf points out, passing years have a way of changing things.

"The older you get, the faster you run."

By Jim Vitti

Photos courtesy of University Archives

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