

Northwestern was competitive in track in 1950s

By TOM EMERY
Enquirer~Democrat Contributor

Wildcats Won A String of County Titles with Homemade Team

Northwestern High School was created by the consolidation of four schools in 1948 and established itself in basketball early on, going 21-5 in that first year. The school had some pretty good track teams in those early years, too.

Northwestern was consistently competitive in boys' track throughout the first decade of its existence, with a group that was basically doing it on their own. Because of this, the school had some surprisingly good showings at the annual Macoupin County Track Meet.

The early Northwestern squads are an example of the value of raw talent and the desire to participate. There was certainly some tradition in track in the northwestern corner of the county; Palmyra High School had collected 56 individual county track titles between 1912-38, and won the 1915 Macoupin County team title.

Modesto, meanwhile, earned 16 individual county track crowns from 1920-45. Scottville (four) and Hettick (two) had also won some individual county titles in their existence.

Those four schools joined to create Northwestern, a school known for student ownership and participation across daily life at the school. Track, then, seemed a natural fit, especially in a time when there were far fewer sports teams than today.

As the Wildcat basketball team enjoyed its remarkable first season with 21 wins

— a mark that would not be matched until 2002-03 — some of the hoops players also wanted an opportunity in track. As a result, they approached the Northwestern principal about forming a thinclad squad.

Thus the Northwestern track team was born, a humble organization that became a surprisingly competitive force at the Macoupin County Meet.

The Northwestern team had no track, rarely kept times, barely had any training regimen, and only went to around three meets per year. Some track equipment that had been used decades earlier by the four schools in the district, including an old pole for the vault. Team members dug their own pit to practice that discipline, and most bought their own shoes.

Their hard work and desire paid off quickly. In just their first year in the county track meet, Northwestern's Bill Allen took home a title in the 880.

In 1950, Bill Pence added another laurel for Northwestern with a win in the pole vault. Pence's name would become synonymous with Northwestern athletics. In addition to a long teaching career, he became the school's all-time winningest boys basketball coach, and was a great gentleman of the game.

The county meet of 1951 was one of the most stacked in county history, and Northwestern was right in the mix. Carlinville, which was early in a streak of 20 straight county team titles from 1948-67, barely held off the second-place Wildcats, 39.5-34.

Pence won the discus and shared the 1951 pole title with teammate Ken Mayes, who later enjoyed a career in the post-

al service and also became a Northwestern sports historian. Northwestern's Tom Eyer finished in a three-way tie for the high jump title.

Northwestern came in third in the team standings at the 1952 county meet, led by Mayes, who shared the pole title with Carlinville's Dick Martin. His Northwestern teammate, Rex Redfern, who later was a highly successful St. Louis accountant, captured the 440.

The erstwhile Northwestern squad remained competitive at the county meet throughout the decade. The Wildcats' Jim Waters won the 1953 county title in the mile, while the 1954 shot crown went to Bob Gibbs, a future mine reclamation specialist.

Other Northwestern county champions of the 1950s were Larry McNeely, who earned a county title in the 1957 high jump, and Steve Molen, who won the pole vault in 1958.

There was still some glory at the Macoupin County Meet for Northwestern in the 1960s, as Tom Harbaugh shared the 1961 pole title with Carlinville's Dwight Fullington. The 1963 county high hurdles title went to Northwestern's Bill Brooks.

Northwestern continued to compete in boys' track through 1970. With the advent of Title IX, the school began to sponsor girls' track, and won the first-ever Macoupin County Girls' Track Meet in 1973. Girls' track at Northwestern remained at the school through 1994.

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Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

3	1	9	4	6	8	5	2	7
4	7	8	2	6	5	9	1	3
5	6	2	1	3	7	4	8	9
6	5	7	9	8	2	3	4	1
1	8	3	6	7	4	9	5	2
9	2	4	3	5	1	7	6	8
2	9	1	5	4	3	8	7	6
8	4	6	7	1	9	2	3	5
7	3	5	8	2	9	1	9	4

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S R A Y M H U L M B V V T S Y O E S I E
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Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

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CANYON	MEADOW	TERRAIN
CASCADE	MESA	THICKET
CRAG	OVERLOOK	TRAILHEAD
EVERGREEN	PLATEAU	VALLEY
FOLIAGE	PRECIPICE	WILDERNESS
GLACIER	RAVINE	WOODLAND

R	E	I	C	V	A	T	G	J	A	R	O	T	E	N	G	R	V	C	E	V
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W	R	E	N	I	V	R	R	E	I	L	9	J	T	A	D	I	D	J		
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