



Donn Kinzle may have been Altoona's greatest track performer.

Kinzle blazed trail to Arizona State

By John Hartsock

Author, trailblazer, record-setting athlete, distinguished coach.

The list sounds like it could be recited in the honor of any number of celebrated guests at any number of prestigious ceremonies around the country.

But this glittering resume belongs to just one person, 70-year-old Donn Kinzle, an Altoona native who is now living in State College.

From setting a PIAA and national record as a hurdler on the Altoona High track team, to setting the foundation for the entire Arizona State athletic program and coaching the Brazilian Olympic team, Kinzle has just about done and seen it all in the spectrum of athletics.

As a high school senior in 1936, Kinzle set a PIAA record of :24.1 in the now defunct 220-meter hurdles at the state tournament and a national mark of :23.8 at the district tournament held at Mansion Park.

But his best high school memories have nothing to do with records.

"My most poignant memories involve having Dick Bartholomew as a high school coach," Kinzle said. "He made me a hurdler. When I was a student at Keith Junior High, our track coach, George Moatz, noticed some things I was doing well in gym class and he called Dick Bartholomew about letting me work out with the high school team. Dick had me high jumping at first, and he pointed out that the first four members of the team to finish the 100-year dash in practice would qualify for the prestigious Penn Relays in Philadelphia.

"I finished third, but I was only in the ninth grade, so Dick pulled me aside and explained to me that it wasn't fair that I should go to the Penn Relays at such a young age while some of the older kids who had been working with the team for years were denied that chance. Then the wheels in Dick's head started turning, and he put together the fact that I had speed and was a good jumper. He suggested that I try the hurdles."

In an experiment that could have rivaled Edison's discovery of the light bulb, the rest became history. Kinzle spent three years at Duke University before ultimately graduating from Arizona State in 1942. He left his mark in track at both schools.

He achieved All-American status at Duke, where he was the Southern Athletic Conference recordholder in both the 120 high and 220-yard low hurdles. But standing out among his college memories was a first place in 1938 at the Penn Relays, where "I hit the tape as a college sophomore and went on to say hello to my old coach, Dick



Donn Kinzle with one of his grandchildren.

Bartholomew, who was there again with the Altoona High team," chuckled Kinzle.

Kinzle went on to greater prominence at Arizona State, where he established Border Athletic Conference (schools in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas) records in the 120 high hurdles and 220 low hurdles. He also won the national championship in the 120 highs at Arizona State in 1942, as the first signs of a promising coaching career surfaced.

He was a student coach during his college years, was later promoted to assistant coach in 1946, and head coach in 1947, when he also became Arizona State's Athletic Director.

Serving in both capacities, Kinzle was able to put Arizona State's entire athletic program, as well as its track team, on the national map.

For his contributions, Kinzle, along with longtime football Coach Frank Kush and baseball coach Bobby Winkles, was selected to the ASU Coach's Hall of Fame in 1985.

Kinzle laughingly recalled laying the groundwork for Arizona State's nationally respected football program.

"The school's president, Dr. Grady Gammage, instructed me to develop all of the athletic programs when I became the athletic director, and we really went at the process of recruiting," said Kinzle. "I knew that if Arizona State was to compete against the major schools, it would have to have the material with which to do it. We got most of the major newspapers, and removed clippings about the most promising high school athletes from around the country. We kept in touch with them from their sophomore years on.

"Of all the major prospects we went after, I think we really only missed one," explained Kinzle, declining to mention names. "This kid was interested in obtaining a pilot's license at college. So we offered him room, board, books, tuition fees, a summer job, a pilot's license, and even a scholarship for his girlfriend. It wasn't unusual to do that back then, so the players wouldn't feel homesick. But the competing school offered the player everything that we did, plus his own airplane! We couldn't match that."

Kinzle went on to coach the Brazilian Olympic team in the mid-1950's, but before doing so, he was on hand at Arizona State during the planning stages of what was the site of last season's national championship game — Sun Devils' Stadium in Tempe.

"The old stadium, Goodwin Stadium, seated only 15,000, and we simply outgrew it," said Kinzle. "Before I left the university, I signed a contract for the 'Salad Bowl' game, which was the original name for what became the Fiesta Bowl game."

Kinzle went on to make further history in Brazil, coaching the Brazilian National track team to the Olympic games in Melbourne, Australia.

"We took five people to the Olympics, and one, a triple jumper by the name of Adhemar da Silva, won a gold medal," said Kinzle. "In my three years as coach, Brazil never accomplished much as a team, but the fact that anybody from Brazil even competed in the Olympics was remarkable. Most of the people down there don't have the background or training to compete on an international basis. My biggest accomplishment down there was developing a national program."

During his Brazilian tenure, Kinzle also wrote a book entitled "Practical Track Athletics," which was illustrated by his former wife, Dorothy.

Another book, "Practical Field Athletics," was nearly completed, but Kinzle had no pictures for it and was forced to forsake it when he moved to Duncansville and opened up an antique shop in the late 1950's.

The shop is now run by Kinzle's son, Kelly — one of Kinzle's six grown children.

Kinzle now lives in State College, where he remains active in the antique business.

"I'm now involved in a business that deals in estate sales of antiques and arts, taking in a four-state region," said Kinzle. "I'm no longer involved in athletics, but I'm as active in antiques now as I've ever been. You have to put away the games sometime. That is, unless you're a sportswriter," he cracked.