

Dick Bartholomew had his own track to success



Dick was part of Penn State's mile relay team that won the NCAA Championship in 1924.

By John Hartsock

Dick Bartholomew got the foot-speed that enabled him to rewrite the track and field record books at Penn State University honestly enough.

Bartholomew, now 86, recalls losing a race handily to his mother during a family picnic as a young boy.

"Speed was the key to my success. Speed is something that's God-given, and then, in order to be successful, you have to work on your starts and finishes," said Bartholomew, who will be one of tonight's five inductees to the fourth Blair County Sports Hall of Fame. "I believe I inherited my speed from my mother. One time we were on a family picnic, and we had a race. She took off and beat all of us by 30 yards."

Bartholomew first put his speed to good use as a running back for the Altoona High School football team in the early 1920's. One of his fondest school-boy memories was turning an end-around run into an 85-yard touchdown gallop against archrival Johnstown. Altoona won the game, 13-7.

"There were 10,000 people at Cricket Field that night, and that end-around won the ballgame," Bartholomew said. "It was a big game. Altoona and Johnstown was really a big battle in those days. I remember that it was November, it was snowing, and it was the end of the football season. The next day, everybody was let out of school, and we had a holiday to celebrate."

Bartholomew earned a track scholarship to Penn State, but his mind was still on football. At one point, he and four track teammates decided to go out for the football team. When Penn State track coach Nate Cartnell gave them an ultimatum — football or track — the four reneged. But it ignited a longstanding feud between Cartnell and PSU's head football coach, Hugo Bezdek.

"Coach Cartnell told us that it was all right with him if we decided to go out for football, but our track scholarships would be taken away if we did so," Bartholomew recalled. "The coaches (Cartnell and Bezdek) never spoke to each other after that incident."

Fate turned out to bless Bartholomew's track endeavors at Penn State.

As a freshman, he was the lead runner
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on the mile-relay team that won the national championship in 1924.

"There were a lot of freshmen on scholarships that year, including five or six sprinters," said Bartholomew, who lives in Hollidaysburg with his second wife, Alice. Bartholomew has a grown daughter, Nancy, by his first wife, Edith, who died in 1966.

Bartholomew went on to establish what was then a Penn State record for the 100-yard dash when he ran it in 9.6 seconds. He duplicated that feat twice more before his college career was finished.

Bartholomew also set a school record of 21.2 in the 220-yard dash that stood for 20 years. That feat was accomplished during a dual meet at Penn University, one of Bartholomew's favorite running surfaces.

"Harvard and Penn both had very good tracks," Bartholomew recalled. "But generally, today's runners have the advantage of much better tracks to compete on. We often had to dig holes in the tracks with our spikes, in order to get our start from almost underneath ground level."

In his junior year, Bartholomew was also a member of Penn State's national championship quarter-mile relay team.

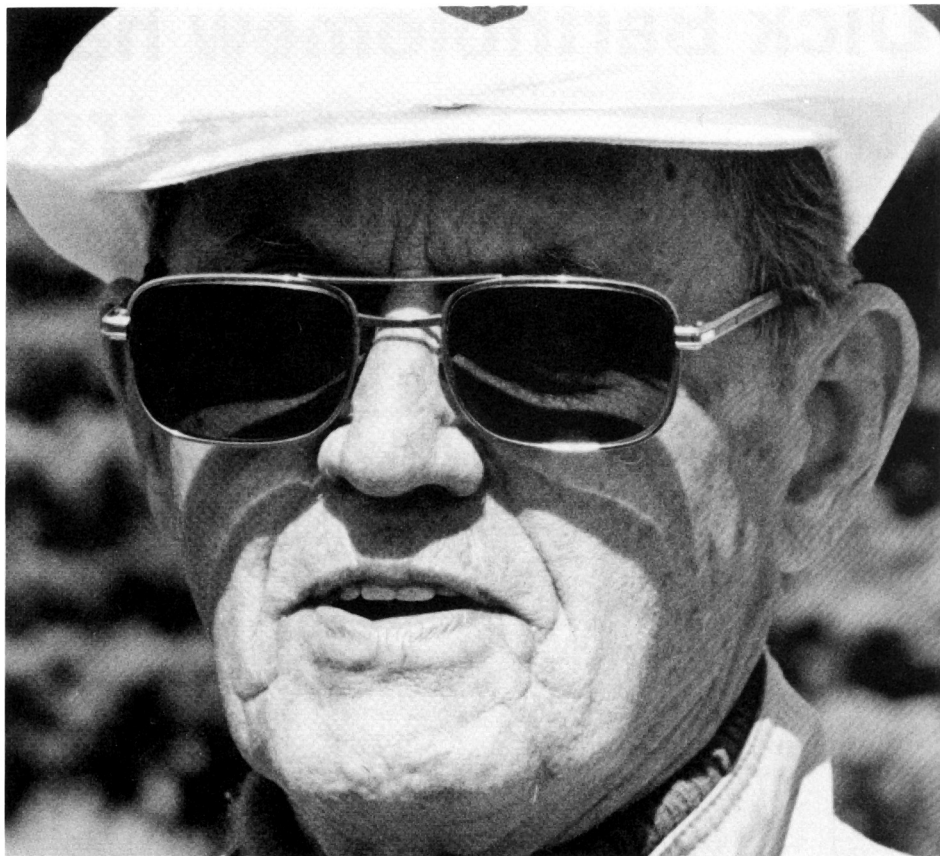
But he said that his biggest thrill was competing in the intercollegiate, or national, meet against Southern Cal's Charlie Borah at Franklin Field in Philadelphia. Borah finished the 220-yard dash in a course record 20.9, and Bartholomew finished a close second. They were both juniors.

Ironically enough, the intercollegiate meet at Harvard the following year was the site of Bartholomew's greatest athletic setback. Bartholomew pulled his right hamstring while in the midst of the 100 dash, and the injury cost him a chance at a berth in the Olympic games.

"That was a great disappointment," Bartholomew admitted. "Earlier that season, my friend and I, Al Bates, had been sized up for Olympic jackets, Al ended up going to the Olympics, and winning a third-place medal."

Bartholomew ended up carving his niche as a high school track coach. His first assignment was at Ellwood City. In two years, he led the Ellwood City team to the WPIAL championship and the state championship. The state tournament in 1929 was held at Altoona's Mansion Park, and Bartholomew's success caught the eye of Dr. Levi Gilbert, who was to become the principal at Altoona High.

"The result was that I never went back to Ellwood City," said Bartholomew,



At 86, Dick's still working on his handicap.

who became Altoona's head track coach, and served as an athletic trainer for the football team while teaching social studies in the classroom.

Bartholomew's track teams had an incredible reign from 1930 to 1946. They never lost a dual meet or finished any worse than first in a district championship meet during that era.

"We had 100 to 150 kids out for track, and we never cut anybody, unless they cut themselves by misbehaving or smoking," said Bartholomew, who managed the Sylvan Hills Golf Club in Hollidaysburg from 1981 to 1987. "We had some great kids."

Among those on the short list that time allowed Bartholomew to mention was Bill Iannicelli, a javelin thrower who developed a sore arm before states. The ailing arm prevented Iannicelli from tossing the javelin, but he promptly improvised and won the state championship in the broad jump.

There was the great mile relay team of Sonny Boy Milton, Harvey Rupert, Paul Sherwin and Johnny Hicks, who won the championship of America in that event in 1931, Bartholomew's second year as coach.

There was the even greater 1939 mile-relay team — Bartholomew calls it "my best ever" — that won another championship and set a new Penn Relays

record of 3:21.2. That team featured Bill Madden, Mike Shaner, Don O'Shell, and Ted Gilliland.

There were the standout hurdles, Jim Gehrdes and Donn Kinzle, who went on to becoming trailblazing track coaches at Navy and Arizona State, respectively. There was the speed demon sprinter, Rabbit Ward, and the late Steve Lach, who was the shot and discus specialist.

Bartholomew was the presenter two years ago, in 1988, when Lach earned induction posthumously as part of the Hall's second class. Bartholomew, in turn, will be presented by Frank Mastrocola, one of his track and field proteges at Altoona.

Mastrocola's appearance at this year's fete will do much to heighten the enjoyment of induction for Bartholomew. So will the induction of Bartholomew's nephew, Brad Benson, a former Pro Bowl offensive tackle with the National Football League's New York Giants.

"I've been looking forward to this," said Bartholomew, who still shoots a round of 18 holes in the mid-80's and last year won the national golf championship at the Senior Games in Shippensburg for players 80 years of age and over. "Brad's mother is my brother's daughter, I think it's quite a coincidence for me to be indoctrinated the same year as Brad . . . a very nice coincidence."