

# **TRACK HISTORY**

**Wayne Bennett**

**1936-Present**

It all began in the east bedroom of my grandmother's house on October 11, 1936. The home was on a farm in northwest Coleman County, Texas near a small community called Novice. My parents were rural poor people and at the time lived on a ranch in southern Coleman County. A sister and a brother preceded me into this world. I would be followed by two more brothers and a sister. Dad was pretty much a farm and ranch laborer, working harvests, driving truck, shearing sheep or whatever was available. He was also quite a rounder but that is another story. 1936 was one of the hottest summers on record. My mother must have been miserable throughout that summer.

I realized early on that I had a little more speed and agility than a lot of the other kids that I associated with. By the time I was three, we had moved into Coleman proper and Dad was working pretty regularly in the paint and paper hanging business. I did not even know that track as a sport existed. I knew a little about baseball and softball but was not very good at those games. I was concentrating on football even at that early age. I could run past most people in the touch and even tackle games in the neighborhood and at school. I could always get open for a pass even if I couldn't catch it.

My first organized football experience came when I was in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade at Coleman High School. With my speed, I was put at end and our team had a very good passer for a 9<sup>th</sup> grader. I would go deep, probably deeper than the quarterback could throw, but the opposition didn't know that, and would leave the middle open for the other end. We won district and I never caught a single pass. My next three years were spent playing defense where my speed allowed me to cover deep or cut off the run. My last two years were at linebacker, a position I loved to play. Again speed was critical to cut off runs.

My junior year in high school, I attempted to play basketball. After a few workouts, the head coach came to me and said "Wayne, we don't have linebackers in basketball. Would you go someplace else before you hurt one of my starters"? I knew I couldn't play baseball, so I went out for track.

Actually, my first track experience was my sophomore year at a high school I just transferred to in north Fort Worth. The coach there was convinced that I must be a miler because I was fairly tall and thin. I said "NO" but he insisted and after an eight and one-half minute mile, he asked what else could I do. I replied that I was a sprinter and maybe a hurdler. I transferred to another high school that fall and became a sprinter.

As with a lot of small schools in those days, there was no track and the coach was the football line coach filling in as track coach. He was a great guy, but gave us no real training in track. He simply held workouts and took us to meets. About once a week we got to go to another school and work out on a track. Of course all the tracks were cinder and only four or six lanes. We had no starting blocks, but the school did provide us with a uniform and spikes. I built me a set of blocks out of 2x4s and 4x4s with large nails for anchoring into the track. I won't go into my high school track experiences except to say that I got to know and compete against one of the all time great sprinters, Jimmy Weaver, of FW North Side High School. My senior year I was elected captain of the track team and we had a lot of fun. We didn't win much, but we really enjoyed what we did. I became a pretty good sprinter and hurdler. Pretty good is not going to win you anything in the state of Texas. I never won a single race in my high school career. Probably my best events were the 440 yard dash and the 180 yard low hurdles. I was a mediocre high jumper, never jumping more than 5'-10". My best time in the 100 yard dash was 10.98 seconds wind aided. Jimmy and his caliber of sprinters were running 9.6 to 9.8 hundreds. My memory tells me that I ran a 50.9 second 440 yard dash one time, but

I can't verify that and my memory may be bad. Some favorite memories from high school are running the 220 yard dash at Farrington Field in Fort Worth with no curve. Since I have worn glasses since I was a freshman, and ran without my glasses, I couldn't even see the finish line at the other end of that long straightaway. One of our favorite meets was the Graham Relays in Graham, Texas. There was a man there who had a lion for a pet and he always brought it to the track. Seeing a lion somewhere besides a zoo was a real treat. For an old west Texas boy like myself, who hadn't seen many lions period, it was really special.

After high school, my athletic activities pretty much stopped for several years. Sometime in the late fifties and early sixties, I played some fast pitch softball and that eventually evolved into playing slow pitch softball. I became one of the better slow pitch pitchers in Arlington, but our church team was not that good. We did win more than we lost, but usually finished second in our league each year. Some of my antics on the diamond will always be remembered by my team mates, not always fondly, but remembered.

All of the above is a prelude to how I got to masters track. In college at Arlington State College, now UTA, I became good friends with Penny and Kenneth Kilpatrick. Penny's dad was a gentleman by the name of Ed Bost. I had gotten to know Ed and saw him regularly around town. I knew he was involved in something called senior games and it involved track and field. Ed knew I was turning 50 in 1986 and encouraged me to come join him. Ed was 75 at the time. He simply said it time for me to get off the couch and do something. I told him he had to be kidding. I started some half-hearted workouts the next spring and went to a couple of meets with Ed. I enjoyed the camaraderie immediately, but not the competition. I was badly out of shape and was not competitive at all. Fortunately weight was not a problem. I weighed about 145 during my high school days and still weighed only about 148 at age 50. Pretty slim for a guy who is 5'-10" tall. I decided that I really couldn't be as bad as it seemed. What I didn't know was that I was competing against some of the best runners in the country. I was hooked however and vowed to be better the next year. I was patient with my training and didn't push my limits. I bought my first pair of spikes in my third year of competition. By now I was starting to win once in a while, and always competitive. The competition was strong with the likes of Jimmy Weaver, Tony Deatherage, Charley Miller, Paul Johnson and Roy Turner in my age division. Of course we were running meters and not yards by now. It took me four years to get into top running shape. From the long layoff, I had to totally learn how to run again. I had lots of help, most of it coming from Tim Murphy. At age 54, I was running as fast as I had run in high school. I have been blessed by God with some talent and no injuries in my career. At age 54 I ran an 11.99 100 meter dash, a 24.99 200 meter dash and a 56.6 second 400 meter dash.

I decided it was time to do more than local and state meets in 1993. I wanted to see how I could compete with the big boys, so to speak. I had been achieving the All-American standards for a couple of years and felt I was ready. I went to my first national meet in the spring of 1993. It was the National Masters Indoor Championships held at the University of Missouri. This was my first time to run on an indoor track. It was a flat 200 meter track. I'm sure I ran the 400 but do not recall doing so. In the 60 meter dash, I made the finals and finished 6<sup>th</sup>. The finish was so close that it took the officials over an hour to figure out the order of finish. I was determined to place in the 200 and prevailed over Joe Hemler for third place. I first met Mel Larsen at this meet and we still share a joke about having the same kind of shoes. My training on finishing a race paid off as I edged Joe in the final 30 meters. From there it was on to the National Senior Games held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

I went to Baton Rouge in pretty good spirits. I knew I would be competitive and hoped to make the finals. Very few people knew who I was since this was only my second national competition. Sure, some of them had seen my name in the rankings but that doesn't mean much until you compete on the national scene. Some of the top masters athletes were at these senior games such as Larry Colbert, Jimmy Weaver, Cliff Pauling, Bobby Thomas and Ken

Baker. I got to meet and know Jim Law at this meet, one of the great competitors and great gentlemen of our sport. The Californians were bragging early how they were going to win every thing. They just knew they were the best. However, they forgot to ask Jimmy, Larry and I how we would do. They soon learned that they were not as good as they thought. I easily qualified for the finals in the 400 but finished 4<sup>th</sup> behind Colbert, Baker and Pauling. In the opening heat of the 200 prelims, I set a senior meet national record only to have it broken by Weaver in the next heat. Larry, Jimmy and I all made the finals. In a very close race, Larry won and I took second and Jimmy was third by a fraction of a second. The Californians had been shut out of the medals. Needless to say I was in high spirits by this time. Again all three of us made the finals in the 100 meter dash. The Californians were sure they would win this one. Jimmy won in an eyelash over Colbert and I was only a half step behind. Again we had shut out the braggarts. They couldn't believe what had happened to them. A great friendship was forged at this meet that lasted until Jimmy's untimely death in 1998. Larry and I are still very good friends and we fondly recall this meet and our love for Jimmy when we see each other at national meets.

1994 was a break-out year for me. I was now 57 years old and winning a lot of meets. The one thing that I hadn't proved was that I could compete on a national level with masters competitors. I was still considered a senior games athlete. We were looked down on by those who didn't compete in senior games and considered inferior to those who had paid their dues in the masters program. While I was winning on a regular basis in local senior games and local masters meets, I was still unknown on the national level. Eugene, Oregon, 1994 would change all that. I entered the 400, 200 and 100 meter dashes. When I finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the 400 with a time of 59.6 seconds, a number of people were wondering where I came from. My own Dallas Masters team mates had to acknowledge that I was for real. When I edged the great Jim Mathis for second in the 100 meter dash, every one knew I was for real. I could immediately sense a different feeling and acceptance from the other athletes. A third place finish in the 200 behind Mathis and Charley Miller elevated my status even more.

The rest, as they say, is history. I never slipped up on anyone again. For the years 1991-95 I met the All-American standards for the 400, 200 and 100 all five years. Only about eight people across the country could make that claim.

I have chased my good friend, Larry Colbert, all over the country. I have been in nearly every race where he set new world records. The one thing missing was a national title. In 2002 at Orono, Maine, I finally got it. It came in the race I least expected, the 100 meter dash. Mr. Peter Taylor says it is the greatest race call he ever made. I can so easily recall his excitement as he screamed into the mike, "Bennett's flying, Bennett's flying, Bennett's flying, I believe he won." And indeed I did. After the race, fans that I didn't know were coming out of the stands to congratulate me. The first one across the track to give me a big hug was Larry Colbert. That meant an awful lot to me. The only thing missing was Jimmy Weaver and I believe that he was watching from above and helping me. I made a decision before going to Maine that I was going to un-retire my first pair of spikes for one last meet. These are the same shoes that Mel and I joke about. They are now back in the box my store room. They are middle distance shoes with a heel and may still be the best shoes I have ever owned, certainly my favorites.

2003 was to be another good year for me. I was scheduled to run in the WMA world games in Puerto Rico, masters nationals in Eugene and the Canadian Masters Nationals in Vancouver, British Columbia. Puerto Rico was the first of these meets. Again, I went there with the hope of making the finals. I wasn't sure that I belonged at that level. I ran just well enough in the prelims to assure myself a place in the finals. My semi-final time in the 100 was a very slow 13.6. Talk about improvement, I finished third in the finals with a time of 13.11. One more step and I would have gotten second. A bronze medal at the world level is not bad. The US finished 1-2-3 in the event with my good friends Bob Lida and Gary Sims ahead of me.

A couple of days later, we finished the 200 in almost the same order except Paul Johnson got second and I was pushed to 4<sup>th</sup>. Gary was 3<sup>rd</sup>. We now had our 4x100 relay team cinched. I led off and ran up on Gary, which caused us to get behind, but great legs by Paul and Bob pulled it out. We were world champions. That has a special ring to it.

About a month later, we were in Eugene for the outdoor championships. Some outstanding performances by Ken Dennis and Harold Tolson pushed Gary and I back a couple of places. I got third in the 200 and 4<sup>th</sup> in the 100. Gary edged me by 0.01 seconds in the 100. Two weeks later we would hook up again in the Canadian Masters Nationals in Vancouver. This time I prevailed by the same 0.01 seconds. Gary came on at the end and bested me by 0.06 seconds in the 200 meter dash.

I have not tried to talk about all the meets, local or national, that I have competed in. I have accumulated over 400 medals in my 19 years of competition. Of those, 2 are world, 18 in outdoor championships, 10 in indoor championships and the 2 in the Canadian meet. I have given most of the local and state meet medals away. I have kept at least one from every different meet in which I have participated and all my national medals. Through 2009 this total now exceeds 600.

I'm going to back up now and look at the senior games for a short recap of those events. I've already told you about the 1993 games in Baton Rouge. The 1995 games were held in San Antonio, Texas. Some of the bigger names were either hurt or simply opted not to come. Larry Colbert wasn't there and Jimmy Weaver was injured. That pretty much put myself, Michael Boudreaux and Emil Pawlik in the favorites seat. I should have won the 100, but Michael stumbled coming out of the blocks and I paused to see if he was alright. That pause kept me from catching Emil and I received second. In the 400, Jimmy suggested that I change my strategy and go all out and make the others catch me. At the 250 meter mark I took the lead to Michael's surprise. I held it until the 320 meter mark and then rigor mortis set in. I went into slow motion. Jimmy was yelling at me to pick it up and I was wondering if I could get my spikes out of the track. Michael won and I finished third. Twenty minutes before the 200 finals, I was asleep on a concrete slab outside the stadium. Joe Summerlin came by and woke me up. I was rested and relaxed and knew this was my race. Three times during the race Michael came up beside me and all three times I simply pulled away from him and won my first and only National Senior Championship. In my last senior nationals in 1997 at Tucson, Arizona, I did not perform to my expectations except in the 400. I knew I couldn't outrun Paul Johnson but felt I was the second best in the field. That's how it played out. I ran a very respectable time of 60.71 seconds, just over my age. That 400 took all that I had and so I didn't do as well as expected in the 100 and 200. I was fourth and fifth respectively.

One final note, I was inducted into the Texas Senior Games Hall of Fame in 1998, the first year of its inception. I have been acquainted with Mr. Tom Grieve, the announcer for the Texas Rangers baseball team, for a number of years, even when he was the Rangers' general manager. I took this opportunity to send him the latest information on my career. The following night, he announced it on a nationwide broadcast of the Ranger's game.

This history would not be complete without giving credit to those who have played a big part in helping me with training, encouragement and friendship. In no particular order: JOE SUMMERLIN, TIM MURPHY, JIMMY WEAVER, LARRY COLBERT, PAUL JOHNSON, LOWELL BONIFIELD, CHARLEY MILLER, THANE BAKER, BILL JANKOVICH, EMIL PAWLIK, BILL COLLINS, ED JONES, ROD PARKER, MEL LARSEN, BILL MELVILLE, HARRY BROWN, WENDELL PALMER, DR. FRED WHITE, BOB LIDA, BILL PARDUE, JEFF BROWER, ED BOST, DON DENSON, DICK CAMP. I thank each of you for all you have done for me. I know I have not listed everyone, but the track and field family is too big for that. I feel that we are truly a family who care about each other's feelings, emotions and health. A lot of people have had an impact on me over the years and I'm sure I have made impressions on people that I don't even know.

I graduated from Birdville High School, in Haltom City in 1955 and went to work for General Dynamics Corp. in Fort Worth. I was laid off in the fall of 1958, probably one of the best things that ever happened to me. I met my wife to be, Nancy Peyton of Channelview, Texas, in the spring of 1957, a student at Texas State College for Women in Denton. How we clicked, I don't know. She was a refined music major who loved classical music and I was a west Texas boy in Levis, boots, hat and western shirts who knew only country music. We are still that way. She graduated in June of 1959 and we were married on August 1, 1959. We moved to Odessa, Texas so I could start college at Odessa Junior College. This was the only junior college where I could major in engineering and Odessa was one of the highest paid teacher's salary in the state. Nancy would teach music until after I got out of college. We moved to Arlington in 1961 where we have lived ever since. We have two daughters, Beverly, born in 1965 and Elaine, born in 1967, and three grandsons, ages 3, 4, 7 and a granddaughter, age 9.

After graduating from Arlington State College with a degree in Civil Engineering in 1964, I went into the construction industry as an estimator and project manager and worked the next 22 1/2 years for Thos. S. Byrne, Inc. They were major commercial contractors in the Ft. Worth-Dallas area. Some of the major projects that I headed up were the Ft. Worth Water Gardens, The Kimbell Art Museum, 2 major additions to the General Motors Assembly Plant in Arlington, a major addition to the Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, a 14 story office building in Arlington, several 5-10 story office buildings in Dallas and one 19 story office building. Also I was project manager on two buildings on the campus of my alma mater. After leaving Byrne in 1986, I worked for several different contractors and sub-contractors until I retired in 2001.

I have been a member of the Dallas Masters Track and Field Club since 1987. After being only a member for a couple of years, I began to take an active role in the leadership of the club and help at the annual meet. If you are active in any club, sooner or later, you get elected to some office. In 1998, I was secretary of the club, when the treasurer called me and asked to meet him in Irving. This was two days before our annual meet. I met Jim and he handed me the club check book and a card to transfer the checking account to my name. He was resigning immediately due to a conflict with the club president. Now I was the secretary-treasurer of the club. At the annual meeting the following January, we elected a new president, vice-president and I was elected the secretary-treasurer. I still hold this position. I take a lot of pride in the Dallas Masters and the annual meet we put on. I have been responsible for purchasing tee-shirts and medals for our annual meet. It is my belief, and I am prejudiced, that we have the best looking medals in the country. I also designed the championship patch we give out at our meet. Part of my responsibility as secretary is publishing a newsletter. I try to put one out once a month, but it usually is more like every six weeks. My greatest weakness is procrastination. For the past five years, I have published a calendar showcasing our members. I am always impressed by what our members have accomplished. I am always amazed at how many people know who I am and what I do. This has been written now while my memory is still fresh and fairly accurate. For those few who will get to read this, you have been singled out as very special people and I hope you enjoy it.

One final word. God plays a big part in who I am and what I am. I have been blessed by Him with some talent, the ability and opportunity to use that talent and freedom from injuries of any nature for these many years. I give Him thanks daily for this. I have been active in Epworth United Methodist Church in Arlington for more than 40 years, serving more than 10 years as chairman of the Board of Trustees. I have been leading the same adult Sunday School class for the past 20 years. I use the word lead, because I'm not sure that I teach them any thing. I am quick to tell people on the track at workouts, at track meets and anywhere else what God has done for me. Yes, I have to work hard and diligently to do the things I do. He gives you the opportunity and ability to do things, but you have to do the work.

**This history is still in the making. I am still competing and looking forward to when I turn 70 in 2006 and get to be the young kid of the group again.**

**Thanks to some good luck on my part and bad luck on others, my 70<sup>th</sup> year was a very good one. It started out with a win in the 100 meter dash at the famed Penn Relays in Philadelphia. Bob Lida was injured and could not compete. In the 4 x 100 for 70+, our team of myself, Larry Colbert, Dick Camp and Rich Rizzo came close to setting a new American record. Bad hand-offs, cold weather and a wet track didn't help any. This was followed by a second place finish in the age-graded 200 at UTA Open, an exciting race won by 55 year old Rick Riddle by .04 seconds. I continued to run well in other meets and headed for nationals in Orono, Maine where I had previously won my only national title. Again, things went right for me and not for Lida. Through a misunderstanding, he failed to declare for the 100 meters and literally handed me another championship. I'll take them any way I can get them. I finished second to Lida in the 200. He is such a great athlete. Our team of Rizzo, Camp, myself and Lida set a new American record in the 4 x 100 relay, just missing the world record. We intend to get it next year. For the year, I was ranked 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> in the world in the 100 meter dash for 70 year olds and tied for 8<sup>th</sup> in the 200 meter dash. Man, there are some great 70 year old athletes out there and I am so proud to be a part of this group. As always I am surprised by my accomplishments and my abilities. I finished up the year by winning the 50, 100 and 200 meter dashes at the Texas Senior Games state championships.**

**2008 started out with a bang. The Penn Relays is the world's largest relay carnival. They run relays every 5 minutes for about 3days, featuring high schools, colleges, university teams and Olympic development teams. Masters are invited to participate as well. You have to be invited to participate in this meet. As masters we are allowed one heat of each age group for the 100 meter dash and usually two heats of masters for the relay. I had joined a team called Sprint Force America to be able to compete here. Myself, Bob Lida of Kansas, Larry Colbert of Maryland and Gary Sims of California teamed up for the 4 x 100 for 70-79 year age group. We practiced a few hand-offs in a practice field and felt we were ready. The running order was Gary, Wayne, Larry and Bob. I made the statement that no one would catch me on my leg and I was right. The baton exchanges went well and the crowd of about 30,000 people were standing and cheering when Bob crossed the finish line with a new world record of 51.96 seconds. The old record, held by a German team, was 53.04 . Of course we were ecstatic. Roger Pierce, a 60 year old world champion, was in the lane next to me and he was not able to make up any distance on me. I think my leg was about 12.8 seconds. Later in the day I would finish 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 100 meter dash behind Bob and Gary. I really can't describe what it means to have the words "world record" beside your name. I will always treasure that.**

**The rest of 2008 was not as exciting as the beginning. We ran our usual age-graded 200 at UTA with Rick again winning and I was second. This is always an exciting event for us and the crowd. They just can't believe that men our age can run so well and that we are even doing this sort of thing. Outdoor nationals were held in Spokane, Washington in early August. I did not run as well as I hoped to but soon figured out that my lazy streak that kept me out of the weight room all summer resulted in a loss of strength in the legs and they simply wouldn't respond as they normally do. I did get third in both the 100 and 200 meter dashes thanks to some misfortune by a couple of other people. Our relay team was a different group and we ran fairly well and got a gold medal, but nearly four seconds off the record.**

**The Texas State Senior Games were held in Temple in late September. Since this is a qualifying year for senior nationals in 2009 in California, there were more than the usual group participating. I won the 100 and finished second to my good friend Mack Stewart of Katy in the 200. Not exactly spectacular times, but good enough to keep me in the top four in the country in my age group. Overall it was good year. I have competed in nine meets plus the UTA race, winning 14 first places, five seconds and three third place medals.**

The year 2009 was not one of my better years. Of course I am now up in the middle of the age group and the years are starting to tell. My first event of the year was the Penn Relays and I got second in the 100 behind Bob Lida. We had a little different 4 x 100 relay since Gary Sims was hurt and we substituted Dick Camp in his slot. Things were going fairly well until I handed off to Larry and in the first few steps he pulled a hamstring and went to the ground. They carted Larry off in a wheel chair. Larry is still trying to rehabilitate that hamstring. Our annual age-graded 200 at UT Arlington was a real barn burner. Bill Collins came and dedicated the race to his former coach at TCU, Guy Shaw Thompson. He won it easily in a time of 20.48 seconds, followed closely by Rick Riddle, John Simpson, Cindy Steenbergen, myself and Joe Summerlin. In late March we ran at a new track in Leander, Texas near Austin. I managed to beat out Bobby Whilden with my best time in two years in the 100, a 13.90. The nationals were held in Oshkosh, Wisconsin and I did not run as well as I should have. I finished third behind Lida and Whilden in the 100 and third behind Lida and Michael Boudreaux in the 200. It had been a few years since Michael had been able to compete and I was very happy to see him healthy again. Heart bypass surgery takes awhile to overcome and a strong resolve to even try to sprint again. I finished the year with performances at North Texas Senior games in Wichita Falls, Hot Springs, Arkansas and Houston, Texas. Whilden again beat me in the 100 at Houston. For the year, I ran in 10 meets and won 20 medals, 15 gold, 3 silvers and 2 bronze. I finished the year ranked 3rd in the 200 and 6<sup>th</sup> in the 100 in the nation in the 70-74 age group.

**Wayne Bennett**