# Track & Field in Iowa, 1880s–1960s

SHSI (IOWA CITY)

## by Leah D. Rogers & Clare L. Kernek

ne of the first competitive sports established at American colleges, track and field was introduced by the late 1880s at several colleges in Iowa, usually by individuals from schools in the East. It was also the one team sport in Iowa that was truly racially integrated and provided some of the best opportunities for minority participation in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, it was not a major sport for women until the 1960s.

Between the 1880s and 1960s—the focus of this story—track and field evolved as larger meets were organized and stadiums improved, and as athletes and coaches achieved successes that advanced the sport and built spectatorship.

In the late 1880s, Grinnell was among the first Iowa colleges to begin having annual school meets. These were all-day competitions among men from various classes, rather than various colleges. The first few meets were held at a half-mile race track in a nearby pasture. The numerous events included several that have long since become obsolete, including "jumps with and without weights, . . . standing and running, [and] sack race," according to a local history. "Then there was

case he failed to balance the first one properly. He who first crossed the line with an egg still reposing on his shingle was winner." Other common events at such competitions were the three-legged race, football kick, baseball throw, and a hammer throw that involved an actual sledge hammer with a hickory handle. Instead of medals, prizes at Grinnell's early meets were items donated by local merchants, such as "laundry work, a pair of shoes, a knife or some other article of practical nature. In the home meet of 1887 the prize for the mile run was a hammock."

By 1889 sufficient interest among Iowa colleges in track and field prompted the organization of a state meet. That year, representatives from 14 colleges gathered to plan the event, calling themselves the Inter-Collegiate Athletic Association. Grinnell was selected as the site of the inaugural meet the following June.

The University of Iowa formed its first track team in the spring of 1890 in preparation for the state meet. Two medical students from Ireland, William and Jeremiah Slatterly, introduced the sport at the university. The cousins had competed in track and field contests at their Dublin college; at Iowa they led practices in

the egg race in which each contestant was given three sprinting and the pole vault, shot put, and high jump. eggs on the shingle and replacing it with another in The June meet featured tennis contests in the morn-

## 66 Iowa Heritage Illustrated



WA WOMEN'S ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES, IOWA CITY, IOWA

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



In those years Grinnell had several talented trackmen—including Clyde Ward, whom Grinnell's Ward Field is named after. Grinnell also had the advantage of having several talented bicyclists on its team; bicycle racing was an important part of track and field competition in the early 1890s. However, under the coaching of E. W. Moulton, his performance increased dramatically in the 1894 season. Crum took firsts in two dashes at the state meet but lost the 440 to Grinnell's R. L. Whitley (whose time of 49 seconds remained a state record for 31 years).

The next day Crum won two first-place medals at the first Western Intercollegiate Association meet in Chicago (forerunner to the Big Ten). During the 1895 season, Crum established himself as one of the nation's premier sprinters. After a string of 25 races without a single loss (including a dual meet with Grinnell), Crum traveled to the Inter-Collegiate 4-A meet in New York. There, he incited the ire of the eastern schools by taking firsts in the 100-yard and 220-yard dashes. In fact, the delegations from Yale and Pennsylvania were so dubious that an amateur collegian from Iowa could beat out the elite of the Ivy League that they protested on the grounds that he must be a professional.

n 1894 and 1895, one of the fastest sprinters in the country (and the University of Iowa's first nationally known sports figure) was John Van Fleet Crum from Bedford, Iowa. Crum's awkward gait did not seem that of a future track star.

## From left:

"Panton winning 440-yd. Dash," 1903, Cornell College vs. Iowa State Normal School (University of Northern Iowa).
Discus, University of Iowa student, 1920.
Team photo, Grinnell High School, 1901.



66 Iowa Heritage Illustrated

colleges race, since become obsolete, including "jumps without weights, ... standing and running, classes, rather than various colleges. The first few meets eggs on the shingle and replacing it with another in The numerous events included several that have long the egg race in which each contestant was given three were held at a half-mile race track in a nearby were In the late 1880s, Grinnell was among the first Iowa all-day according to to begin having annual school competitions р local history. among men from various "Then there meets. [and] sack with pasture. These was and

Between the truly racially 1880s and 1960s-

stor and built spectatorship. ganized and stadiums coaches -track and stadiums improved, and as athletes and achieved successes that advanced the sport and field evolved as larger meets were or--the focus of this

integrated and provided some

was in the East. It was also the one team sport in Iowa that sport for women until the 1960s.

the best opportunities for minority participation in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, it was not a major 2

ne of the first competitive sports established

in Iowa, usually by individuals from schools at American colleges, track and field was introduced by the late 1880s at several colleges

80051 ack & **S09** P 2

by Leah D. Rogers & Clare L.



ot first crossed the line with an egg still reposing on his shingle was winner." Other common events at such run was a hammock com donated by actual sledge hammer with a hickory handle. Instead case he failed to balance the first one properly. He who nature. In the home meet of 1887 the prize for the mile pair of shoes, a knife or some other article of baseball throw, and a hammer medals, prizes at Grinnell's early meets were items mated by local merchants, such as "laundry work, a petitions were the three-legged race, football kick, 3 throw that involved an practical

track and field prompted the organization of a state meet. That year, representatives from 14 colleges gathas the site of the inaugural meet the following June. ered to plan Collegiate Athletic Association. Grinnell was selected By 1889 sufficient interest among Iowa colleges in k and field prompted the organization of a state the event, calling themselves the Inter-

sprinting and the pole vault, shot put, and high jump. Two medical The in the spring of 1890 in Two medical students from Ireland, William and Jer-emiah Slatterly, introduced the sport at the university. at their Dublin college; at Iowa they The University of Iowa formed its first track team cousins had competed preparation for the state meet. in track and field contests Ireland, William and Jerled practices In

The June meet featured tennis contests in the morn-

ward tition in the early Fleet Crum from Bedford, the nationally known sports figure) was John Van Ч gait did not seem that of a future track star. 1894 and 1895, one of the fastest sprinters in le country (and the University of Iowa's first 1890s. Iowa. Crum's awk-

Field menracing was an important part of track and field compeof having several talented bicyclists on its team; bicycle In those years Grinnell had several talented track-

is named after. Grinnell also had the advantage

-including Clyde Ward, whom Grinnell's Ward

and Wesleyan, and Upper Iowa. Other point-winners were Grinnell, Ames, Cornell, Iowa the Slatterlys, came in first, with winners in nine events the opera house. The University of Iowa team, led jump, 220-yard run, half-mile run, tug-of-war, and threekick, hammer throw, 75-yard dash, pole vault, standing broad legged race. Boxing matches and exhibitions of fencing saber swinging were scheduled for the evening

by

at

running high jump, 120-yard hurdles (10 flights),



by premier sprinters. After a a single loss (including a Crum traveled to the Inter-( York. There, he incited the York. tested on the grounds tha could beat out the elite of the Ivy League that they In were so dubious that an amateur collegian from Iowa a the first premier Chicago (forerunner to the Big Ten). During the 1895 season, Crum established himself as one of the nation's fact, taking firsts in the 100-yard and 220-yard dashes The next day Crum won two first-place medals at the delegations from Western Intercollegiate incited the a it he -Collegiate 4-A meet in New string of 25 races without dual meet with Grinnell), ire of the eastern must be a Yale and Pennsylvania Association professional. meet without schools pro-E

of 49 seconds remained a state record for 31 years) son. but lost the 440 to Grinnell's R. L. Whitley (whose time performance increased dramatically in the 1894 sea-Crum took firsts in two dashes at the state meet coaching of μi. W. Moulton, his

ing and track and field events in the afternoon, including baseball throw, 50-yard dash, football place kick, running broad jump, 16-pound shot put, 100-yard dash, hitch and However, under the

Summer 2010 67

VS.





ußıs For amateur home without his medals. three weeks later. He went on to distinguish himself in resolved in his favor and his medals forwarded to him (for State University of Iowa). As a result, he returned proof, they pointed to what looked like a dollar on his uniformcompetition. -which was actually an SUI logo The controversy was quickly

the hiring of a trainer. By 1909, at the 20th annual state up eight times. (In comparison, the University of Iowa meet, Grinnell had won nine titles had won six; Drake, four; and Iowa State, one.) In 1895 Grinnell's track team also benefited from and been runner-

added After it would stayevent finally could be held on a proper field. And there Des Moines, and Marshalltown until 1897 Moines became the host, often at the state fairgrounds. The state meet had been in Grinnell, Iowa City, more to the stadium field at Drake University, seating as the Drake Relays. and improved drainage when Des were the



relay came thletic director and coach John Griffith, who ame to Drake in 1908 from Morning College in Sioux City, organized Drake's meet in 1910. He decided to host a 1908 Morningside "carfirst

colleges; nival" teams from Simpson, Des Moines and Highland Park West and North Des Moines high schools of track and field events on April 23, Drake University; Earlham Academy; 1910, with and

Despite a surprise blizzard, the event was de-

the ed to every Iowa college, high schools clared a success, and ambitious plans were laid for the next year's relay meet. gional track and field event. per called "the biggest meet ever staged in the Mid-west." Held on April 22, 1911, a beautiful spring day, the meet established the Drake Relays as a major re-23 high schools competed in what a local Over 70 teams from 16 colleges and universities and state, and all the Missouri Valley institutions. Invitations were extendthroughout newspa-

the 1911 meet, attendance shot to 1,500 two years later, more schools in the meet (including the universities of and in 1912 promotion by Griffith, who, for example, encouraged area merchants to buy blocks of tickets in advance and to 5,000 by 1917. This was partly due to aggressive most important meets in the country. neapolis, and Detroit covered it. In 1915 the Associated increased. Reporters from Chicago, Kansas City, Min-Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan), press coverage Press declared the Drake Relays to be one of the three Local civic organizations underwrote publicity. The crowds grew rapidly. From 500 spectators sent personal invitations to 500 alumni. in advance With at

state meet. back to 1906 and America's first association-sponsored well-established interscholastic track program that dated ticipation at this level had been limited-More high schools began to enter the Relays -despite Iowa's Par-

Iowa prep star, Chuck Hoyt of Greenfield High School. One of the decade's most well-known athletes was an

Action

Dubuque, schoo winni at the grade, Sol

figuring he would have another chance in college, but so impressed Olympic officials that he was invited to join the 1912 U.S. team. (Hoyt turned down the offer, school, Hoyt began racing competitively in the eighth sophomore, in national competition. In 1912, Recognized for his Stagg Interscholastic Meet in Chicago, a feat that and never lost a dash in high school, including he won the 100-yard and 220-yard dashes sprinting talent while (Hoyt turned down the offer, while a high Ħ school grade

ter his time in the 220 set a new world record. teams win third and second place respectively. In 1916, running for Grinnell, Hoyt was the star of the meet afthe 1916 games were canceled due to the war.) Hoyt's high school had no track coach, s nell's H. J. "Doc" Huff stepped in. Hoyt gave standout performances in 1913 and 1914, helping his high school so Grin-

the most, with eight, and Morningside College in Sioux City with six. the Relays' first decade, Coe in Cedar Rapids claimed Of all the Iowa colleges with first-place finishes in

SIC,

international competition held in lieu of the Olympics ican team as the greatest collegiate long jumper in the country. In 1919 he won the 100-yard dash and the U.S. Army in the Inter-Allied Games in Paris, an the broad jump at the Penn Relays, and represented competitors in the Drake Relays, anchored the 1919 l events. ng 880-yard relay team from the University Butler, where He was twice elected to the All-Amerone he had established records of the first African American in six of

> tion and could not finish. cord, and Butler was expected to win his event AAU championship with in Antwerp. But he when he went with the jump in Paris was just 2 in and in which 18 countries pulled a muscle during competi-C iches shy That same year he won the a record-setting jump. S participated. team to the 1920 Games of the Olympic re His winning easily



Penn. By the end of the decade, days. Newspapers records had been bettered new records By 1922, it comprised 34 ev vaulter from Norway. Army and colleges on the nation's other major relay event. In 1923, ten In the 1920s the Drake Relays came of age as and international importance. major track trants widened to include athletes from the U.S. set at Drake with those at the Penn Classtarted and field The both coasts, program expanded as well. ents over the course of two at Drake comparing the competition the Drake event had and even a polebut only three at The field of of national number of en-

 Hurdles, George Saling, circa Meet, Drake Stadium, From left: Long jump, Ed Gordon, 1932, University of Sprint, University of Iowa students, 1920s. Work Projects Administraton photo labeled "Negro Track lurdles, Julie Goodrich, ," June 5, 1971 1932, University of Iowa. Adel High School. 941. of lowa

Summer 2010 69



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

IOWA WOMEN'S ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES, IOWA CITY, IOWA

SHSI (IOWA CITY)

For proof, they pointed to what looked like a dollar sign on his uniform-which was actually an SUI logo (for State University of Iowa). As a result, he returned home without his medals. The controversy was quickly resolved in his favor and his medals forwarded to him three weeks later. He went on to distinguish himself in amateur competition.

In 1895 Grinnell's track team also benefited from the hiring of a trainer. By 1909, at the 20th annual state meet, Grinnell had won nine titles and been runnerup eight times. (In comparison, the University of Iowa had won six; Drake, four; and Iowa State, one.)

The state meet had been in Grinnell, Iowa City, Des Moines, and Marshalltown until 1897, when Des Moines became the host, often at the state fairgrounds. After more seating and improved drainage were added to the stadium field at Drake University, the event finally could be held on a proper field. And there it would stay—as the Drake Relays.

Press declared the Drake Relays to be one of the three thletic director and coach John Griffith, who came to Drake in 1908 from Morningside most important meets in the country. College in Sioux City, organized Drake's first More high schools began to enter the Relays. Parrelay meet in 1910. He decided to host a "carnival" of track and field events on April 23, 1910, with teams from Simpson, Des Moines and Highland Park colleges; Drake University; Earlham Academy; and state meet. West and North Des Moines high schools. Despite a surprise blizzard, the event was de-

clared a success, and ambitious plans were laid for the next year's relay meet. Invitations were extended to every Iowa college, high schools throughout the state, and all the Missouri Valley institutions. Over 70 teams from 16 colleges and universities and 23 high schools competed in what a local newspaper called "the biggest meet ever staged in the Midwest." Held on April 22, 1911, a beautiful spring day, the meet established the Drake Relays as a major regional track and field event.

The crowds grew rapidly. From 500 spectators at the 1911 meet, attendance shot to 1,500 two years later, and to 5,000 by 1917. This was partly due to aggressive promotion by Griffith, who, for example, encouraged area merchants to buy blocks of tickets in advance and in 1912 sent personal invitations to 500 alumni. Local civic organizations underwrote publicity. With more schools in the meet (including the universities of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan), press coverage increased. Reporters from Chicago, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Detroit covered it. In 1915 the Associated

ticipation at this level had been limited—despite Iowa's well-established interscholastic track program that dated back to 1906 and America's first association-sponsored One of the decade's most well-known athletes was an Iowa prep star, Chuck Hoyt of Greenfield High School.

68 Iowa Heritage Illustrated



Recognized for his sprinting talent while in grade school, Hoyt began racing competitively in the eighth grade, and never lost a dash in high school, including in national competition. In 1912, while a high school sophomore, he won the 100-yard and 220-yard dashes at the Stagg Interscholastic Meet in Chicago, a feat that so impressed Olympic officials that he was invited to join the 1912 U.S. team. (Hoyt turned down the offer, figuring he would have another chance in college, but the 1916 games were canceled due to the war.)

Hoyt's high school had no track coach, so Grinnell's H. J. "Doc" Huff stepped in. Hoyt gave standout performances in 1913 and 1914, helping his high school teams win third and second place respectively. In 1916, running for Grinnell, Hoyt was the star of the meet after his time in the 220 set a new world record.

Of all the Iowa colleges with first-place finishes in the Relays' first decade, Coe in Cedar Rapids claimed the most, with eight, and Morningside College in Sioux City with six.

Sol Butler, one of the first African American competitors in the Drake Relays, anchored the 1919 winning 880-yard relay team from the University of Dubuque, where he had established records in six school events. He was twice elected to the All-American team as the greatest collegiate long jumper in the country. In 1919 he won the 100-yard dash and the broad jump at the Penn Relays, and represented the U.S. Army in the Inter-Allied Games in Paris, an international competition held in lieu of the Olympics and in which 18 countries participated. His winning jump in Paris was just 2 inches shy of the Olympic record, and Butler was expected to win his event easily when he went with the U.S. team to the 1920 Games in Antwerp. But he pulled a muscle during competition and could not finish. That same year he won the AAU championship with a record-setting jump.

n the 1920s the Drake Relays came of age as a major track and field competition of national and international importance. The field of entrants widened to include athletes from the U.S. Army and colleges on both coasts, and even a polevaulter from Norway. The program expanded as well. By 1922, it comprised 34 events over the course of two days. Newspapers started comparing the number of new records set at Drake with those at the Penn Classic, the nation's other major relay event. In 1923, ten records had been bettered at Drake but only three at Penn. By the end of the decade, the Drake event had

## From left:

• Work Projects Administraton photo labeled "Negro Track Meet, Drake Stadium," June 5, 1941.

Hurdles, Julie Goodrich, 1971, Adel High School.
Long jump, Ed Gordon, 1932, University of Iowa.
Sprint, University of Iowa students, 1920s.
Hurdles, George Saling, circa 1932, University of Iowa.

Summer 2010 69



E KENT PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION. UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES, IOWA CITY, IOWA

SHSI (IOWA CITY)

produced six new world records and nine national ones.

In terms of both records broken and number of overall wins for the 1920s, the University of Illinois led the field. However, several athletes from Iowa schools also triumphed in that decade and the early 1930s. Iowa State University's 2-mile relay squad in the 1920s, led by Arthur E. "Deac" Wolters and Ray Conger, set national and world records. (Conger broke the 1,500-meter record in the 1928 Olympic trials.) And under the coaching of George Bresnahan, the University of Iowa team flourished. Eric Wilson and Charles Brookins were two of the school's seven track and field athletes who competed in the Olympics in the 1920s, and long jumper Ed Gordon won a gold medal in the 1932 Games.

Other champions included future Olympian George Bretnall (Cornell College); high-jump winners Summerfield Brunk and Bob Carle (Drake); pole vault champion Xavier Boyles and discus thrower Robert Mitchell (University of Iowa); and L. D. Weldon in the javelin (Graceland). Three-time Olympic medallist

## From left:

Morgan Taylor of Grinnell ran his first Drake Relays race in the 1920s. Known for his versatility, he excelled in the broad jump and hurdles. An Iowa high school also set a new U.S. record: Washington of Cedar Rapids won 14 races in the 1920s.

n the years leading up to World War II, the Drake Relays grew even more in size and prestige. Three thousand athletes poured into Des Moines to compete in 1931. In a fierce rivalry, the Drake Relays and Penn Classic competed to attract the premier athletes of the day. For example, in 1935, in a bid to get Ohio State's Jesse Owens, who had become famous as a prep star, the Relays director convinced Owens's team to switch its entry to Drake. Owens tied the Relays record in the broad jump, even though he injured an ankle warming up.

The event attracted the best track and field athletes in the world, as well as greater notice from the national media. In 1931 African American sports journalist Frank Young of the *Kansas City Call* began providing coverage for black newspapers in New York, Philadelphia, and several other cities. By 1937, NBC, CBS, and Mutual Radio were all broadcasting from the Relays. Despite the Depression, the decade produced larger crowds than ever.

The Relays continued uninterrupted throughout the war years, but not without change. Relay events were cut and more individual events were included instead.

School (now the University of Northern Iowa).
Relay, Julie Goodrich (front), 1973, Adel High School.
Pole vault, Henry Canby, 1929, University of Iowa.

70 Iowa Heritage Illustrated

<sup>•</sup> High jump, University of Iowa student, 1923.

High jump, 1903, Cornell College vs. Iowa State Normal



DWA WOMEN'S ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES, IOWA CITY, IOWA

F. KENT PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES, IOWA CITY, IOWA

The number of collegiate athletes decreased from 624 in 1943, to 424 the next year. This affected the number of records produced at Drake in the 1940s. Only three world records were set and no national records until after the war.

The number of Relays participants increased after the war as ex-GIs enrolled in college and competed; in 1946, half the title-winners were ex-soldiers. The following year, 141 schools from 18 states entered into competition, the highest number ever in the Relays' history. The event was again big news, and in 1949, CBS radio resumed its coverage after a nine-year hiatus. In 1953 the meet was broadcast on national television for the first time.

The 1950s saw the Drake Relays established as truly a world-class event, with many Olympic champions and world record holders competing. In one year alone the field of athletes drew from Finland, Australia, Ireland, Sweden, South Africa, Canada, Jamaica, and Hawaii. Due to the extraordinary level of talent, more records were shattered. Times were reduced in the 440 and 880. The discus record gained over 15 feet. In the pole vault the 15-foot mark was reached for the first time. And in the 120-yard high hurdles, times fell below 14 seconds.

Throughout the 1960s, the Drake Relays built on these successes, with more athletes and stronger performances attracting crowds of 18,000 spectators. This was also the decade when women first ran in the Relays. In 1961, Wilma Rudolph, three-time gold medallist at the Rome Olympics, helped debut women's competition at the Drake Relays and won the 100-yard dash. Another advance was the track itself; an all-weather surface was installed in 1969.

he history of track and field in Iowa does not end in 1969. Followers of the sport in the last four decades have had plenty of victories to applaud. For one example, consider Natasha Kaiser, who attended Roosevelt High School in Des Moines and ran in the Drake Relays in the 1980s. She won four Drake championships and nine state medals for Roosevelt High School and went on to win Olympic and World Championship medals. Today, Kaiser-Brown is the women's track coach at Drake University.

For more than a century, the Drake Relays have symbolized the dedication of coaches, the devotion of fans, and the stamina of Iowa athletes who advance from individual high schools and colleges to this world arena. Enriched by its history, the Relays have become one of Iowa's most anticipated spring rituals. �

### NOTE ON SOURCES

This article is excerpted from the track and field chapter of "Survey of Buildings, Sites, Structures, Objects, and Districts Related to the Development of Team Sports in Iowa, 1850–1960." Submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office in 2003, the statewide survey was conducted by Leah D. Rogers and Clare L. Kernek, Tallgrass Historians L.C., with contributions by Lisa Randolph, Prairiesong Research.

Summer 2010 71