

The Big 3 in '83

By Craig Christians, BWHS Track

Usually when we talk about the "Big 3" for Bellevue West Track and Field, the reference is to the Metro Conference, District, and State track meets. But in 1983, the "Big 3" were not meets but rather individuals who were to leave a mark on Bellevue West track, a mark that has lasted two decades.

Nineteen eighty-three was a banner year in Bellevue West Track and Field. Prior to last year's girls team championship and the fifth place finish by the boys, 1983's team finishes of 4th and 5th respectively have stood as the top combined team finish in school history. The team had several outstanding athletes but they were anchored by the "Big 3," seniors Tim Wakeland, Meg Thompson, and Zel Fowler. An incredible thirteen school records were set during the year with one or more of these three individuals being involved in every one of them. Zel led the way with six school records (400, 800 4x4, 4x8, SMR, DMR), while Tim (800, 1600, 3200, 4x8, DMR) and Meg (1600, 3200, 4x4, 4x8, DMR) followed with five apiece. Today, four of Tim's records still stand (800, 1600, 3200 and DMR) while two of Zel's (400, SMR) remain on the wall. Meg's final records were erased in 2001 (re-set again in 2002) by Kym Bennett in the 3200 and the girl's 4x800 relay.

Tim Wakeland was the dominant force in Nebraska distance running having swept all three distance races at the 1982 State Meet as a junior as well as capturing the state cross country title. During the Spring of 1983, he would again take gold at 1600 and 3200 meters, while placing 3rd in the 800 despite running a personal best and school record 1:55.02. His 3200 time remains the third fastest in Nebraska history. I have been fortunate to contact Tim recently by e-mail. He is currently the Clinical Director of a physical and occupational therapy practice in Bangor, Maine. Following graduation, he attended Iowa State University where he was a cross country All-American. Some of his personal bests include a 4:03 mile and 14:15 5K. Tim qualified for and participated in the 1988 Olympic Trials in the Steeplechase. He has continued to run throughout his life and writes, "last year I celebrated my first missed day of running in 21 years (completely by accident during a snowstorm)... it is such a part of my life that it has always been a part of my normal routine." Tim said that he thinks his times may have been faster had he not run three or four events at every

meet. He recalled his final State Meet in which he ran the 4x800 relay, 800, 3200 and finally the 1600 over two days. His victory in 4:17.7 in his last race at State becomes all the more amazing given the demanding schedule he faced.

Currently on the opposite coast is Meg (Thompson) Jay, working for Blue Cross of California in San Francisco. Meg was a standout for three seasons with the cross country and track teams while at West. She was a three-time State Cross Country medallist as well as a Metro Conference individual and team champion. Meg was also an incredibly durable athlete competing in the 1600, 3200, 4x400 relay and 4x800 relay at the 1983 State Meet. She brought home medals in all of these except the open 1600. I have also shared e-mail with Meg recently and she related how the 4x4 was a real family affair in 1983. The relay featured herself, her sister Kate, and twins Zel and Tonya Fowler. For the 4x800 relay, Meg and the Fowlers teamed with Julie Byrk on the school record that was finally eclipsed in 2001. Meg is proud of the fact that she competed in the first girls Nebraska State Cross Country Meet in 1980 (placing 6th) and says she still has the T-shirt to prove it! Meg fondly recalls the friends she made on her T-Bird track and cross country teams and says, "the time with them was almost as great as the winning."

Zel Fowler's specialties were the 400 and 800 meter runs even though she was able to handle the longer distances having finished 15th at the 1982 State Cross Country meet. She cracked the one minute barrier for 400 as a sophomore and went on to lower the school record over the next two years eventually running 57.6 and placing third at State in 1983. For two laps, Zel's 2:14.99 State Meet championship run remains the school record and is also in the top ten all-time among Nebraska high school girls. Zel was also a four event State Meet contestant as she anchored both the 4x400 and 4x800 relays. Following graduation, Zel attended UNO where her name remains on the all-time 800 meter charts (2:11.85) in addition to being part of the school's 4x400 record.

With a little help from a few friends, Tim, Meg, and Zel led the T-Birds to a banner season in the Spring of 1983. With thirteen school records and ten State medals between them, these three were most certainly "The Big 3 in '83."