

Decade of dominance peaks with two more state championships

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on May 22, 2012)

Jack Bailey continues the series of columns telling the amazing story of the state championships won by Oak Ridge High School.

“Oak Ridge High School opened the 1961 outdoor track and field season in humbling fashion, losing to Chattanooga City by a score of 71-57. It was Oak Ridge’s first dual meet loss in ten years.

“Chattanooga City was coached by Ray Bussard, in his third year at the school, after previously winning a state championship in his native Virginia. Bussard later went on to a Hall of Fame career as the legendary swimming team coach at The University of Tennessee.

“A few weeks later, Oak Ridge came in second again to Chattanooga City at the Knoxville News-Sentinel Relays, thus setting the stage for some epic battles later in the season.” Has Jack got your attention? What a great story is unfolding, hang on. Go Jack!

Jack continues, “After those two early season losses, ORHS began a rapid improvement, winning the rest of their meets in the regular season, leading up to the all important District, Region and State Meets.

“David Cardwell, who had won the state Cross-Country title the previous November, set a new ORHS record in the 880 yard run on April 29, 1961, when he ran 1:59.3 against Knox Fulton, besting the old school record of 2:03.00 by Mike Price in 1957.

“In an interview in the April 23, 1961, edition of the Knoxville News-Sentinel, ORHS Head Track Coach Ben Martin was asked by columnist Ted Riggs about his team’s prospects for the upcoming District, Region and State Meets. Coach Martin was well known to have a strong belief in relay teams and he was asked if he might change that philosophy.

“Coach Martin replied, ‘Well, I don’t know about that. We may make a few changes, but it’s a bit early to decide yet. I certainly wouldn’t want to weaken our mile and two mile teams (both are among the best in Tennessee) and I just don’t know about the other two (440 yard relay and 880 yard relay.) We place a high premium on our relay runners. It all depends on how the other schools shape up between now and time for the district.’ His words proved prophetic, as you will learn as you read on in this story.

“Rigg’s article went on to say that, “ a month ago Martin saw little chance for his squad in the race for top Tennessee Secondary Schools Athletic Association (TSSAA) honors. In fact, until this past week he was thinking in terms of ‘perhaps a third place finish’

“‘After seeing our boys run Wednesday’, Martin remarked, ‘I decided we’re not as bad as it first appeared. I’m not saying we’re going to win another State championship - far from it - but now I believe our chances of finishing among the leaders are better than ever.’

“On May 6, ORHS gained a measure of revenge against the Chattanooga City Dynamo’s, beating them by a 67 ½ - 64 ½ margin en route to winning the District Track and Field Championship. It was Oak Ridge’s 5th straight District title.

“Oak Ridge was only leading by one point going into the final event of the day, the mile relay. The Wildcats won going away to claim the championship. The two-mile relay team of Hank Cole, Sam Hodnett, Garlon Campbell and David Cardwell won in a district record time of 8:20.4, breaking the old District record of 8:46.8, set by ORHS in 1959.

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"The next week, Oak Ridge claimed the Region title, also held at the Oak Ridge track, by defeating runner-up Chattanooga City and a host of other schools. The winning margin over Chattanooga City was 47 ½ -38 and the convincing win established Oak Ridge as the favorite in the upcoming State Meet.

"Oak Ridge pulled off several surprises in the Region meet as they continued to post more impressive marks. Basketball star Howard Hay won the discus throw. David Cardwell tied the Region record in the 880 yard run with a time of 1:58.6 and set a new school record for the second time in the season. The two-mile relay team of Sam Hodnett, Garlon Campbell, Hank Cole and David Cardwell had a winning time of 8:19.4, which broke the old Region record of 8:25.7, set by ORHS in 1960.

"In the mile relay, the team of Hank Cole, Sam Hodnett, Jim Calvert and Gene Arrington won with an excellent time of 3:25.7, bettering existing school, district, region and state records. ORHS qualified fifteen athletes for the state meet, the most of any school.

"A week later, on May 20 at Evans-Collins Field in Knoxville, in a meet expected to be the closest state meet since 1956, Oak Ridge won an unprecedented sixth state track and field championship. Oak Ridge defeated runner-up Chattanooga City by a margin on 22-16.

"Oak Ridge's superb depth paid off handsomely, as they captured the two-mile relay (Hodnett, Campbell, Cole and Cardwell) in 8:24.4, the mile relay (Hodnett, Cole, Calvert and Arrington) in 3:30.3 and took a fourth place finish in the 440 yard relay. Football star Gene Arrington won the 440 yard dash and David Cardwell won the 880 yard run in 2:00.3. Howard Hay contributed a point with a fourth place finish in the discus throw.

"Junior Hank Cole made some newspaper headlines as he was flown via helicopter to the state meet. He took college entrance exams in the morning in Oak Ridge and the only way he could get to the meet in time for his races was by helicopter, which landed next to the stadium in time for him to run a leg on two winning relay teams.

"Head Coach Ben Martin claimed his sixth state championship and Assistant Coach Adam Lanning his first. Martin had won previous state titles in 1952, 1953, 1956, 1957 and 1958.

"The calendar year of 1961 was a remarkable year for ORHS sports. They won the state basketball championship in March, the state track championship in May and went on to win a share of the state football championship in the fall of 1961. No school in TSSAA history had ever won three state titles in one calendar year.

Jack also shared some comments from Hank Cole (Jack said, "Hank and I were team captains on the 1962 team and Hank was our 'star' runner). Here are comments from 1961 that Hank shared, "...and in 1961 I was able to slip out of the 440, which for the States had heats when I would be taking the college boards, but permitted time (remember the helicopter) to get there for the 2-Mile and Mile relays. "

Hank continued, "This also helped Ben avoid the conflict of my competing with Gene Arrington, though I am pretty sure Gene was not happy having to run the 440 at all, or at least until after he won the State – I too was happy, since Gene beat a Nashville runner named Gaddis who had out-slogged me in the rain of the Nashville Banner Relays earlier in the year."

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Hank concluded with, "We all can thank the generations of classes beginning with 1952, and earlier, that helped build this momentum of relays and runners."

"This also placed a burden/responsibility on all of us to try to sustain the results. I could look back at the David Burkharts, Hershel Baileys, and many others as models, and also to those in our partner classes who carried on the serious training standards, practice regimes and meet tactics.

Jack has again reminded us of the past championship wins of Oak Ridge High School. Next he will take us into that "indomitable" championship track season of 1962!

Wildcats Have Hopes Of Winning Sixth Crown For Coach Ben Martin

Saturday will mark the end of many long hours of hard work for over 100 boys throughout the state as the Tennessee State Track and Field Meet opens at Evans-Collins Field in Knoxville tomorrow.

Morning sessions for the meet will begin at 9:45 with the finals in all field events and the preliminaries in most individual track events.

Finals for the running events will begin Saturday afternoon at 2 p.m.

Oak Ridge will be favored in the meet as they have 15 boys entered in hopes of bringing back the sixth state crown for the Wildcats.

The last winner the 'Cats had was in 1958 when the Ridgers broke just about all relay records held at the time.

The local squad stands to break three state records tomorrow; the

mile relay team ran their race in the regional in the time of 3:25.7, bettering the old state record by three and one-half seconds; the two mile relay team broke the regional record by six seconds without being pressed to run harder; David Cardwell is in good shape to break the 880 - yard dash record of 1:58.8 set last year by Benjie Beaird of Ripley. Cardwell ran a 1:58.8 in the Regional.


The Wildcats will have one of their runners flying before the meet begins Saturday. Hank Cole, runner on the mile and two-mile relay teams, will fly by helicopter from Oak Ridge to Knoxville for the meet. Cole will be taking college entrance exams and would be late for the meet should he have to travel by car.

Memphis Central and Memphis Christian Brothers stand to give the Wildcats a tussle for defending champion Nashville East's crown.

Central will be entering 11 boys and CBHS will enter ten.

Chattanooga City will enter only seven but are going on to throw a scare into the Wildcat hopes. Gary Silcox, City's speedster, would win the 220 while teammate John Sweeney could win both hurdle events for the Dynamos. Labron Brown in the Discus and Bob Ashby in the Shot Put could give the State Crown to the Chattanooga School for the first time in its history.

The following is a list of the time recorded in the three Regional meets held last Saturday with the best time being in first place. The only ones that are listed are the ones Oak Ridge has entries in.



David Cardwell is pictured with an article published in *The Oak Ridger* in 1961 just prior to the Wildcats winning the state championship in May