

## ***The dynasty continues: Oak Ridge High School wins seventh state track championship in 11 years***

**(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on May 29, 2012)**

Jack Bailey continues the saga of Oak Ridge state championships with a glimpse into 1962.

"Oak Ridge High School, the defending state champs, opened the 1962 season in grand style, overwhelming Chattanooga East Bank High School on March 24 by a score of 97 ½ -25 ½. Oak Ridge's star quarter-miler, Hank Cole, set a new school record in the 440 yard dash with a time of 49.8, breaking the old record of 50.2 set by David Burkhart in 1958. It also topped the existing state record of 50.1.

"In a Knoxville News-Sentinel article of April 8, 1962, Coach Ben Martin and Olympian Phil Mulkey spoke glowingly of Cole. Mulkey said, 'I've never seen a high school runner with more fluid motion. No matter which event he enters, he is bound to be a contender.' Coach Martin echoed Mulkey's comments by saying, 'Hank's movements are flawless---absolutely no wasted motion. The boy's stride is so smooth you could lay a ruler on his head and it wouldn't fall off.'

"Coach Martin went on to say, 'Actually, Hank's greatest potential lies in the 880 yard run. I believe he is capable of running 1:55.' For comparison, the existing state record at the time was 1:58.8. Cole went on to be the captain of the Yale track team and was ultimately elected to the Oak Ridge Sports Hall of Fame

"After their opening win, the Wildcats were then dominant in wins over Tennessee Military Institute (TMI), 106-17, and a three way meet with Karns and Norris, 119.4-25.6-8, respectively.

"Next up were the Knoxville News-Sentinel Relays, where Oak Ridge was only 'believed to have a small chance of winning,' according to The Oak Ridger. Oak Ridge proceeded to run wild, winning all four relays to win the N-S Relays for the sixth time.

"The following weekend, the team journeyed to the Nashville Optimist Relays, where 'Oak Ridge's record breaking Wildcats piled up a staggering total of 51 points to easily take top honors,' according to a story in the Knoxville News-Sentinel. Nashville East was a distant second with 22 points. Oak Ridge set six of eleven new records in the meet.

"Interestingly enough, ORHS came in fourth in the mile relay, using a group of younger runners so they could gain race experience. It was to be the ONLY relay loss the 'Cats would experience in any relay race the entire year. Hank Cole was named MVP of the meet on the strength of winning the 440 yard dash in record setting fashion and anchoring the winning two-mile relay.

"Oak Ridge went on to defeat Knox East and Knox South by a score of 87-53-24, respectively, on the Oak Ridge track on April 24. The meet was highlighted by two significant events. Don Pinkston of Knox East ran a spectacular 4:28.1 in the mile run, the fastest high school mile ever run in the state of Tennessee and broke the record set by Chauncey Stout of Knoxville High School in 1930. Stout, who worked in Oak Ridge, witnessed the record shattering performance. The other significant event was in the 440 yard dash, where Hank Cole of Oak Ridge was upset by Danny Smith of Knox East. Cole suffered his only loss of the year in that race.

"Oak Ridge's next meet was a three way affair with Knox Fulton and Knox Bearden, with Oak Ridge racking up 99 points to 54 for Fulton and 11 for Bearden. All-American fullback Dick Truitt set a new ORHS record in the shot put with a heave of 50'10 ½." He broke David Fitchpatrick's old mark of 50' 2", which was set in 1958.

"Oak Ridge cruised to the District championship on May 5, outscoring second place Chattanooga City 89-52. Oak Ridge's powerful squad won twelve first place medals and set five new District records. Charlie Kite broke the oldest District record on the books, winning the 880 yard run in 2:00.8. The old record of 2:03.0 was set by Mike Price of ORHS in 1957.

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"Oak Ridge advanced to the Region meet as heavy favorites, with one of the strongest teams in its history. Coach Martin was quoted in *The Oak Ridger* on May 11, 'we have no one boy who is really fast, but a bunch that will run their hearts out.'

"The Wildcats did not disappoint, overwhelming the field and outscoring runner-up Knox East by the tune of 63 2/3-30. Oak Ridge again won all four relays. Freddie White of ORHS won the 180 yard hurdles in 20.2 seconds, setting a new school record and topping the record he had set earlier in the year.

"Hank Cole won the 440 yard dash and Charlie Kite won the 880 yard run. Howard Hay and Larry Thirloway finished 1-2 in the discus throw, Terry Hudson, a member of the 1961 State Champion basketball team, tied for first in the high jump and Gary Lunsford won the pole vault.

"As Oak Ridge prepared for the State Meet at Memphis Whitehaven High School, an article in the Knoxville News-Sentinel stated, 'It'll take a major catastrophe to deprive Oak Ridge of its seventh State (TSSAA) track championship.' Oak Ridge had sixteen qualifiers in twelve events. No other team came close to OR's depth. Nashville East had fifteen participants but only in seven events. The finals were to be run at night for the first time in TSSAA history.

"On May 19, as expected, Oak Ridge High School easily won its seventh state title in an eleven year span, defeating runner-up Memphis Frayser by a comfortable 35 ½ - 16. In fact, Oak Ridge's total was almost as great as the TOTAL point score of the teams that finished second, third and fourth.

"Oak Ridge displayed great quality and overwhelming depth by winning the 440 yard dash (Hank Cole) and all four relay races, a feat never before accomplished in Tennessee schoolboy history. Gary Lunsford tied for second in the pole vault, Terry Hudson tied for second in the high jump, and Howard Hay and Larry Thirloway came 2-3 in the discus throw.

"The Knoxville News-Sentinel called Oak Ridge, 'indomitable,' and *The Oak Ridger* called them, 'fabulous.' The 440 yard relay (Freddie White, Joe Davis, Mickey Marcum, Jim Calvert) was first with a time of 44.3, missing the state record by just .3. The 880 yard relay (Freddie White, Joe Davis, Jim Calvert, K. C. Jones) was first in 1:32.1, missing the state record (set by ORHS in 1958) by just two tenths.

"The mile relay (Jim Calvert, Joe Davis, Chris Harris, Hank Cole) was first with a new state record time of 3:27.6, eclipsing the old mark of 3:29.5, set by Nashville East in 1960. The two-mile relay (Chris Harris, Jack Bailey, Bob Taylor, Charlie Kite) set the most remarkable record of the evening, running the distance in 8:09.7, breaking the old state record by an incredible 9.7 seconds. The previous record of 8:19.4 was set by Nashville East in 1959.

"According to an article in *The Oak Ridger*, the domination by ORHS (seven state titles in eleven years) led two Memphis coaches to suggest 'that Oak Ridge be put in the University Division, giving the other Tennessee high schools a better chance in the meet.' The suggestion was a joke, of course.

"A picture of the Wildcats team made the cover of the TSSAA News in its May, 1962 publication. In an accompanying article, Oak Ridge was acclaimed as the best of 'the finest field of track athletes ever assembled in Tennessee.'

"Alfred G. Hill, long-time owner of *The Oak Ridger*, in a follow-up column about Oak Ridge's win, editorialized 'such an accomplishment does not *just happen*.' I wonder if the point winning members of the Oak Ridge track team realize how fortunate they are in having such a coach as Ben Martin, and the atmosphere which inspires ORHS to win so many state championships.' He also noted the four winning relay teams involved eleven competitors—an understandable definition of team work.'

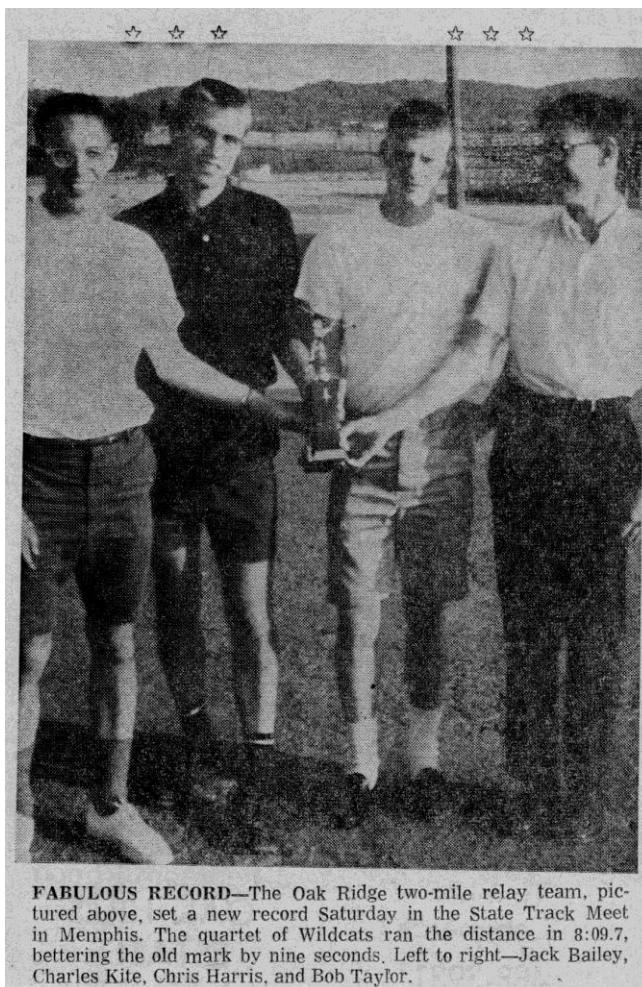
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"And so the remarkable track dynasty built by Coach Ben Martin came to an end. It was the end of an era. Oak Ridge won its first state championship of any type when it won the 1952 championship on its home track sixty years ago this spring. Fifty years ago this spring, ORHS won its seventh state championship in that great eleven year run. The Oak Ridge High School has not won a boy's state track championship since.

Before we leave this series, let me convey Jack's thanks to Earl Nall. Jack says, "Thanks to Earl Nall, a fellow 1962 ORHS classmate, for his support in this series of articles. Earl works for the Tennessee Secondary Schools Athletic Association (TSSAA) and provided results to me for all the state track meets in 1952, 1953, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1961 and 1962. That information was a tremendous help in putting this series of articles together."

I want to thank you Jack for a great series of articles on the history of Oak Ridge High School state championships!



Oak Ridge High School Relay Team breaks old record by nine seconds. Note that Jack Bailey is on this team - Ray

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New Oak Ridge High School record set