

State championship trophies missing no longer

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of September 12, 2019)

Jack Bailey brings us the story of lost state championship trophies and has worked to get them replaced. He shares not only the trophies story but also recounts the scoring records of the teams winning the championships. Enjoy this unique piece of Oak Ridge High School history.

Ben Martin. An Oak Ridge Legend. He came to Oak Ridge High School in 1943 from Norris, TN, as an assistant football coach and teacher. The first Oak Ridge High School football team went 0-4 and head football Coach Ferris Bynum left in December, 1943, for military service during World War II. Martin was elevated to head football coach and thus began a legendary career in Tennessee high school athletics. He served as head football coach at ORHS from 1944-1947, head basketball coach from 1943-1960, head track and field and cross-country coach from 1943-1965 and athletic director from 1948-1971. He was inducted into the Oak Ridge Sports Hall of Fame in 1986, the Tennessee Secondary Schools Athletic Association (TSSAA) Hall of Fame in 2010 and the Greater Knoxville Sports Hall of Fame in 2011.

While Martin was very successful in football and basketball, his greatest accomplishments came in track and field. His teams won an amazing seven state track championships in an eleven-year span from 1952-1962, a feat unmatched in Tennessee track and field history. And this was before there were any divisions or classifications in Tennessee high school athletics.

ORHS has won 43 state championships in boy's and girl's sports through the years, but the seven boy's track championships all came under Coach Martin's leadership. At some point, possibly during the major high school renovation in the mid-2000's, all the state championship track and field trophies, save one, disappeared, were lost or misplaced.

Current ORHS athletic director Mike Mullins approved a project to fund replacement trophies. After contacting several trophy/award companies and with the assistance of ORHS Class of 1962 graduate Earl Nall, A & M Products of Princeton, Illinois, agreed to make replacement trophies. Exact replicas were not possible because of the age of the trophies, so six matching trophies were made to replace the missing trophies from 1952, 1953, 1957, 1958, 1961 and 1962. The only trophy to survive was the 1956 trophy, but the metal running figures were all missing and they have now been replaced with new metal running figures. The trophies show a lone running figure on top of the trophy and four relay figures on the base of the trophy.

Ben Martin was a master at developing outstanding relay teams and his relay teams won a remarkable 15 state championship relay races (including six new state records) to spearhead most of the state championship overall team victories. His final state championship team in 1962 swept all four relay races at the state meet, the only time that has ever been accomplished in Tennessee track and field history.

Following is a detailed breakdown of the relay teams that won relay state championships on the seven state championship teams with the team scores for Oak Ridge High School and the runner-up team and an * indicating a new state record:

1952 Oak Ridge 38, Whitehaven 22 1/2

880 yard relay---Frank Blackistone, Lowell Wilson, Freddie Carter, Dave Griffith-----Time (1:34. 0)

Mile relay-----Jack Horton, Frank Blackistone, Sammy Clinton, Gene Gardner-----Time (3:36. 0)

2-mile relay-----Bobby Parsons, Max Kirtland, Sammy Clinton, Jack Horton-----Time (8:48. 1)

1953 Oak Ridge 24, Memphis Treadwell 23 1/2

*880 yard relay---Lowell Wilson, Frank Blackistone, Freddie Carter, Jackie Cornett-----Time 1:32. 4

Mile relay-----Joe Herndon, Freddie Carter, Frank Blackistone, A. Westerdahl-----Time 3:40. 8

1956 Oak Ridge 16 1/3, Memphis Central 15

(No relay winners)

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1957 Oak Ridge 30, Knoxville Fulton 21 ¼

*Mile relay-----Herschel Bailey, Jim Rust, Dave Carroll, Jackie Robinson-----Time 3:30. 7

1958 Oak Ridge 39 ½, Knoxville East 18

*440 yard relay-Bobo Herring, Howard Dunnebacke, Jackie Pope, Herschel Bailey-----Time :44. 6

*880 yard relay-Bobo Herring, Howard Dunnebacke, Jackie Pope, Herschel Bailey-----Time 1:31. 9

Mile relay-----Herschel Bailey, Winston Russell, Jackie Pope, Dave Burkhart-----Time 3:33. 3

1961 Oak Ridge 22, Chattanooga City 16

Mile relay-----Sam Hodnett, Hank Cole, Jim Calvert, Gene Arrington-----Time 3:30. 3

2-mile relay-----Sam Hodnett, Garlon Campbell, Hank Cole, David Cardwell-----Time 8:24. 4

1962 Oak Ridge 35 ½, Memphis Frayser 16 ½

440 yard relay---Freddie White, Joe Davis, Mickey Marcum, Jim Calvert-----Time :44. 3

880 yard relay---Freddie White, Joe Davis, K. C. Jones, Jim Calvert-----Time 1:32. 1

*Mile relay-----Jim Calvert, Chris Harris, Joe Davis, Hank Cole-----Time 3:27. 6

*2-mile relay----Chris Harris, Jack Bailey, Bob Taylor, Charles Kite-----Time 8:09. 7

As you can see, some remarkable teams led by a remarkable coach, Ben Martin. The replacement trophies are now on display at Wildcat Arena at ORHS as a lasting tribute to Ben Martin and the teams from a by-gone era.

Thanks to Bobby Martin, Coach Martin's son and a long-time Oak Ridger, for providing the picture accompanying this article.

ORHS Athletic Director, Mike Mullins says, "ORHS Administration and Athletics Department greatly appreciates the efforts of Jack Bailey in spearheading the State Track Trophy replacement project. These trophies were lost during the HS renovation. The Ring of Champions that houses the State Championship trophies, is on display in the Wildcat Arena lobby."

Thanks Jack Bailey, you have again excelled in documenting Oak Ridge High School sports history and the trophies look great!

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Ron Taylor, from left, Winston Russell and Jack Bailey pose with the replacement ORHS state track championship trophies. Taylor was a member of the 1952 and 1953 teams. Russell a member of the 1956, 1957 and 1958 teams and Bailey a member of the 1961 and 1962 teams. Taylor and Russell later ran for the University of Tennessee and Bailey ran for the University of Alabama. All three are members of the Oak Ridge Sports Hall of Fame.

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Coach Martin's grandson, Jay Martin, and great-grandson, Ben Martin, (obviously named for his great-grandfather) standing behind the trophies

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Coach Ben Martin