

High School Days

I went to high school from 1959 to 1963 at Central High School in Phoenix, Arizona. I distinctly remember during my first few days how impressed I was with the fluency of it all. My fellow students were dressed extremely well in what appeared to be very new clothes, and we were assigned our own locker with our own key. We were able to buy lunch tickets, if my memory serves me correctly for thirty-five cents, and one could pick out from a variety of meals. But what most impressed me was the way individuals jokingly threw pennies at each other, and even more, the way they would leave the pennies on the ground. This to me was really quite unbelievable. Naturally, I picked up a penny every time I saw one until people started looking at me and, I felt, even laughing at me.

I was also tremendously impressed with the actual facility. The high school had its own gym where one could play a variety of sports including gymnastics, basketball, and wrestling. The high school also had several tennis courts and handball courts, the latter of which I frequented when I played handball extensively during my high school years. I can remember my hand swelling up tremendously playing handball, since we used our bare hands and usually used an old tennis ball as the ball, hitting it against the court made of three-sided walls, but I thoroughly enjoyed the sport.

My first fall I decided to play football, and again I was amazed. Even though I had played some football in grammar school, we did not have any equipment such as helmets, etc., and I was astounded when once I made the peewee squad, we were taken to a room where we selected our own helmets and shoulder pads out of a large row of such equipment in different sizes. I was also impressed that on our away games, we went on our own bus and played on the visiting

teams turf, and we even had our own referees in their black and white striped shirts. I played both offense and defense and thoroughly enjoyed it.

One of the main things that has stuck in my mind about playing sports is that our coaches would call us hotdogs and hamburgers, and if we did not line up correctly or did something incorrectly, they would kick us in our butts or on the legs, whatever was easiest. They even slapped us on the top or the side of our heads to get our attention. We certainly did not think anything of it; it was simply the norm and I do not think it was meant to do us physical harm, but rather to make sure we were paying attention.

Once the winter came about, I participated in basketball and was fortunate enough to make the freshman team. Again, I was impressed with the uniforms provided. I was a mediocre player and primarily played back-up guard. In those days, I don't think we had the designation of point guard and shooting guard, but I remember we had two guards, two forwards and the centers I played one of the guards, usually on the right side. I remember one particular game when I had a "hot hand" and made nine points. I was somewhat proud of myself, having contributed to the team's effort, but we lost the game as we lost most of the games during that year.

As the spring came about, the jocks played either baseball or went out for track and field. Since baseball was totally unknown to me, I proceeded to try out for track and field. I really did not know what I was good at, but somehow I ended up running middle distance or long distance and in fact, ended up running the mile. This was extremely difficult for me. Practicing for the mile was hard and consisted not only of running the mile but also sprinting either the 330 or 440, both very difficult. The meets were usually held on Friday afternoons, which caused me much anxiety, and the mile run was usually the fourth or fifth event. As the first three events proceeded, I would nervously warm up by running short distances, such as 100 or 200 yards.

Once the race started, the first quarter was always quick. Then we settled down for the third and second quarter mile, and then of course the fourth lap or the “bell” lap was a sprint and the second 220 yards were a sprint. I believe we had approximately nine meets and I was fortunate enough to either be first or second in most of them, which led me to qualify for the state meet in the freshman mile.

The state meet was held at North High School, and there were three individuals who were favored to win the freshman mile: a student from North High School, one from South High School, and myself. Sure enough, during that race, as the last lap unfolded, I was in third position. As we proceeded around the last curve, with approximately 100 yards to go, I was in second position. My thoughts at that time were that with all the practices, all the sweat, all the energy, I would end up in second place. So, I just gave it everything I had and inched closer to my rival in front of me. As we closed in on the finish line, I lurched forward and ended up approximately half a foot to a foot in front of my opponent. I was so exhausted I crumbled to the ground and had to be taken off the track by two or three people. Nevertheless, I remember how proud I was with the blue ribbon and showed it off to Mr. Reynolds at the chicken farm where I had to go to work afterward. I then showed it off to my parents, who really did not understand, or I thought they didn't understand, the importance of it. Nevertheless, with my time at 4 minutes, 59 seconds, I beat five minutes. This record stood only one year; the following year another freshman ran 4:40.

As my sophomore year came about, I again wanted to try out for football, but in the meantime my mother had talked to people that warned her how dangerous football was to an individual and consequently she forbid me from playing football. Since I wanted to participate in some sports, I ran cross-country which then consisted of three miles. Again, the practices were

hard and long, and my anxiety persisted on the days of the meets. I contributed somewhat to our team, in fact, enough to letter in the sport as a sophomore. Again, I was impressed with the buses taking us to the away meets as well as with the phenomenal facilities at these campuses. As a sophomore, one distinct campus I recall was Phoenix Union High School where, as part of the course, I ran up and down the bleachers, which was obviously somewhat dangerous. The thing I remember most after that particular run was that I ended up with severe pain in my shins, so-called shin splints. This lasted several weeks and fortunately went away and I never got them again.

In the fall of my junior year, I tried out for basketball. I did not make varsity, but played junior varsity, which I thoroughly enjoyed. As springtime came around, I again went out for track and field and ran the mile again, but did not do very well. I broke five minutes only once and I don't think I won a race or came in the top three most of the time.

The next year I again ran cross-country and did all right, but it was certainly not a stellar performance. I again tried out for varsity basketball but only made junior varsity. I started some games but sat on the bench most of the time. In that following spring, I again ran the mile but I believe only broke the five-minute mile two to three times. I do not believe I ran any races.

My senior year in high school, I started running cross country and had several meets, but it was about that time I started working for Jack-in-the-Box, where my hours were more demanding and more rigidly set than at the chicken farm. Consequently, I did not participate in the whole cross-country season. I didn't try out for the basketball team either because of the hours I was working at Jack-in-the-Box, and it was doubtful I would have made the varsity team anyway. As a senior, you could not play for junior varsity. I should mention that during my junior year, I was asked to play one game on the varsity team. In fact, I remember it quite well. It

was a game in Yuma, and we took the bus to Yuma and were fed food on the bus. As usual, I was sitting at the end of the bench, but as we had the game well in hand and we were ahead by many points, I was put in as a substitute for one of the guards. As I was playing, I was fouled and ended up at the free-throw line. In those days if you made a point, then your name was listed in the newspaper in fine print at the bottom of the article describing the game, with your name and number of points. Well, it was a free throw and consequently you had to make the first one to make the second shot. Unfortunately, I missed the first shot and then was immediately pulled out of the game. This ended my glorious time on the varsity team at Central High School.

I didn't run track and field in my senior for the same reason I didn't play basketball, that being the set hours at Jack-in-the-Box.

All-in-all, my athletic activities during my high school days were extremely pleasant, except for the anxiety before the individual meets in cross country or the mile run.

As for my classes, I studied hard and fortunately was able to do most of my homework during recess and at lunch hour, and therefore had the after-school hours free for work and sports. I took Latin all four years, and enjoyed the rigid structure of that language. It seemed a much more defined language than either German or English.

I had many memorable teachers, among them Mrs. Boyle, who was my sophomore English teacher and who impressed upon me the importance of classic literature such as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" or poems by Emily Dickinson. I also remember quite well the chemistry class and especially the laboratory component of that class. It was fascinating mixing different liquids together to make a totally different mixture that often would bubble, steam and have a distinctive odor to it. Along with the other fourteen- and fifteen-year-old boys, I loved to

make the odor that smelled like a rotten egg and would pass that particular liquid under the noses of our girl classmates with laughter and shrieks.

While at Central High School, I participated somewhat in the political aspects and I was selected for the student council in my junior and senior years. The good part of that, as best I remember, is that we were ordered to supervise the lunches to make sure people did not cut in line, etc. and as a reward for that, our lunch was free. This was amazing to me.

Of other certain memorable and individual events that occurred during high school, I remember distinctly at lunchtime when one of my friends walked up to me and said, "Well we are finally competing with the Russians." Just hours before, Alan Shepherd had successfully carried out the first shot into outer space. I also remember quite distinctly later on when John Glen circled the earth, how we listened to his landing live on radio in one of the classes.

Concerning my social life status during those years, my first year and maybe even through my junior year, I had no interest whatsoever in girls. My time was occupied with school, sports, and work. I remember the advertisements for proms and certainly was amazed that people would willingly go to a dance with a girl.