

**Written April 15, 2019 by Roddie MacKenzie – In Memory of LeRoy Washburn, “Mr. Track & Field”**

Athletics NB and the track and field community in New Brunswick and across Canada have lost a dear friend and supporter with the recent passing of LeRoy Washburn in Oromocto. LeRoy, 84, had a lifelong passion for the sport of track and field from the mid 1950's, including involvement as a talented athlete, organizer, coach, official and administrator. His tireless work as a volunteer was integral to the growth and promotion of our sport, beginning in the early 1960's, for more than 50 years.

I first met LeRoy when I was in high school, and his personality and character shone through immediately in a conversation; he made the listener feel at ease, important and welcome. LeRoy was both business like and friendly, professional without being over-bearing, and so passionate about a lifelong pursuit of competitive sports for youth. Coming from the Miramichi metropolis of Blackville, he was educated at UNB, and followed his passion for working with youth by entering the teaching profession. As a young Physical Education teacher, first in Boisetown and then Oromocto, his reputation spread far and wide as having a depth and knowledge of sports and physical activity, and a desire to spread the importance of not just being an athlete, but demonstrating character, values, hard work and sportsmanship. He continued this leadership as the Recreation Director for the Town of Oromocto and as Athletic Director at St. Thomas University for thirty years. I can remember many a conversation over the years where we (usually he would talk and I would listen and learn !) hashed over various results in local and provincial track meets, highlighting what he saw in those successful competitors: attitude, commitment, resilience, camaraderie, desire, and not just the result shown by the stopwatch or measuring tape. Whether he was coaching, officiating or organizing, his way was easy, comfortable, welcoming, unselfish, and SO knowledgeable about the sport. WOW . . . He could talk sprints, jumps, throws, relays, multi-events . . . you name it.

Very quickly, we all learned that LeRoy Washburn was "Mr. Track and Field" in New Brunswick, and he represented us well in every capacity. The respect he earned across the country was easily observed by all. He was held in high esteem, and it was not because he went looking for the attention. He did things quietly, without fanfare, and often in the "old school" way. His manner was so easy going! LeRoy was a joy to work with, because he had this simple approach to things; he ran meetings efficiently, found people to head up committees he knew would get it done without hassles, and he had people working together for common goals. If there were personality differences or club rivalries, he would find a way to democratically blend these differences together for the betterment of all parties, most of all, the provincial association and its programs. He had this way about him that made you ENJOY going to meetings!! Those meetings and attached business with him as our President from 1984 to 87 were undertaken with nothing but optimism, fairness and an obvious transparency. This continued long after he left the ANB Board, now donating his time and involvement at the Athletics Canada (CTFA) level. His calm and team-first reputation preceded him every step of the way. You never felt out of place or intimidated by a LeRoy Washburn conversation or question, and when corrections had to be made, tough decisions rendered or lessons learned, he got it done with his typical fatherly approach.

As a blossoming athlete in more than a few sports in the mid 1950's, LeRoy became an accomplished sprinter, jumper and thrower on the NB track scene, continuing to demonstrate his skills for most of the next two decades. He performed well each season in the end of year Canadian Olympic Training Program competition, usually held in Toronto, showing his prowess in the javelin and discus, and then showed great strides in the long jump, finishing near the top of the CDN rankings in 1960, with an incredible leap of 23 ft 6 inches (7.16m !!). He ran the 100 yds in 10 flat, quite a feat back then. He would later focus on throws, with javelin being his best. He was a many time provincial champion in events as varied as the 100

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yds, long & triple jump (Hop, Step & Jump back then), shot, disc, javelin, and later, a few decathlons. He finished 12th in the first ever Canada Summer Games in Dartmouth, as a THIRTY FIVE year old decathlete, just behind a Newfoundland chap named Dennis Furlong. At the age of 40, he won the Outstanding Performer award at our 1974 Legion Provincials and Open Meet. Towards the end of his competitive days, he was our provincial record holder in the javelin, and to this day, he is our 5th best long jumper ever, and still Top 20 all time in discus. Simply amazing really.

As an official, mainly in the Throws area, LeRoy was both well organized and efficient with his approach, with an uncanny knowledge of the rule book, and able to run an event at just about any level . . . Local, provincial, national, international. Although he became a politician in the mid 1970's, (two terms as an Opposition MLA for the Liberals, 1974-82), he was effective at keeping politics out of the track and field process, always running a smooth, hassle free competition, with small doses of education along the way. LeRoy was never shy to run an off-book mini-clinic after a competition wrapped up. Ask Mark Sheehan or Brian Gilliss!! His officiating skills were rewarded with assignments at the 1967 PanAm Games in Winnipeg, the Montreal Olympics of 1976, the 1979 World Cup in Montreal, and the Commonwealth Games of 1978 in Edmonton, Alberta, and 1986 in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was then honoured with appointments as an International Technical official at the Pan Am Games and the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. His long-time leadership skills he showed as a valued Board member, official, and part time coach gave him an opportunity to lead the Canadian team to the 1987 World Student Games in Yugoslavia as the Chef de Mission. In 2010, at the World Juniors here in Moncton, he was honoured as a flag bearer for the opening ceremonies. He looked pretty sharp in those IAAF colours!! I remember sitting at several functions with him years ago, and he had more stories to tell from his forays into the international track arena. He loved to tell them, and while he was making you laugh and wonder and comment, it was a conversation that left you with a definite feeling for his passion and joy of being involved with the athletes. That was LeRoy. . . He so wanted all young people to have a chance, to experience that thrill of running, jumping & throwing, feel the wind in your face, the sand in your socks, or the mud on your fingers from that caked 16 pounder!

As we reflect on the loss of our friend and colleague, the biggest promoter of the sport in our province's history, I know he has an amazing legacy as an athlete, official, organizer, coach, administrator, leader. What I will never forget though, was his friendship, his warm smile, his hearty laugh, his bear like one arm hugs and firm handshake. His valuable and effortless conversations; the story telling that always had a lesson; his undying support and help when needed; the valuable and timely advice; his selfless hours of doing whatever he could to lend a hand; his typical simple answer for a complex issue. He was more than our MR. TRACK and FIELD though; he was a loving and generous human being, a committed family man, a believer in our youth, a shining example of what it is to be that individual willing to do whatever it took to reach a goal, to make things better, to give some kid a chance.

LeRoy, our friend, you will be missed, but never forgotten. Thank you for all you have given and the example you have set. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Loretta and family. Be comforted, knowing your husband and father gave so much, made a thousand friends along the way, but never lost sight of the things that matter most in life. We are honoured to have shared the journey with him in the same jumping pit, throwing circle and starting blocks. The starter's pistol has fired for the last time, but the stopwatch will keep on ticking.