

(Alumni News Page – Alumni Spotlight Segment continued)

How fast was Charlie White? One look at the record board in the Thornton High School Field House will confirm that White was one of, if not, the best track athlete to have ever competed for the Wildcats.

How did Charlie reach that All-American level of performance? There is no question that he was blessed with natural speed but it was his tenacious drive to be the best that motivated him to train and compete with a unique focus. White typically had a game plan and a goal for each race. Known as a front runner, he would regularly take the lead and control the tempo of a race. This tactic was important as it gave him the most advantageous position when it was time to make his finishing surge. This strategic approach to training and racing was introduced to Charlie early in his freshman year by his Coaches Steve Toth and Ed Fredette.

The most memorable example of Charlie's racing style may be the 1973 Illinois State Meet, Half Mile Finals. The Thornton junior controlled the race from the start maintaining a comfortable pace and with 220 yards to go, he unleashed a blistering kick. His winning time was 1:51.0, outdistancing 2nd place by exactly 3.1 seconds, which is a significant time gap between 1st and 2nd place in this event.

White was also a great team leader that lead by example, his disciplined training and racing regiment inspired his teammates. Moreover, Charlie's leadership was never outspoken, judgmental or misguided but always humble, with purpose and focus. All he asked of his teammates was 100% effort everyday toward their common goal.....The State Championship. In 1973, they came within one point of attaining that goal, by placing 3rd behind co-champions LaGrange and Lane Tech.



Thornton's 1973 State 3rd Place Team

Athletes: (l to r) Brad Borgwardt, Nick Bratcher, Max Tolen & Charlie White. Coaches: Steve Toth, Bob Oetting & Ed Fredette.

Equally impressive was White's Collegiate career at Illinois, his disciplined work ethic and study habits were essential for his success in Champaign. Surrounded by NCAA All-American teammates, his fellow Illini demanded 100% commitment to their common goals of Big Ten and NCAA Championships. With that mandate, the Illini enjoyed Big Ten and national success. Charlie finished his collegiate racing career with several accolades, including being a Big Ten Champ, Big Ten All-Conference 12x and NCAA All-American 3x.



Charlie spoke with us recently regarding his student-athlete experience:

WFF: When did you know that Track was the sport for you?

White: *I knew track was the sport for me when I started running my freshman year. I had success in track and cross country, I competed on the varsity level and was soon one of the best runners on the team.*

WFF: When did you first start setting goals and what were they?

White: *My older brother Roy and I started setting goals for me my freshman year. He would tell me what the school record was or who the best runner was to beat and we would plan a race strategy. Also, my high school coaches Steve Toth and Ed Fredette would tell me what times and places I should be shooting for. They gave me goals that seemed impossible to achieve at first but, later on we realized they were achievable. Our main focus from freshman year was to place or win the state meet as an individual and as a team every year.*

What National Records did you set?

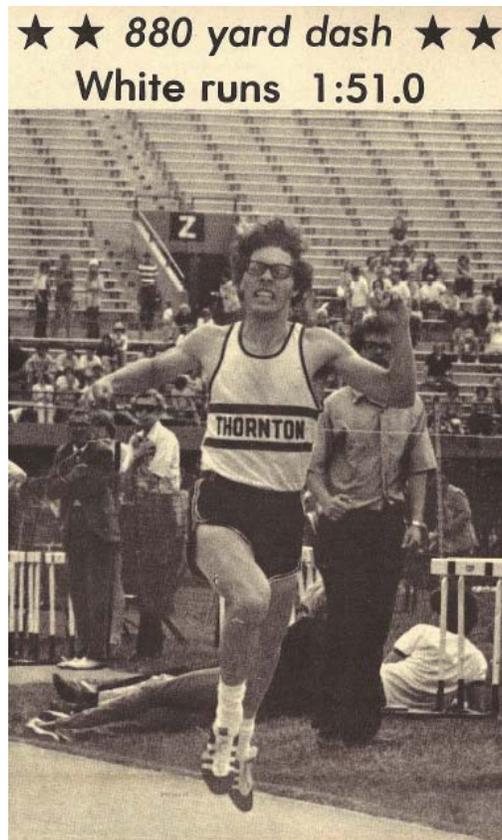
White: *I tied the Freshman National Record in the 880 twice at 1:56. Later at the State meet I broke the record with a 1:54.9 time. I tied the Sophomore National Record of 1:52.5 twice during the year. I was .4 of a second from tying the Junior National record of 1:50.6 set by Jim Ryun.*

WFF: What were your most memorable high school races?

White: *My 2 most memorable high school races were indoors and outdoors.*

During my freshman year the coaches decided to run me in the 880 instead of the 2-mile. I was very happy to hear this since I didn't like the 2-mile, it was too long. I ran my first 880 in 2:00.8 and broke the varsity school record. My brother Roy, who rarely gets excited, was jumping up and down and telling me what I had done. I really didn't have a clue, I was a little upset because I took second place and didn't win.

My second most memorable high school race was winning the State 880 Race. It was a long hard preparation for the last few years that culminated to a fairly easy victory. I was well prepared and was hoping for a faster time. We were shooting for the state record (1:50.4, Larry Kelly, Maine East) and national record (1:50.3, Jim Ryan, Kansas). We were less than a second away from achieving those goals but, winning the State Title as an individual, (1:51.0,) was pretty exciting.



WFF: You had a successful career at Illinois, what determining factors swayed your decision to go there?

White: *I decided to go to the University of Illinois because of their great reputation for education and sports. Also, several state champions that year were heading to school there and I felt comfortable with the school, future teammates and distance from home. We have a close knit family that wanted to see me run too.*



WFF: Did you ever have aspirations of making an Olympic Team?

White: *I did have aspirations to try out for the 1976, 1980 and 1984 Olympic Team but, never ran the times needed to compete at that level, due mainly to injuries.*

WFF: What are some of the most important lessons you learned during your student-athletic experience and how have they helped shape your life?

White: *Some of the most important lessons I have learned from my student athletic experience is to first of all, TRY and secondly to give it your all and do not give up. Goal setting is very important because it gives you reason and purpose for trying and not giving up despite setbacks. Many times we forget why we are doing what we are doing because we lose sight of our goal. This is also important in every day life, work and athletics.*

WFF: What advice could you offer high school student athletes?

White: *I would advise high school student athletes to enjoy the high school experience in the classroom and on the track or playing field. You may have the opportunity to receive recognition and possibly a scholarship to a college or university to pursue a higher education or the chance to compete at a collegiate level in sports. It is achievable if you believe that it is possible.*

Charlie is a successful sales professional currently living and working in Merrillville, Indiana.

This is a list of Charlie's athletic accomplishments and personal best times:

High School times and places while at Thornton

HS All Conference 8x

HS All Sectional 8x

HS All State 6x – State Champ 3x, with 4th, 6th & 7th place finishes

Best HS times:

220: 22.9

440 (mile relay): 48.0

880: 1:51

Mile 4:14

2 Mile: 9:38

3mile(x-c state meet): 14:47

Junior Olympics: 2nd, 2nd, 7th Place. Competed my fros,soph and jr. year in the summer.

Collegiate times and places at the Univ. of Illinois

Big Ten All Conference 12x: Big Ten Champ, Runner-Up 2X, w/ 9 finishes in Top 5

NCAA All American 3x: 2nd, 5th, 5th place finishes

Best College times:

200: 21.8

400(1600 relay): 46.6

800: 1:47.8

1500 m, 3:46

Mile: 4:04

2 Mile: 9:00

5K: 14:37 (XC)

4 mile: 19:45(XC)

5 mile: 25:07(XC)

10K: 30:58(XC)

Member of the USA JR.Track Team, competed against Russian team and the USA won. I was 2nd place in 800m.1:49.5.