

Cal Poly Dedicates Steve Miller and John Capriotti Athletics Complex



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Mustang Track & Field Alumni Honored at Banquet Following Home-Opening Invitational

John Capriotti had several universities to choose from in the spring of 1977.

After earning NJCAA All-America honors in cross country, indoor track and outdoor track at Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield, Ill., Capriotti had visits lined up to the likes of Arkansas and Illinois as his recruitment picked up. That's when a phone call from his high school coach changed the trajectory of his life.

Steve Miller, who had coached Capriotti at Bloom Township HS in Chicago Heights just a couple years prior, was now the director of track & field and cross country at Cal Poly, and wanted his former all-state Trojan to join him 2,000 miles out west in San Luis Obispo.

"Jeff Small and I went out to Cal Poly on spring break," Capriotti recalled. "It didn't take long for me to fall in love with the place."

The Chicago kid committed to Cal Poly, and a year later ran for the Mustangs' first-ever NCAA championship cross country squad. It marked the first of five combined national titles for Miller's teams spanning the fall of 1978 to the springtime of '81.

Today, Miller serves as chairman of the board of directors for USA Track & Field after being appointed in 2015, while Capriotti has served as vice president and global director of athletics/running track and field



at Nike since 2010.

"The quality of life and the culture of running that was developed under Coach Miller when I was here attending Cal Poly, I will never forget," Capriotti said. "I think about it all the time. All those Olympic games I've been at, all those (IAAF) World Championships — my teammates, my time at Cal Poly, were very influential. Simply put, my decision to join Coach Miller at Cal Poly changed my life."

Cal Poly could certainly say the same of Miller and Capriotti.

On Saturday, March 24, the university hosted its first track & field meet at Steve Miller Track within Steve Miller and John Capriotti Athletics Complex, named after the Cal Poly graduates, each of whom were leading donors toward the facility's renovation.

Later that evening, both Miller and Capriotti spoke to a banquet audience of more than 300 gathered inside Cal Poly's Multi Activity Center.

"The five years I spent here at Cal Poly were among the best five years of my life," Miller said. "What Cap and I did for Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo is really out of a feeling of love and appreciation. It was a feeling that we had a chance to give something back."

Including Miller, 16 members of the Cal Poly Hall of Fame were on hand Saturday night.

"As I look around the room, I see many happy faces, many old friends, awesome memories, and a lifetime of the most meaningful relationships a person could ever have," Capriotti said.

"It's truly a special place," Capriotti added about San Luis Obispo, before thanking teammates. The list included his former roommate, Danny Aldridge (a Petaluma, Calif. native), along with Anthony Reynoso (from Sylmar) and Jim Warrick (of Lompoc). "While I was here during school breaks, I couldn't afford to go back to Chicago, so I spent the time in either Petaluma, California; Lompoc, California; or Sylmar, California, and I enjoyed every minute of it."

Capriotti helped lead Cal Poly to the California Collegiate Athletic Association cross country championship in his first fall with the program in 1977, before taking seventh place at the NCAA Championships in 1978, thus adding another All-America certificate as the Mustangs won the national title.

"You gave me the thrill of a lifetime that I will never forget and cherish forever," Capriotti said gazing upon his teammates. "I'm honored to have shared those times with you all."

Miller (who earned his Master of Science in kinesiology from Cal Poly while coaching in 1978) extended his gratitude toward Vic Buccola, then director of athletics, for hiring him in '75. Meanwhile Capriotti graduated with a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology in 1980.



Capriotti began his career at Nike in 1992. Altogether at Nike, athletes signed under Capriotti's guidance have won more than 350 individual track & field Olympic medals in six Olympic Games, as well as 700-plus medals in 13 World Championships. Additionally, athletes managed by Capriotti at Nike have set more than 25 world records or road-racing world bests and have won over 600 Big City Marathons.

No matter where the business has taken him, though, Cal Poly always remained close to Capriotti's heart.

"I will never forget the day in 2008, at the Olympic Games in Beijing, when I was working at the Nike Hospitality Center," Capriotti shared. "It's an endless line of people trying to get in to see whatever sport they're there to see. I remember for the finals in the women's discus, I had 12 more appointments. I brought my staff together and said, 'Whatever you've got to do, reschedule all these appointments.' They said, 'Where're you going, Cap?' 'I'm going out to watch the women's discus. There's a young lady (Nike) gave a contract to who's a Cal Poly grad, and I just have a feeling she's going to do something special.'"

Capriotti arrived at the stadium in time to see Stephanie Brown Trafton, a seven-time indoor and outdoor All-American at Cal Poly from 2001-03, release her first throw to 212 feet, 5 inches.

"Little did I know that that throw would hold up," Capriotti remembered fondly, "and she would become the 2008 women's Olympic champion gold medalist."

Brown Trafton, the U.S.' first Olympic gold medalist for the women's discus since 1932, was in attendance Saturday evening, along with several fellow Olympians, including one of the greatest women's javelin throwers in U.S. history, Karin Smith; legendary high jumper Reynaldo Brown; and active Team USA heptathlete and American pentathlon record-holder Sharon Day-Monroe (currently a member of Cal Poly's staff).

Smith, Brown and Day-Monroe each all won at least one national championship at Cal Poly — part of a program tradition that includes a total of 25 NCAA team championships between track & field and cross country all-time.



The program's history also includes a combined 73 team conference championships between men's and women's cross country and track & field since 1968.

Many from those 73 squads were among Saturday night's attendees, including dozens from a handful of the 21 championship teams led by current Mustang director of track & field and cross country Mark Conover.

"We're so proud of this sparkling new facility and the Miller and Capriotti families," Cal Poly director of athletics Don Oberhelman said. "I want to thank the Miller family and the Capriotti family for allowing us this moment."

Among the complex's improvements (which open up the potential for Cal Poly to host Big West Conference Championship meets in the decade ahead), Beynon Sports installed a new track surface, and a newly renovated hybrid Bermuda field was put into place inside the oval.

The program is still looking to fundraise for further improvements, including a scoreboard and bleachers in addition to numerous equipment items ranging from various pads, bars, covers, carts, poles and markers, to weights and implements.

The Capriotti family has pledged to match gifts in support of the program moving forward, up to \$250,000, dollar-for-dollar.

Gifts can be made during a span of up to three years, and are tax-deductible through the Cal Poly Foundation. More information can be found either [at this link](#), or by contacting Ashley Offermann, Cal Poly associate athletics director for development, at aofferma@calpoly.edu or (805) 440-9792.

Going back to when Miller first coached Capriotti as a middle-schooler, the lives of the two have been intertwined for over 50 years, and their time at Cal Poly endures.



"This was one of the great moments of our lives," Miller said. "(Cal Poly) was a place in our hearts that was more impactful than I can possibly explain. There were moments that we shared that were really, really special and meaningful, and when I got involved in putting this (renovation) together, I couldn't think of anybody that I'd rather do it with than John Capriotti."

From Cal Poly, Miller went on to become the head coach at Kansas State from 1981-86, and then the Wildcats' director of athletics from 1987-90, before entering the sports business world as global marketing director for Nike (1991-2000), CEO of the Professional Bowlers Association (2000-05) and CEO of Agassi Graf Holdings (2008-present). A USTFCCA Hall of Fame enshrinee, Miller also taught as an adjunct professor of sports marketing at Oregon, prior to chairing the board at USATF.

Small, who went on that fateful recruiting trip with Capriotti back in 1977 (ultimately committing to the Mustangs), also returned to the track at Cal Poly on Saturday — this time as the 23rd-year head coach at

Marshall.

Small is just one of many who competed for Miller before becoming coaches themselves. Capriotti also became a head coach at the collegiate level, first at Northwestern (1984-86) and then K-State himself (1986-92). In trying to quantify his coach's impact on the landscape of their sport, Capriotti inventoried a "Miller Coaching Tree" for the audience on Saturday night.

He listed Arkansas, Wyoming, TCU, Arizona State, Arizona, Illinois, SMU, Stanford, Kennesaw State, San Diego State, Washington State, Sonoma State, San Francisco State, Indiana State, Duke, Toledo, Northern Illinois and South Carolina off the top of his head as programs where Miller's legacy had roots, adding that he soon wants to tally all of the high school programs around the nation where the same could also be said.



"It's without a doubt a testament to Coach Miller and the positive impact he had on all of our lives that so many of us have chosen the same profession," Capriotti said. "These are my stories. I have no doubt that each and every former athlete of Coach Miller has impactful, lifelong and unforgettable stories of their own how coach influenced their lives. He was always there for us. There are constants in the world and there are variables. Steve Miller was always a constant."

Miller, in turn, said he was actually the student all along, learning from the athletes he coached and managed on his journey.

"Listen. Pay attention. Because every day, you're going to learn something new, and you never know where it's going to come from," Miller imparted to the audience in closing. "You're never quite sure. You think you have a down path, but a young child might say something to you and open your eyes and illuminate you. Somebody you never thought possible will tell you something you never, ever dreamt about."

"What I would tell all of you is during those five minutes of reflection and clarity in the evening, during those moments where things become really true, think you can be better than you've ever been," Miller said. "Do more than you ever thought possible. Become something that you never ever dreamt you could be, because there's not a person in this room that can't change the world. There's not a person sitting here that can't have an impact on a variety of people."

