

MIKE O'CONNOR: A GREAT COACH REMEMBERED

One of the finest tributes that can be paid to a coach is a confirmation from fellow coaches that he was a mentor that had mastered his profession. In the discipline of middle distance running, Mike O'Connor was one of those individuals and over the years he made a mark on the sport of 'Athletics' that those who follow him will be hard pressed to match.

Mike O'Connor had the drive, determination, commitment and technical expertise that enabled him to take a diverse group of teenaged athletic talent and mold them into athletes that could perform at a level of expertise far in advance of their chronological age.

Successful coaches, however, have more, **much more**, than just the technical know how or expertise of their sport. They have that "intangible something" that allows them to light a fire and gain a commitment from young athletes that have so many choices in which to commit themselves and their energy. Middle distance running is not an easy activity and mastery of the discipline means that those that are successful have been willing to undergo all the rigors and **discomforts** that are an integral part of the sport. Coach Mike O'Connor possessed that intangible, **a force of personality if you wish**, that allowed him to become a driving personality that influenced young people to achieve goals, that now as adults, when they look back on it, are probably somewhat mystified that one individual could have drawn so much from their previously undisciplined young minds and bodies.

As a rival coach I gained a deep respect for the feeling and commitment that coach O'Connor drew from his group. If a member of my group happened on occasion to be able to score a win over members of Mike's group, both the athletes and myself knew they had performed very well.

Great coaches are judged by the success they have on the playing field but, more than that, a coach is judged by the positive influence he exerted over those he was charged with directing. If a coach has a great athlete under his charge, he will undoubtedly have some success on the playing field. But if a coach can take a group of runners, mold and assist them in achieving worthwhile goals and along the way make them feel good about themselves, then that coach has succeeded. If a coach can add to that by gaining a love and respect from his athletes that lasts a lifetime, then he truly is a "coach of his time." Mike O'Connor fits that latter category. The sport of Athletics as a whole and the athletes he coached in particular, will forever remember Mike as a "COACH NOT ONLY FOR HIS TIME BUT FOR ALL TIME."

Gerry Swan
August 2014